



THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation has the literal title in Greek, the ‘Apocalypse of John.’ The word apocalypse means revelation, that which is uncovered. It comes from the Greek word, which literally means ‘to pull the lid off something.’

Revelation is a book that people either ignore or find too difficult to understand. For these reasons, many people do not study it at all. If this were true, God would wake a mockery out of every one of us, Revelation 1:3. God says to the recipients that He intends to bless the lives of those who read the content of the book. So, if the book was too difficult, how could God bless us?

Revelation is not a difficult book; it’s less difficult to understand than Romans or Galatians, even less difficult than 1 Corinthians. Almost two-thirds of Revelation is found in the Old Testament.

Keep in mind that to clearly understand the book, a proper background has to be put in place, and so, knowing what the Old Testament gives, this proper context in which Revelation becomes clear.

When we read about people suffering because of their faith, we often wonder if it’s really worth it. John’s revelation is an answer to that question. However, we understand the book by remembering the people to whom it was originally intended and the circumstances in which they found themselves.

John suffered because of the Gospel, and his loyalty and allegiance were to Christ. The book is about the revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:1. At the end of the day, no matter what people may say, it’s about our Lord Jesus Christ.

If it’s about Him, the only question to ask is ‘Will the victory be ours?’ The book of Revelation is answering, ‘yes,’ Revelation 12:11. In the light of what God says, you and I can overcome evil.

Revelation is not a book in isolation; the message is consistent with the rest of the Scriptures. To understand the whole picture, we should keep it simple. If we go too much into details, then we will miss the point.

THE DATE

The Book of Revelation was most likely written about A.D. 95-96, during the reign of the Roman Caesar Domitian. There are some who believe it was written earlier, A.D. 68 or 69, because they believe the main teaching in the book is about the impending destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary says the following.

“The book was obviously written at a time when the church was undergoing persecution and difficulty. During the possible time for the composition of the book, the two most important periods when this was so were during the reigns of Nero and Domitian. The principal argument for the former date is Revelation 17:9-14. If this refers to the emperors of Rome, then Nero was the fifth, and the writing would date shortly after his reign. The later date is attested by a number of ancient authors such as Irenaeus and Eusebius, who state categorically that the book was written in the time of Domitian. In Nero’s reign, the church was still very young and vigorous. By the time of Domitian, there is much more possibility of development and of degeneration. Most scholars today agree that the later date is to be preferred.”

THE AUHTOR

The author tells us that his name was John, and he describes himself as God's 'servant', Revelation 1:1, as one of the 'prophets', Revelation 22:9, and as 'your brother', Revelation 1:9.

Tradition has affirmed this John to be identical with John the apostle, and further, that he was the author of the Fourth Gospel and of the three Johannine Epistles. The view that the author was John the apostle goes back to Justin Martyr, AD 140, and is supported by Irenaeus and many others.

THE BOOK

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 that 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 church history. 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 live as a Christian, and we learn how to die faithfully as a member of the Lord's body.

INTERPRETING THE BOOK

There are four main ways of looking at the book.

1. The preterist view.

This takes the book to describe past events. It sees all the visions as arising out of conditions in the first century in the Roman Empire. The seer was appalled by the evil that was going on and used poetic style and imagery to protest against it and to record his conviction that God will bring an end to all of this.

This is a point of view endorsed mostly by liberal scholars. It is a way to deny the book as being a prophecy, Revelation 1:3, and does not consider what is revealed in Revelation 21 and Revelation 22 about what is still to come.

2. The historical view.

This regards the book as setting forth in one grand sweep a panoramic view of history from the first century to the second coming of Christ. Such views were held mostly by most of the reformers, who identified papal Rome with the beast.

But this view has a lot to be said against it, as they cannot agree on what the visions refer to, and it seems that they consider that history confines itself in western Europe. This is wrong as the expansion of Christianity in earlier days happened in the East.

3. The futurist view.

This maintains that from Revelation 4 onwards, revelation deals with events at the end-time. What is described in the book, then, according to this view, concerns what will happen in connection with the Lord's second coming.

This view takes seriously the predictive elements, Revelation 1:19 / Revelation 4:1. But this would remove the book entirely from its setting, even if there is a bit of truth, considering the future events described in Revelation 21 and Revelation 22. It is difficult to see what meaning it would have for the people to whom the book was intended.

4. The idealistic or poetic view.

This insists that the main thrust of the book is concerned with inspiring persecuted and suffering Christians to endure to the end. The language and the things described are a poetic fashion to view the triumph of God. The difficulty is that the seer claims to be prophesying of later days.

None of these views is completely satisfying, and probably that a true view would combine elements from some of them. We should take the text as it is, respecting the context and the settings, but without denying parts of it which might be difficult to believe. At the end of the day, the Christian should not doubt the power of God and the ways he used to give us his message.

THEME

The Revelation was recorded by John, Revelation 1:1, while in exile in Patmos, 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.

OUTLINE

Prologue. Revelation 1:1-20
 The letters to the churches. Revelation 2:1-3:22
 A vision of heaven. Revelation 4:1-11
 The seven seals. Revelation 5:1-8:5
 The seven trumpets. Revelation 8:6-11:19
 Seven significant signs. Revelation 12:1-14:20
 The seven last plagues. Revelation 15:1-16:21
 The judgment of the great whore. Revelation 17:1-18
 The judgment of Babylon. Revelation 18:1-19:5
 The marriage of the lamb. Revelation 19:6-10
 The final victory. Revelation 19:11-20:15
 A new heaven and a new earth. Revelation 21:1-22:5
 Epilogue. Revelation 22:6-21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘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, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.’ Revelation 1:1-3

PROLOGUE

The revelation John received was from Jesus Christ Himself, **Revelation 1:1**. John describes himself as one of God’s ‘servants’, **Revelation 1:1**. Later, he describes himself as ‘your brother’, **Revelation 1:9**, and later still, as one of the ‘prophets’, **Revelation 22:9**.

Notice the words, ‘must soon take place’, **Revelation 1:1**. In **Revelation 1:3**, we are told that ‘the time is near’, and the book closes with the reminder that these things ‘must soon take place’, **Revelation 22:6**, and the words, ‘the time is near, **Revelation 22:10**.

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, **Mark 1:15**.

The book isn’t about the year 2025; it’s not about what happened during medieval times. Revelation isn’t about what is going to happen 10,000 years down the road.

The things which John describes throughout the book, 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. 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.

We know that Revelation is a symbolic book because in **Revelation 1:1**, God said he sent his angel to John concerning the things which were to be 'signified.' The word signified means 'to be shown by signs.' The words 'made it known' are the word 'signified.' This tells us that this is a symbolic book. God is going to put in place for Christians certain images.

John himself was a witness to the things he saw. He preached the Word of God, and he shared the testimony of Jesus Christ, concerning his teachings, death, burial and resurrection, **Revelation 1:2**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Revelation 1:2**.

'It declares the Book of Revelation to be indeed and in truth the word of God, given by the Father to Christ, and by Christ to John, who in turn delivered it to the churches. This is the very loftiest claim that possibly could be made upon behalf of this sacred writing.'

Not only is Revelation 'symbolic', not only was it written about things that would 'soon take place', but 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 hands of the Romans.

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, **Psalms 119:105**.

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 in flammable 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**, which is 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.

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.

GREETINGS AND DOXOLOGY

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

John now addresses the seven churches of Asia Minor, **Revelation 1:4**. Jesus will directly write to each of these seven churches in **Revelation 2** and **Revelation 3**. The number seven always represents perfection. There are seven days in a week; there are seven churches discussed in the Book of Revelation. These are things that are complete or that represent a totality.

In a time when these Christians were being heavily persecuted that words 'grace and peace' would have meant a lot to them, **Revelation 1:4**. Notice the greetings come from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, the seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ, **Revelation 1:4-5**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come', **Revelation 1:4**.

'This title of God is essentially that of **Exodus 3:14**, 'I AM who I AM.' Christ also used this title of himself in **Mark 6:50** / **Mark 13:6** / **Mark 14:62** / **John 6:35** / **John 8:12** / **John 10:7** / **John 11:25** / **John 14:6**.'

Why is the Holy Spirit called ‘the seven spirits’ in Revelation? The most satisfying answer is to connect the reader to the similar description given in **Zechariah 4:1-10**. Seven has the symbolic meaning of perfection. Therefore, the salutation to the churches is from God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ.

Hinds, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is used in the salutation in direct association with God and Christ, and a blessing is invoked from the three.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following concerning the seven spirits.

‘Here are seven titles of the Holy Spirit in this passage from **Isaiah 11:2**, and from very early times, this reference in Revelation has been associated with it. ‘It denotes the Holy Spirit in the plenitude of his grace and power.’

Jesus Christ is ‘the faithful witness’, **Revelation 1:5**, which means He was never unfaithful at any point, **2 Corinthians 1:21**. Jesus is not only the faithful witness, but He is also faithful and true, **Revelation 19:11**, which means He was always true, He never lied, He always spoke the truth because He is the Truth, **John 14:6**.

Jesus is also ‘the firstborn from the dead’, **Revelation 1:5**. Paul describes Jesus as the One ‘the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,’ **Colossians 1:18**. The word ‘beginning’ comes from the Greek ‘arche’ and has various meanings.

It could mean beginning, origin or the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader or that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause and finally it could mean the first place, principality, rule, magistracy.

Remember the word ‘firstborn’ doesn’t necessarily mean the first one, but can refer to the ‘pre-eminent’ one. Jesus wasn’t the first person to rise from the dead; there were others, Jairus’ daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. But He is the first to rise, never to die again, and is declared elsewhere to be the ‘firstfruits’ of the resurrection, **1 Corinthians 15:20-23**.

Jesus is also ‘the ruler of the kings of the earth’, **Revelation 1:5**. Despite what some people make think Jesus is ruler supreme over all things, **Matthew 28:18** / **1 Corinthians 15:25** / **Ephesians 1:22** / **1 Peter 3:22** / **Revelation 2:27**. Jesus loves us so much that He shed His blood for us, in order to free us from our sins, **Revelation 1:5**.

Hinds, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Revelation 1:5**.

‘That Christ washes us, cleanses us, through the merits of his blood is unquestionably true, as stated in **Revelation 7:14**. But by Christ’s blood we are loosed from our sins also.’

Notice that Jesus has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father, **Revelation 1:6**. Israel of old was supposed to be an object lesson; they were supposed to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, **Exodus 19:5-6**. They were supposed to bring the world back to God by acting as mediators between the world and God, but they messed up.

When Moses was up the mountain, the people remained below and ended up building a golden calf under Aaron’s instructions; they messed up. Moses stood where Aaron should have stood and asked the question, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side?’ and only the tribe of Levi came forward, **Exodus 32:29**.

And so instead of all the Israelites being priests and mediators between God and the world, the tribe of Levi was chosen to mediate between the Israelites and God. We are what Israel as a nation was supposed to be in the first place.

We are now the chosen people, we are now the royal priest, we are now the holy nation, and we are now a people that belong to God, **1 Peter 2:9**. And it’s our responsibility to be the mediators between the world and God, like it was supposed to be at the start. We’ve got the job of trying to reconcile the world to God.

Jesus says that Israel, as a nation, will have the kingdom taken away from them and it will be given to another nation, **Matthew 21:43**. He's taking it away from the Jewish nation because they messed up and He has now given it to His church, **Galatians 3:26-29 / Galatians 6:16**.

And just like the Israel of old who were responsible for proclaiming the praises of God, we too have the same task. No wonder all the glory and power for ever and ever belong to Him! Amen. **Revelation 1:6**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘John here breaks into a noble doxology, using words which imply the present and eternal dominion of the Son of God. The New Testament doxologies invariably ascribe the same power, honour, and glory which belong to God to his Son, Jesus Christ. See **Revelation 5:12-13 / Revelation 7:10 / 2 Timothy 4:18 / Hebrews 13:21 / 1 Peter 4:11 / 2 Peter 3:18**, and **Jude 1:24**.’

In **Revelation 1:7**, John quotes from **Daniel 7:13-14**. Notice ‘He is coming in the clouds’. Remember, John tells us four times in his book that these things will happen soon, the time is near, **Revelation 1:1 / Revelation 1:3 / Revelation 22:6 / Revelation 22:10**.

Revelation 1:7 is not a reference to the second coming of Christ but a reference to the coming judgment on the Roman Empire. This is Old Testament judgment language, **Isaiah 19:1 / Jeremiah 4:13**.

Jesus uses similar language in **Matthew 24:30-31 / Mark 13:26-26**. Look at **Matthew 26:64**. I used to think this referred to the second coming of Christ, but I'm not too sure now.

Remember when Jesus was before Caiaphas, the high priest in trial, and Caiaphas says, ‘You tell me if you are the Son of God?’ And Jesus says this, ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ ‘But I say to all of you: In the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,’ **Matthew 26:64**. Is **Matthew 26:64** a reference to the second coming? Notice it says, ‘He's sitting at the right hand.’ It doesn't say He's standing or He's riding a horse; it says, He's sitting.

I think what Jesus is saying there is, “Caiaphas, this day you are my judge, you and your people are judging me, but the day is coming, and you're going to see it when I'm sitting at the right hand of God, and I'm sending my judgment to you.” And Caiaphas' generation saw that prophecy come true, **Matthew 23:36 / Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32**.

Also notice that ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’, **Revelation 1:7**. This means that no one is excluded from this judgment. Everyone is being brought under Christ's coming judgment.

It was the Jews who pierced Him, **Psalms 22:16**, and they were more than happy to have the responsibility lie with themselves, **Matthew 27:25**. It was the Romans who pierced His side to make sure He was dead, **John 19:34**.

In **Revelation 1:7**, John quotes from **Zechariah 12:10-13:1**.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The meaning in **Zechariah 12** is very important to understanding what the book of Revelation means. Notice that **Zechariah 12:10** says that God is going to pour out a spirit of grace and mercy on the Jews. The Jews are mourning because they have pierced the Messiah. The picture is weeping for repentance because they have pierced the Messiah. God is going to pour out mercy and grace so that they can repent. **Zechariah 13:1** clarifies that God is going to open a fountain to cleanse them from their sins and uncleanness. When we read the phrase, “those who pierced him,” we must understand that the scriptures are pointing to the Jewish nation. They will seek repentance, and God will give that opportunity.’

‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”
Revelation 1:8

How anyone can deny the deity of Christ is beyond me, especially in light of what John declares about Jesus here. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. Jesus is the first and the last, **Isaiah 44:6**, the beginning and the end, and everything in between, **Revelation 1:17 / Revelation 2:8 / Revelation 21:6 / Revelation 22:13**.

Jesus is ruling. Jesus is in control. He is the 'I AM.' He is and was and is to come, **Revelation 1:4**. He truly is the Almighty, **Isaiah 9:6-7 / Revelation 19:6**. Notice John calls Jesus, 'Lord God' and 'Almighty.' The words 'Lord God' are translated from the words 'kurios', which means supreme authority and is used like a title such as 'Lord' or 'Sir', and 'theos', which is the word for God.

Jesus is therefore one of the distinct personages of the Godhead, thereby sharing the attributes of God the Father, **Exodus 3:14 / John 1:1 / John 8:58 / Hebrews 1:8**.

The Nicene Creed says the following.

'And (we believe) in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.'

JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST

'I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day, I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." **Revelation 1:9-11**

Because John was 'in Jesus', he could address himself as their brother and companion in the suffering they were about to endure, which they had to endure patiently as Christians because they were a part of God's kingdom, **Revelation 1:9 / Acts 14:22 / 2 Timothy 3:12**.

He's been exiled by the Roman officials to the Island of Patmos because he preached God's Word and held true to his testimony concerning Jesus, **Revelation 1:9**. The tradition of the early church says he was banished to Patmos in the reign of Domitian.

Notice it was on the 'Lord's Day' that he was in the Spirit, **Revelation 1:10**. The Lord's Day is clearly a reference to the first day of the week, Sunday, **Luke 24:1 / John 20:19 / Acts 20:7**. In the Spirit simply means he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and at this point in time, he is about to have a vision, **Ezekiel 37:1**.

He heard behind him a loud voice like a trumpet. This is clearly a reference to the voice of God, **Exodus 19:16**. The voice told him to write down on a scroll what he saw and send it to the seven churches, **Revelation 1:11 / 2 Peter 1:15 / 2 Peter 3:15-16**.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'John is told to write the vision which he sees. It is his duty to share the message which God gives to him. A man must first hear and then transmit, even if the price of the transmission is costly indeed. It may be that a man must withdraw to see his vision, but he must also go forth to tell it.'

'I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 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 1:12-16**

When John turns to see who was speaking to him, the first thing he sees is seven golden lampstands, **Revelation 1:12**. We don't need to speculate as to what these lampstands represent, because Jesus Himself tells us that they are symbolic of the seven churches, **Revelation 1:20**.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

The picture of the seven golden lampstands has three sources.

1. It comes from the picture of the candlestick of pure gold in the Tabernacle. It was to have six branches, three on one side and three on the other, and seven lamps to give light, **Exodus 25:31-37**.
2. It comes from the picture of Solomon's Temple. In it, there were to be five candlesticks of pure gold on the right hand and five on the left, **1 Kings 7:49**.
3. It comes from the vision of Zechariah. Zechariah saw 'a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it,' **Zechariah 4:2**.

Notice among the candlesticks John sees 'someone like a son of man', **Revelation 1:13**. Who is this person? It's none other than Jesus, **Revelation 1:18 / Daniel 7:13-14**. Jesus is dressed in a robe reaching and has a golden sash around his chest, **Revelation 1:13**.

These are the clothes of a priest, **Exodus 28:4 / Exodus 29:5 / Leviticus 16:4**, but they are also the clothes of angels when they appear in a vision, **Daniel 10:5-6 / Ezekiel 9:2**.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

'This makes for an interesting combination since these clothes were worn by the high priest, but also worn by dignitaries, rulers, and heavenly beings. This is an image of authority in all cases. Jesus is pictured with authority in the midst of these seven churches.'

Jesus' hair is described as white like wool, as white as snow, **Revelation 1:14**. This is a picture of justice and righteousness and purity. Jesus is the sinless One, **Daniel 7:9**. Jesus' eyes were like blazing fire, **Revelation 1:14**; in other words, He never misses a thing, **Daniel 10:6**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the eyes.

'This indicates the omniscience of Christ, the ability to penetrate all disguises and to judge things as they are, not as they might pretend to be.'

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, **Revelation 1:15**, which signifies the coming judgment, **Revelation 2:18**. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters, **Revelation 1:15**, which signifies Christ's powerful word, **Ezekiel 43:2**. These descriptions continue to copy the imagery found in **Daniel 7:13-14**, and **Daniel 10:5-6**. Notice what Jesus is holding in His right hand, which is symbolic of strength and power, **Exodus 15:6**. He is holding the seven stars, **Revelation 1:16**; these are the seven angels, **Revelation 1:20**. Coming out of His mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword, **Revelation 1:16**.

This is the Word of God, **Isaiah 11:3-4 / Hebrews 4:12-13 / 2 Thessalonians 2:8**. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance, **Revelation 1:16**. John sees Jesus, and his face is shining in the full strength of his divinity, and it is blinding, **Matthew 17:2**.

In these verses, 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, and some were being dragged off. People like Domitian were in control, but it was Jesus is always in control, **Revelation 19:16**.

During times of persecution, we must look to Christ for help. 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**. Jesus is alive and well and can help us. Thus, we must look to Him in times of trouble.

'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'" Revelation 1:17-18

John is so overwhelmed by what he saw, he fell down at the feet of Jesus as though he was dead, **Revelation 1:17 / Ezekiel 1:28 / Daniel 10:9 / Daniel 8:17 / Matthew 17:6 / Acts 26:14**.

Jesus places His right hand upon John and tells him not to be afraid, and He declares that He is the First and the Last, which means He is God, He is eternal, **Revelation 1:17 / Isaiah 44:6 / Isaiah 48:12 / Revelation 1:8 / Revelation 2:8 / Revelation 21:6 / Revelation 22:13**.

When I was studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses, I took them to this passage to demonstrate how Christ is God. However, they said it was not Jesus speaking about Himself but Jesus speaking about the Father. I asked them if the Father ever died and came back to life, to which they had no answer.

Notice the text says, 'I am the Living One, I was dead, but now I'm alive forever', **Revelation 1:18 / John 5:26**. Surely this has to be speaking about the Christ, **Matthew 16:21-23**.

Jesus says he holds the keys of death and Hades, **Revelation 1:18**. Hades is another word for hell, the place where the Rich man found himself after he died, **Luke 16:22-23**. The term 'death and Hades' occurs only in the Book of Revelation. The one who sits on the pale horse has the name Death, with Hades following after him, **Revelation 6:8**. In **Revelation 20:13**, death and Hades gave up the dead, who are then judged at the final judgment. Then both 'death and Hades' are thrown into the lake of fire, **Revelation 20:14**, along with anyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life, **Revelation 20:15**. I am sure you would have noticed that 'death and Hades' are personified in the later passages. As Christians, we have nothing to fear, not death and not even hell, because Christ has power and authority over both.

Those who die without the assurance of the salvation offered in the Gospel will die in a lost state, whilst those who have accepted Christ as Saviour and have lived according to that faith, will die in a saved state, **2 Corinthians 5:5-8 / Philippians 1:23-24**, and therefore, will have no need to fear when 'the books are opened', **Revelation 20:12-13**, because their names are enrolled in 'the Lamb's Book of the Living'.

Having already been judged and acquitted in the person of the Lord Jesus, Christians will not again stand trial for their life, **Romans 8:1 / 1 John 5:13**. Christians will be judged not concerning their salvation, but for the things they said and did while they were alive, **Romans 14:10-12 / 2 Corinthians 5:10**.

'Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.' Revelation 1:19-20

John is told to write down what he saw, what he sees now and what will take place later, **Revelation 1:19 / Revelation 1:11**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is John's commission to write the vision for the benefit of the seven churches, and for all generations. Of course, the three things mentioned, which John was to write, have often been understood as an outline of the book,

the things which he saw referring to **Revelation 1**, the things which pertain to **Revelation 2** and **Revelation 3**, and the things that shall be ‘hereafter’ referring to the balance of the prophecy.’

Jesus goes on to explain to John the mystery of the seven stars that he saw in Jesus’ right hand and of the seven golden lampstands. He says the seven stars, **Revelation 1:16**, are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands, **Revelation 1:12**, are the seven churches, **Revelation 1:20**. Who are these angels?

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are two main ways to take this reading. The word translated ‘angels’ is the Greek word ‘aggelos’ which has two meanings, according to the BDAG lexicon. The first meaning is, ‘A human messenger serving as an envoy, an envoy, one who is sent.’ The second meaning is, ‘A transcendent power who carries out various missions or tasks, messenger, angel.’ Are the seven stars representing human messengers for these seven churches, or do these stars represent spiritual beings (angels) who act for these seven churches?’

Kercheville continues in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are a number of difficulties with understanding the seven stars to be seven angels. First, why is Christ holding these seven angels in his right hand? It is hard to determine the meaning of this symbol if seven angels are in view. Second, why would these seven angels be instructed to write a letter to each church? This is not an action that we see in the scriptures. Third, there is no evidence in the scriptures that every local church has an angel watching over it.’

Kercheville continues in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is easier to understand these seven stars as seven human messengers operating on behalf of each local church and representing each church. Epaphroditus worked as a messenger and represented the church at Philippi, **Philippians 2:25 / Philippians 4:18**, and Epaphras was a teacher and represented the church at Colossae, **Colossians 4:12**. One could certainly see messengers from these seven churches coming to John on Patmos and receiving this revelation from John and the particular message about each local congregation.

Kercheville continues in his commentary, says the following.

‘Therefore, these seven human messengers are depicted as being held in the right hand of Christ. It is a picture of protection and love as Christ holds them even during the suffering that is coming upon them. Christ is protecting the people of God in his right hand while he judges the enemies with the sword of his mouth.’

REVELATION 2

INTRODUCTION

Revelation 2-3 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, and there has been widespread persecution of Christians. Persecution came in the form of Judaizers, 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 members 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 EPHESUS

“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 and 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 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 one hundred and twenty-seven 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 staying 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 than 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 Revelation 2:7, 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.

Or as Kercheville, in his commentary, suggested.

‘The seven stars in Christ’s right hand are the human messengers that have come to John to receive this revelation. These human messengers represent the local church they are from and are pictured in the Lord’s powerful right hand, protected and safe. They are instructed to write the words of Christ about their churches.’

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, Revelation 1:20 / Ephesians 1:22-23. Jesus walks among the seven golden lampstands, Revelation 1:20 / Exodus 25:31-37.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This indicates the active, constant, and persistent energy with which Christ is concerned with the welfare of every church and every Christian.’

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, Hebrews 4:13.

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 Revelation 2:6 that they rejected the works of the Nicolaitans. Who are those guys? The Nicolaitans are identified by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, two early church fathers, as a sect which grew out of Nicolas, who is mentioned in Acts 6:5.

They were the ones who apostatised from Christ. However, they originated, they were known as perverts, with low morals, a sect that was loose thinking and practised 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 of 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 as they used to, Matthew 22:37.

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 with being doctrinally 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 what 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 its 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 recognise that although they thought they were flying, they had actually fallen. If we don't love Jesus and His people as 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 their coldness and fall back in love with Him all over again.

Notice that repentance leads to action, the Ephesian church was 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.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This coming depends upon whether or not they repent; if they repent, he will not come and remove their candlestick.’

Ignatius, who was one of the apostolic church fathers, said the following.

‘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 baptistery 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

Jesus uses this phrase of 'whoever has ear let them hear' very often, Matthew 11:15 / Matthew 13:9 / Matthew 13:43. Here, He emphasises they must listen to the Spirit.

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, Revelation 2:7 / Revelation 2:11 / Revelation 2:17 / Revelation 2:26 / Revelation 3:5 / Revelation 3:12 / Revelation 3:21 / Revelation 15:2 / Revelation 21:7.

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, Luke 11:22 / John 16:33. This is one of the biggest encouragements that the Book of Revelation has for each child of God.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'the tree of life.'

'These words regarding the 'tree of life' are found in Genesis 2:9, and in Revelation 22:2 / Revelation 22:4 / Revelation 22:19, thus binding the beginning and the end of the Bible together, all of which, first to last, is concerned with the recovery of that which was lost in the Fall.'

The third heaven was known as the dwelling place of God; this is God's spiritual, eternal home. This isn't physical and isn't created. This third heaven is also known as 'paradise', which is used in connection with 'the third heaven.' Paul speaks about being 'caught up in the third heaven and caught up in paradise' in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.

In other words, the third heaven and paradise are the same location. And there's no need to speculate where Paul was because John tells us that paradise is the heavenly realm of God, Revelation 2:7.

And there's no need to speculate where Lazarus was located; he was in paradise, the heavenly realm of God. And there's no need to speculate where Jesus and the thief on the cross were going that very day, Luke 23:43. They were both going to paradise, the heavenly realm of God. The third heaven, paradise, is the place where Paul and all Christians long to go, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

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.

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 was 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, four 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 show 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 thirty-five 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 as 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](#) / [Revelation 1:4](#) / [Revelation 1:17](#) / [Revelation 2:8](#) / [Revelation 19:6](#) / [Revelation 21:6](#) / [Revelation 22:13](#).

And so straight away John reminds these Christians and says, ‘come what will, Christ is with us,’ [Isaiah 9:6-7](#).

Smyrna, who claimed to be first in 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 says 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 forevermore.

Jesus experienced the very worst that 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

Don’t underestimate that word ‘afflictions’, [Revelation 2:9](#). 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 Roman forces trying to destroy Christianity.

Don’t underestimate that word ‘poverty’ either, [Revelation 2:9](#), this is not just being poor, it means they were absolutely destitute. 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, Matthew 6:24. Should we be intimidated by others when they have a go at us for being Christians?

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 is 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 there was even more trouble ahead. But despite all the tribulation, thanks be to God, Smyrna was a consistent church.

Notice the word 'slander', it should be the word 'blasphemy' which is used, Revelation 2:9. 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.

Jesus says, 'I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan', Revelation 2:9. 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 as He did with many of the others. And so not only did they have a positive testimony, but 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 that 'He knows' what they are facing because He has faced tribulation and suffering as well.

Satan was doing the tempting, but God, at the same time, is proving, testing, and trying them, Revelation 2:10. 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 ten days, Daniel 1:12-16. Jacob was tested by Laban ten 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 whether 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**.

Various Crowns		
Time	Reason	Reference
A Crown of Honor	For leading a disciplined life	1 Corinthians 9:27
A Crown of Rejoicing	For evangelism and discipleship	1 Thessalonians 2:19
A Crown of Righteousness	For loving the Lord's commandments	2 Timothy 4:8
A Crown of Life	For enduring trials	James 1:12 / Revelation 2:26
A Crown of Glory	For shepherding God's flock faithfully	1 Peter 5:4

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**.

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**, '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.

“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, and 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 the 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 the 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, eight hundred feet up, sat the huge altar, from which smoke ascended endlessly from the sacrifices offered there.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 broadsword, 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? [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 I 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 was 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 sits 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 remained 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 began 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 practising 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 who 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.

Baalism 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 realised 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 caught 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 the first person to introduce the doctrine of ‘once saved always saved’. Jesus says the church in Pergamum was tolerant of compromise, and they had become compromisers. Baalism 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, 1 Corinthians 8-10. The teaching of Balaam wasn’t the only false teaching which was happening in Pergamum; they also had the problem that 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 practising compromise, they were practising ‘once saved always saved’.
2. He tells them they are tolerant of the teaching of the Nicolaitans, in other words, they were the compromisers 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 judgment. And so, what He is saying is that the church needs to make some changes too or else they too will suffer in the 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.

What is this hidden manna? Well, the first mention of manna is found in Exodus 16:4, where we find that 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 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 repented, listened carefully, remained faithful, and died 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 master's abundance.

All these declare what Christians have and what they will receive if they 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 the circumstances of the status of the one re-named. For example, Abram becomes Abraham, and 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. 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 recognised 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 the 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 Apollo, 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, Daniel 10:6. He says He has feet like burnished bronze, which is symbolic of judgment, Daniel 10:6.

“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 is very loving in seeking one another's highest good.

Here is a congregation that had confidence in their faith and was motivated by their faith. Here is a congregation that is 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 had.

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 gentle 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 Baalamites, as 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 who 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 was making the church suffer. Jesus is telling us that 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 are 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 to. 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 afflicted with disease. Remembering that she is practising 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 sexually 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' benefit. 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 appearances. 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 was tolerating this false prophet called Jezebel. She was a false teacher who was encouraging the members of this church to commit fortification 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 that 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 meat, 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 to.

She would teach that fornication was okay because it was practised 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 by an attack, they would have to try to 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 continue 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 from 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 / 2 Timothy 2:10-12.

Paul says the world and all things 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 that 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's 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 your 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

Lenski, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the following three letters this admonition is placed at the end instead of at the beginning, thus dividing the seven into two groups of three and four; but, ‘We are unable to say just why they are so divided.’

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.

REVELATION 3

INTRODUCTION

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

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

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 sixteen 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 are. 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 in peace. The church in Sardis had not been at war with Rome, and it wasn’t having any trouble with the prominent group of Cybellian worshipers who 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 its 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 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 Sardian, 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 will 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 to.

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 is 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 anyone or anything 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, when 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 in 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 was not a garrison city.

It was located on the Calamus River about one hundred and five 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.

As 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 [Isaiah 22:15](#), 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 to use 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 descendants 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 of trouble or by providing food for those who really need it. 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, 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 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 Gentile 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, 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 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 keeps them from the hour, 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, he 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 predominantly so, we have the Scriptural assurance for them. If the congregation is Jewish or predominantly 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 that 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 you're 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 forty-three 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 of 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 nine hundred feet long. Used primarily for running races, the length of the track was fixed at six hundred 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 that 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 was that 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 than 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 had never been moved.

In that way, it would have been better for them never to have been moved than to have 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 its 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, nor 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 realise 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 who 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, 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 you’re slowly drifting 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. There is a great variation when it comes to the ‘sinner’s prayer’, but most say something like this, ‘Jesus, I now realise 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 lukewarmness 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.

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 members 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.

REVELATION 4

INTRODUCTION

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 Revelation 4, we now launch out into a great sea of symbols, and 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.

THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

‘After this, I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me, like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” Revelation 4:1

Now that all the information concerning the seven churches has been completed, John looks and sees before him a door standing open to heaven. He hears the same voice, which sounded like a trumpet, as he did back in Revelation 1:10. The voice like a trumpet is a reference to the voice of God, Exodus 19:16.

God invites him to come up and to see what will soon take place, Revelation 1:9. John is having a new vision, and he is going to see inside the throne room of heaven. Note, however, he never actually enters the throne room.

‘At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.’ Revelation 4:2-3

Once again, John once again says he was in the Spirit, Revelation 1:10. In the Spirit simply means he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and at this point in time, he is about to have another vision, Ezekiel 37:1.

John sees a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. This is the throne room of Almighty God, Daniel 7:9. The word ‘throne’ is used ten times in the eleven verses of this chapter, and ‘over forty times’ in Revelation.

Notice the one sitting on the throne had the appearance of jasper, Revelation 21:11, and ruby, which is a fiery red stone. He also sees a rainbow shining like an emerald around the throne.

The rainbow is a symbol of mercy, and His covenant relationship with mankind and the earth, Genesis 9:13 / Ezekiel 1:28 / Revelation 10:1. John is using human language to describe something which is indescribable.

‘Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.’ Revelation 4:4

All around God’s throne, there are twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders sitting on them. There are a lot of differing ideas as to who these twelve elders are.

Some suggest that the number twelve, a number often used to indicate religious completeness, intensified by two. The twenty-four represented all those who were remaining ‘faithful until death’, Revelation 2:10. Others believe the elders represent the church.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The question will then be, ‘Why twenty-four?’ The answer is because the Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles. There were originally twelve tribes, but now it is as if the tribes were doubled.’

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are twenty-four of them, which is the number of courses of the priests in the Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 24:7-18. They are priestly in their activity in respect to harping and offering up incense, Revelation 5:8. We have in these the royal priesthood. This is the church of God, 1 Peter 2:5 / 1 Peter 2:9 / Revelation 1:6 / Revelation 5:9-10 / Revelation 20:4 / Revelation 20:6. The twenty-four elders are the royal priesthood.’

Notice they are dressed in white, which signifies their righteous deeds, Revelation 2:4-5. They also had a crown of gold on their heads; this is the victor's crown. This crown also points us to the priesthood, Zechariah 6:9-15.

‘From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.’ Revelation 4:5

The mention of flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder all tell us that God's throne room is very active. These all speak of God's justice and wrath, Revelation 8:5.

They all speak of the presence of God, Exodus 19:9-24 / Exodus 20:18-21 / Ezekiel 1:27 / Daniel 7:9-10. John sees seven lamps blazing, which represent the seven spirits of God, that is, the Holy Spirit Himself.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word ‘lamps’.

‘Subsequent versions use ‘torches’ here instead of lamps, and perhaps that is better. Carpenter found a suggestion in this of the ‘torch’ that moved between the parted sacrifice in the account of the Abrahamic covenant. Genesis 15:17, indicating that both of God's covenants with Noah and with Abraham were symbolised in this chapter.’

‘Also, in front of the throne, there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.’ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night, they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.” Revelation 4:6-8

Notice John is trying his best to describe what he sees, hence why he uses the words ‘looked like’. He sees what looks like a sea of glass as clear as crystal, Revelation 4:6 / Ezekiel 1:22.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are three things that this sea, like shining glass, does symbolise.’

1. It symbolises preciousness.

In the ancient world, glass was usually dull and semi-opaque, and glass as clear as crystal was as precious as gold. In Job 28:17, gold and glass are mentioned together as examples of precious things.

2. It symbolises dazzling purity.

The blinding light reflected from the glassy sea would be too much for the eyes to look upon, like the purity of God.

3. It symbolises immense distance.

The throne of God was in the immense distance, as if at the other side of a great sea.

Milligan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The origin of the symbol of the sea is found in 2 Chronicles 4:2-6. The sea stood between the priest and the holy place where God dwelt.’

John says there were four living creatures, who are covered in eyes, which means nothing is hidden from their sight. Some suggest that the four faces mentioned in Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7 represent Jesus in the four Gospels. Matthew represents the face of the lion, which implies Jesus' kingship. Jesus is from the line of Judah. Mark represents the face of the ox, which implies the servant, service, and serving Jesus. Luke represents the face of the man, which implies humanity; Jesus is the Son of Man. John represents the face of the eagle, which symbolises Jesus' deity. Jesus is the Son of God.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning the living creatures.

‘They are always found near the throne and the Lamb, [Revelation 4:6](#) / [Revelation 5:6](#) / [Revelation 14:4](#). They have six wings and they are full of eyes, [Revelation 4:6](#) / [Revelation 4:8](#). They are constantly engaged in praising and in worshipping God, [Revelation 4:8](#) / [Revelation 5:9](#) / [Revelation 5:14](#) / [Revelation 7:11](#) / [Revelation 19:4](#). They have certain functions to perform. They invite the dreadful manifestations of the wrath of God to appear upon the scene, [Revelation 6:1](#) / [Revelation 6:7](#). One of them hands over the vials of the wrath of God, [Revelation 15:7](#).’

Barclay goes on to say in his commentary,

‘Although there are definite differences, there can be little doubt that we find the ancestors of these living creatures in the visions of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel’s vision the four living creatures each have four faces—the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle; and they uphold the firmament, [Ezekiel 1:6](#) / [Ezekiel 1:10](#) / [Ezekiel 1:22](#) / [Ezekiel 1:26](#); the fellows of the wheels are full of eyes, [Ezekiel 1:18](#). In Ezekiel we have all the details of the picture in the Revelation, although the details are differently allocated and arranged. In spite of the differences, the family resemblance is clear.’

Notice these living creatures continually say, “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ [Revelation 4:8](#) / [Isaiah 6:2-3](#) / [Psalm 99:1-9](#). Notice also they also say, ‘who was, and is, and is to come’, [Revelation 4:8](#), do those words sound familiar? [Revelation 1:4](#) / [Revelation 1:8](#). God is omnipotent, He is eternal, He is Almighty, [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) / [Revelation 19:6](#)

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come’.

‘This title of God is essentially that of [Exodus 3:14](#), ‘I AM who I AM.’ Christ also used this title of himself in [Mark 6:50](#) / [Mark 13:6](#) / [Mark 14:62](#) / [John 6:35](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [John 10:7](#) / [John 11:25](#) / [John 14:6](#).’

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

The living creatures constantly give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, [Revelation 4:9](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Revelation 4:9](#).

‘These are the words that greeted the emperor in triumphal procession; and ‘our Lord and our God’ was introduced into the cult of emperor worship by Domitian.’

While the living creatures are praising God, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the Father, [Revelation 4:10](#). In other words, the living creatures and the twenty-four elders are continuously worshipping God. Notice also that they lay their crowns before the throne and give Him glory and honour, [Revelation 4:11](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Revelation 4:11](#).

‘John uses a picture which the ancient world would know well. The elders cast their crowns before the throne of God. In the ancient world, that was the sign of complete submission. When one king surrendered to another, he cast his crown at the victor’s feet. Sometimes the Romans carried with them an image of their emperor, and when they had reduced a monarch to submission, there was a ceremony in which the vanquished one had to cast his crown before the emperor’s image. The picture looks on God as the conqueror of the souls of men, and on the Church as the body of people who have surrendered to him. There can be no Christianity without submission.’

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God alone is truly worthy of worship. The Lord is superior to all other rulers. He is superior to any Caesar. He is greater than anyone who thinks he has might and authority. The Romans would describe the emperors after their

death as a god. Then the emperors took that title to themselves while they were alive. But none of them are worthy of any such title or description.’

God is the creator of all things, [Genesis 1:1-2](#) / [Psalm 104:30](#) / [John 1:3](#) / [John 1:10](#) / [Colossians 1:16-20](#), and because He created all things, they have their being, [Revelation 4:11](#) / [Acts 17:28](#) / [1 Corinthians 8:6](#).

REVELATION 5

INTRODUCTION

“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.” Revelation 5:1

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

John now sees in the right hand of him who sits on the throne a scroll, but notice it has writing on both sides of it, [Ezekiel 2:9-10](#). We need to wait until we get to [Revelation 6](#) to see what is written. The scroll is sealed with seven seals, indicating that it is complete; it’s completely sealed.

“And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.” Revelation 5:2-4

John now sees a mighty angel, [Revelation 10:1](#) / [Revelation 18:21](#), asking the question, who is worthy of breaking the seal and opening it, [Revelation 5:2](#). We can almost feel the disappointment in John’s words when he realises that no one is worthy enough to open the seal or even look inside it, [Revelation 5:3](#).

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is clearly involved a determinative function, that is, whoever opens it is responsible for the controlling and developing of what is to follow. The destinies of the people involved lie in the hands of whoever dares to step forward.’

It’s not surprising that John wept at this point, [Revelation 5:4](#).

“Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Revelation 5:5

We can only imagine the disappointment John was feeling as he wept because no one was found worthy, but now, one of the elders shows him some good news. There is One who is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.

The elder points to the Lion of Judah, [Genesis 29:9](#) / [Hebrews 7:4](#), the Root of David, [Isaiah 11:1](#) / [Isaiah 11:10](#) / [Romans 1:3-4](#) / [Revelation 3:7](#) / [Revelation 22:16](#). He has triumphed, [John 16:33](#) / [Colossians 2:13-15](#) / [Romans 4:25](#).

Christians were being persecuted; they wanted to know if God is in control, who would help us overcome the great world power that is Rome? The elder tells us that it is Jesus, He has triumphed, [Revelation 5:5](#) / [John 16:33](#) / [Romans 4:25](#).

“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Revelation 5:6

Notice John saw a Lamb, who looked like it had just been slain, but He is very much alive, [Isaiah 53:7](#). The Lamb is seen standing in the centre of the throne and surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders, whom he spoke about in [Revelation 4:6-11](#).

Notice the Lamb had seven horns, representing complete and perfect power, [Daniel 7:7](#) / [Daniel 7:20](#). The Lamb also has seven eyes, representing that the Lamb is all-seeing. These are the seven spirits of God which were sent out into all the earth, [2 Chronicles 16:8-9](#).

Why is the Holy Spirit called ‘the seven spirits’ in Revelation? The most satisfying answer is to connect the reader to the similar description given in [Zechariah 4:1-10](#). Seven has the symbolic meaning of perfection.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here is a tremendous picture of Christ. He is the fulfilment of all the hopes and dreams of Israel, for he is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. He is the one whose sacrifice availed for men, and who still bears the marks of it in the heavenly places. But the tragedy has turned to triumph and the shame to glory; and he is the one whose all-conquering might none can withstand and whose all-seeing eye none can escape.’

“He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.” Revelation 5:7-8

John says the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne, [Revelation 5:7](#) / [Hebrews 1:3](#) / [Hebrews 1:6](#) / [Hebrews 1:8-9](#) / [Hebrews 2:9](#).

Hendriksen, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Lamb has taken the scroll out of the hand of him who was seated on the Throne. This very clearly refers to the fact that Christ, as Mediator, at his ascension received authority to rule the universe.’

Notice that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders all fell down before the Lamb, [Revelation 5:7](#). Who is the Lamb? It’s Jesus Christ, [John 1:29](#), who is able to offer help during times of persecution. The Lamb is divine, the Lamb is Christ, the Lamb is worthy of worship.

Notice the elders each have harps, [Psalms 33:2](#) / [Psalms 98:5](#) / [Psalms 147:7](#), and were holding bowls full of incense, which represents the prayers of God’s people, [Revelation 5:7](#) / [Psalm 141:2](#) / [Luke 1:9-10](#).

Because the bowls are ‘filled’ suggests that there were many prayers uplifted before God, [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#).

Clearly, these elders have the role of the priesthood, [Revelation 4:4](#).

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are twenty-four of them, which is the number of courses of the priests in the Old Testament, [1 Chronicles 24:7-18](#). They are priestly in their activity in respect to harping and offering up incense, [Revelation 5:8](#). We have in these the royal priesthood. This is the church of God, [1 Peter 2:5](#) / [1 Peter 2:9](#) / [Revelation 1:6](#) / [Revelation 5:9-10](#) / [Revelation 20:4](#) / [Revelation 20:6](#). The twenty-four elders are the royal priesthood.’

“And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:9-10

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘One of the characteristics of the Revelation is that it is the book of new things. There is the new name, Revelation 2:17 / Revelation 3:12; there is the new Jerusalem, Revelation 3:12 / Revelation 21:2; there is the new song, Revelation 5:9 / Revelation 14:3; there are the new heavens and the new earth, Revelation 21:1; and there is the great promise that God makes all things new, Revelation 21:5.’

There are many new songs mentioned within the Scriptures, Psalms 40:3 / Psalms 33:3 / Psalms 96:1-2 / Psalms 98:1, many of which are usually associated with deliverance and redemption, Exodus 15:15-21 / Deuteronomy 32:1-43 / Luke 1:46-55. Here we read of another new song, concerning the worthy Lamb of God, Revelation 5:9 / Revelation 14:3 / Revelation 15:3 / Isaiah 42:10 / Isaiah 42:14-17.

The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open it because He was slain and because it was with His blood that He was able to purchase people for God, Acts 20:28 / 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 / 1 Peter 1:19-21, from all over the world, regardless of their race and nationality.

Because Jesus shed His blood, all Christians are a part of His kingdom and serve as priests, Revelation 1:10 / Revelation 1:6. Israel of old was supposed to be an object lesson; they were supposed to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, Exodus 19:5-6. They were supposed to bring the world back to God by acting as mediators between the world and God, but they messed up.

When Moses was up the mountain, the people remained below and ended up building a golden calf under Aaron’s instructions; they messed up. Moses stood where Aaron should have stood and asked the question, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side?’ and only the tribe of Levi came forward, Exodus 32:29.

And so instead of all the Israelites being priests and mediators between God and the world, the tribe of Levi was chosen to mediate between the Israelites and God. We are what Israel as a nation was supposed to be in the first place.

We are now the chosen people, we are now the royal priest, we are now the holy nation, and we are now a people that belong to God, 1 Peter 2:9. And it’s our responsibility to be the mediators between the world and God, like it was supposed to be at the start. We’ve got the job of trying to reconcile the world to God.

Jesus says that Israel, as a nation, will have the kingdom taken away from them and it will be given to another nation, Matthew 21:43. He’s taking it away from the Jewish nation because they messed up and He has now given it to His church, Galatians 3:26-29 / Galatians 6:16. And just like the Israel of old who were responsible for proclaiming the praises of God, we too have the same task.

Notice also that we as Christians, acting as priests in His kingdom, will reign on the earth, Revelation 5:10. As Christians, we are reigning with Christ right now, John 16:33 / 1 Peter 2:9 / Ephesians 2:6 / 2 Timothy 2:11-13 / Revelation 2:26-27.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 5:10.

‘The KJV renders this passage: ‘And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.’ There are two significant changes in the ASV. ‘Us’ is changed to ‘they,’ and ‘we shall reign’ is changed to ‘they reign.’ We shall take the first change first. That the ‘us’ here means Christians of the present times is obvious, and since that is the true meaning of the passage, no matter how it is translated, the KJV should be retained.’

“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice, they 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 5:11-12

We get the impression that John can barely imagine how many angels are present surrounding the throne, the living creatures and the elders, [Revelation 5:11](#) / [Deuteronomy 32:2](#) / [Psalm 68:17](#) / [Daniel 7:10](#) / [Hebrews 12:22](#) / [Revelation 7:1](#).

These angels are praising the Lamb who was worthy and slain. It’s the Lamb who receives power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and praise, [Revelation 5:12](#) / [1 Chronicles 29:10-12](#) / [Hebrews 1:6](#).

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](#).

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshipped.” Revelation 5:13-14

All of creation is now involved in praising the Lamb, [Psalms 148:1-14](#). After all, He was the One who created all things, [Hebrews 1:3](#). He is the One who receives all the honour, glory, and power forever. It’s no wonder the four living creatures say ‘Amen’ and fall down and worship the Lamb, [Revelation 5:11-14](#) / [Revelation 4:10](#).

[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

INTRODUCTION

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 living creatures 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

‘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

FIRST SEAL. A WHITE HORSE. JESUS THE CONQUEROR

It was the Lamb, who is Jesus, who opened the first of the seven seals, because only He was worthy enough to do so, Revelation 5:5-9. John heard once again one of the four living creatures invite him to come and look. Thunder implies judgment is coming.

Before Solomon’s time, no horses were permitted in the armies of Israel, Deuteronomy 17:16-17. 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 that 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 that it could easily apply to Christ. We can be assured that the church will 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

Jesus, the Lamb, now opens the second seal, and once again John is invited to come. This horse is coloured red, it’s a fiery red. 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

Jesus, the Lamb, now opens the third seal, and again, the living creature invites him to come. This horse is coloured black, this is a colour of distress and calamity, it’s a picture of the grim, dread calamity of famine, Ezekiel 4:10 / Ezekiel 4:17. 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

Jesus, the Lamb, now opens the fourth seal, and once again the living creature invites him to come. This horse is a pale horse, which 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 ravaging diseases usually follow. They can destroy more than a war. Thus, this horse and rider represent pestilence.

Jesus says, he holds the keys of death and Hades, [Revelation 1:18](#). Hades is another word for hell, the place where the Rich man found himself after he died, [Luke 16:22-23](#). The term ‘death and Hades’ occurs only in the Book of Revelation. The one who sits on the pale horse has the name Death, with Hades following after him, [Revelation 6:8](#). In [Revelation 20:13](#), death and Hades gave up the dead, who are then judged at the final judgment. Then both ‘death and Hades’ are thrown into the lake of fire, [Revelation 20:14](#), along with anyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life, [Revelation 20:15](#).

I am sure you would have noticed that ‘death and Hades’ are personified in the later passages. 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

Jesus now opens the fifth seal, but this time John sees something different. 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](#).

We can know that God knows and cares deeply about our suffering. Here 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](#). We learn that God knows and cares about our suffering. How can he 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, [Psalm 37:25](#).

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.

There's an important question in the Book of Revelation, which is here. 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](#). God will take care of righteous people in His time, [Revelation 6:9-11](#) / [Isaiah 33:1](#) / [Daniel 11:36](#) / [Daniel 11:45](#).

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.

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

Jesus now opens the sixth seal, and what he saw must have been frightening. This seal depicts judgment in answer to the plea of the souls under the altar. The earthquake, the sun, the moon, and the stars are all judgment talk, [Isaiah](#)

34:4-6 / Jeremiah 4:23-25. In Matthew 24:29, Jesus uses the same language concerning judgment against Jerusalem, and this language isn't anything new.

Jesus is using a language which some call apocalyptic, and it was very familiar to students of the Old Testament. We're not familiar with it because we're Gentiles, and so sometimes we think they're talking about the second coming when they aren't necessarily doing so.

For example, in the apocalyptic language, you often announced judgment by saying the whole cosmic structure, sun, moon, stars, were going to be shaken, Matthew 24:29 / Mark 13:24-25 / Luke 21:25. In fact, that was just an Old Testament way of saying God was about to judge a nation.

In Isaiah 13:10, we read about a judgment against Babylon, which is not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Babylon. In Isaiah 34:4, we read about a judgment against Edom, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Edom.

In Ezekiel 32:7-8, we read about a judgment against Egypt, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Egypt.

When a Jew heard language like, the stars are going to be darkened, the moon is going to turn dark, the sun is going to fall. When they heard talk like that, they didn't think that the 'end of the world,' they thought, 'what nation is God judging now?'

And when Jesus uses that kind of language, Matthew 24:29 / Mark 13:24-25 / Luke 21:25, He's saying that God is sending judgment upon Israel. Just like He did on Egypt, just like He did on Edom and Babylon.

This judgment will be on the Roman persecuting power as indicated in the words, 'Every mountain and island were moved out of their places,' Revelation 6:14. This seems to encompass the known Roman world. The kings and great men of Revelation 6:15 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. This seal speaks of the wrath of the Lamb, Revelation 6:16.

Notice what he says here, 'For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' Revelation 6:17.

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

INTRODUCTION

'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.’ Revelation 7:1-3

John now sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, Revelation 7:1 / Psalm 104:4 / Hebrews 1:7. The number four 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 four often represents earthly things, Isaiah 57:13 / Jeremiah 18:17 / Jonah 1:4.

They are depicted as holding back the four winds of the earth to stop any wind blowing on the land, the sea and any tree, Revelation 7:1 / Isaiah 11:12 / Ezekiel 7:2. This implies that there is judgment coming. John now sees another angel, coming up from the east with a seal of the living God, Revelation 7:2.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following concerning this other angel.

‘This is good news. There is mercy implied here. The sun, among other things, symbolises the attributes and goodness of God, Psalm 84:11 / Malachi 4:2 / 2 Peter 1:19 / Revelation 16:12 / Revelation 22:16.’

This angel calls out to four other angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea, but these angels are told not to harm the land, the sea or the trees, until we put a seal on the servants of our God, Revelation 7:3. This implies there was a waiting period, they had to wait until all of God’s righteous people were sealed, Ezekiel 9.

The sealing on the foreheads of God’s people isn’t to be taken literally, as we will see in Revelation 7:4. This sealing is a picture of spiritual protection, security, ownership, and preservation, Revelation 7:9-17 / 2 Timothy 2:19.

144,000 SEALED

“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 7:4-8

Here we’re introduced to the 144,000, but who are they? 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.

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.

In **Revelation 7:9-10**, we will read about the 'great multitude'. 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**.

Again, we read these saints were 'before the throne', and they are serving God in 'His temple', **Revelation 7:15 / 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 in **Revelation 14:1**, there is the 'Lamb,' which is a figure representing Christ, **John 1:29 / Revelation 5:6**.

In **Revelation 14:1**, there is Mount Zion, a symbol of divine government, as in **Isaiah 2:2-4**. In **Revelation 14:3**, 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 in **Revelation 14:4**, we have the saints who are depicted as 'virgins,' which descriptive emphasis 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 were 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, **Revelation 5:9**. The only purchase price ultimately available for human salvation is that of the blood of Jesus Christ, **Acts 20:28 / 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 / 1 Peter 1:19-21**.

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-to-day, we can be sure that God knows those who are faithfully serving Him will be taken care of.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE IN WHITE ROBES

‘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. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”’ **Revelation 7:9-10**

John now sees before him a great multitude which couldn't be counted from all over the world, **Genesis 15:5 / Genesis 32:12**. The number was sealed, indicating God's protection of all His people on earth.

They stood before the throne, and the Lamb, **Revelation 5:6**, and they were wearing white robes, indicating victorious saints in the keeping of God, **Revelation 7:9 / Revelation 6:2 / Revelation 7:4**.

They are also holding palm branches, which indicate a time of celebration and thanksgiving, **John 12:13**, as they did for the Feast of Tabernacles, **Leviticus 23:40**.

They would sing the ‘Ascent Psalms’, **Psalms 120-134**, and the great Hallal Psalms, **Psalms 113-118**. They would praise God for His great salvation, who sits on His throne and to the Lamb, **Revelation 5:6 / Revelation 2:26-27 / Revelation 3:21**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God the Father, and He who is the Lamb of God, alike claim the honour of salvation. It is observable here that the redeemed ascribe their salvation to the Lamb as well as to Him who is on the throne.’

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.

“All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” **Revelation 7:11-12**

Here we read that all the angels, the elders and the four living creatures were standing around the throne. All of them fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God. ‘Amen,’ they cry, all the praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honour, power, and strength are to God forever and ever, Amen. These verses show us who is in control. It is God who is all-powerful; it is God who is in control, not Rome, not people, but God.

‘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**

One of the elders asked John who are these in the white robes, **Revelation 3:4-5**, and where did they come from? John didn't know, and so the elder told him. These are the ones who served God and who worshipped Him; these are the Christians who suffered but came out the other side victorious. What was the great tribulation they survived? The great tribulation in view here is the persecution of the saints under the Roman Empire.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In **Revelation 6**, we hear of one coming. In the first part of **Revelation 7**, we have the 144,000 sealed as protection during it. This clearly implies they were to go through it. And now we have a host who are the ones who ‘come out of the great tribulation.’ Manifestly, it is the tribulation of **Revelation 6**.’

Why did God allow them to suffer first? 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,’ **Hebrews 9:14** / **1 John 1:7**.

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 with the blood of Christ when we are baptised in order to wash our sins away in the blood of the Lamb, **Acts 2:28** / **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!

“Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” **Revelation 7:15-17**

The survivors of the great tribulation are totally devoted to God; they are before the throne, they serve Him day and night, **Revelation 7:15** / **Luke 2:37**. God Himself is their shelter, **Psalms 15:1-2** / **John 17:21** / **John 17:23** / **Revelation 21:3**.

Notice the blessings they receive because of their faithfulness: they will never hunger again, they will never thirst again, and they will be protected from the heat of the sun, **Revelation 7:16** / **Isaiah 49:9-10**.

They will receive all these blessings because Jesus, the Lamb of God who is at the centre of the throne, will be their shepherd. Jesus the Good Shepherd, **John 10:11**. Jesus the Great Shepherd, **Hebrews 13:20**. Jesus the Chief Shepherd, **1 Peter 5:4**.

He is the Shepherd who provides for all our needs, **Psalms 23:1-2** / **Psalms 23:5** / **Psalms 36:8** / **Isaiah 40:11**. He will lead them to springs of living water, **Isaiah 49:10** / **John 4:13-14** / **John 7:38**. Now that their suffering is over, God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes, **Isaiah 25:8** / **Isaiah 60:20**.

REVELATION 8

INTRODUCTION

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. Remember, this is not speaking about future events thousands of years later.

These are things which ‘must soon take place’, **Revelation 1:1** / **Revelation 22:6**, ‘the time is near’, **Revelation 1:3** / **Revelation 22:10**. This is speaking about God's judgment against the Roman Empire.

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, [Revelation 6](#). 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, [Habakkuk 2:20](#) / [1 John 2:18](#). It seems to express a fearful expectation or the calm before the storm is unleashed. These thirty minutes could seem like an eternity, [Revelation 10:3](#) / [1 John 2:18](#). Seven angels with seven trumpets now appear. The number seven symbolises the meaning of totality or completeness associated with God’s authority on the earth, so the seven angels with the seven trumpets are a picture of unity, perfection, fullness, and completeness of what God was going to do. We recall the seven angels of the seven churches, [Revelation 1:4](#) / [Revelation 2-3](#), who appear before God, [Exodus 25:17-22](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Trumpets play a major role in God’s dealings with His people, [Exodus 19:16](#) / [Exodus 20:18](#) / [Isaiah 27:13](#) / [Jeremiah 4:5](#) / [Joel 2:1](#) / [Zephaniah 1:16](#) / [Matthew 24:31](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:51-52](#) / [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#). They were part of Israel’s ceremonial processions, [Joshua 6:4](#) / [Joshua 6:13-16](#) / [1 Kings 1:34](#) / [1 Kings 1:39](#) / [1 Chronicles 15:24](#), and they assembled the Israelites for war, journeys, and special feasts, [Numbers 10:9-10](#). They also warned of the coming day of the Lord, [Joel 2:1](#), and they announced the new year in Israel, [Numbers 29:1](#).’ These seven angels are given trumpets from God; these trumpets were used to summon or announce something important, [Numbers 10](#). It appears that God is ready to speak.

THE GOLDEN CENSER

“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. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.” Revelation 8:3-6

Here we see a throne-room scene again, and another angel stood at the altar with a golden censor, [Revelation 8:3](#). The altar is the ‘golden altar’ of incense, [Revelation 8:3](#) / [Leviticus 16:12](#) / [Numbers 16:46](#), which stood in the tabernacle sitting above the cherubim on the ark, [Exodus 25:17-22](#).

Amid trumpets that are unleashing God’s wrath, the saints’ prayers go up before the throne of God as sweet-smelling incense, [Revelation 8:3](#). 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, [Revelation 8:4-5](#). The incense is associated with the prayers of the saints, [Psalm 141:2](#) / [Luke 1:10](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here we have the idea that prayer is a sacrifice to God; the prayers of the saints are offered on the altar, and, like all other sacrifices, they are surrounded with the perfume of the incense as they rise to God. A man may have no other sacrifice to offer to God, but at all times he can offer his prayers, and there are always angelic hands waiting to bring them to God.’

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](#).

Another altar is mentioned, [Revelation 8:5](#), 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, [Revelation 8:5](#) / [Ezekiel 10:3-7](#).

In answer to those earlier prayers, we find coming judgment. The thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake, [Revelation 8:5](#), all speak of coming judgment, [Revelation 6:9-11](#). God uses earthquakes to signify His judgment against sin. God used an earthquake to destroy Korah and his followers, who started a rebellion, [Numbers 16:31-33](#).

David often speaks about how earthquakes are a demonstration of God's anger against His people or a nation, [2 Samuel 22:8](#) / [Psalm 18:6-7](#). Isaiah speaks about how God will punish His people because of their sin using an earthquake, [Isaiah 5:25](#) / [Isaiah 29:6](#). Jeremiah also speaks about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin using an earthquake, [Jeremiah 10:10](#).

Nahum, [Nahum 1:5](#), Habakkuk, [Habakkuk 3:6](#), and Zechariah, [Zechariah 14:5](#), all speak about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin, using an earthquake. Jesus Himself speaks of an earthquake which would happen when God was going to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, [Matthew 24:7](#). John, in his vision, speaks about how God will bring judgment against Rome and unbelievers, [Revelation 6:12-14](#) / [Revelation 8:5](#) / [Revelation 11:19](#) / [Revelation 11:13](#) / [Revelation 16:18](#).

The seven angels are now prepared to blow the seven trumpets. In other words, the angels were preparing to warn of the retribution and judgment of God on the enemies of righteousness, [Amos 3:6](#) / [Hosea 5:8](#). God's message is clear: if you hurt My people, you will suffer the consequences.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The whole scene quite clearly symbolises God sending judgment on the earth in response to His people's accumulated prayers, [Exodus 3:7-10](#) / [Exodus 19:16-19](#) / [Revelation 4:5](#) / [Revelation 11:19](#) / [Revelation 16:18](#). The trumpet judgments to follow are what He will send.’

THE TRUMPETS

‘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

THE FIRST TRUMPET

Here we have the first of seven angels sounding his trumpet, Revelation 8:2. 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 / Ezekiel 38:22.

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, Matthew 17:20.

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

Here we have the second of seven angels sounding his trumpet, Revelation 8:2. A great mountain burning may signify a great power or nation, Jeremiah 51:25 / 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 2:35 / Daniel 2:40-44 / 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

Here we have the third of seven angels sounding his trumpet, Revelation 8:2. 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 became like wormwood and caused many to die. Wormwood is a bitter plant; thus, destruction would be bitter, Deuteronomy 29:18 / Jeremiah 9:15 / 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

Here we have the fourth of seven angels sounding his trumpet, Revelation 8:2. Each of the four trumpets damages 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.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We learned in [Revelation 6:12-14](#) that the sun no longer shines, the moon becoming like blood, and the stars falling from the sky are symbols of final judgment on a nation. In [Revelation 8:12](#), we again see only a third of these celestial bodies struck. Therefore, this is not yet the final judgment but only a partial judgment, the great tribulation, affecting part of the earth.’

The angel heard the eagle crying, ‘woe, woe, woe’ to the inhabitants of the earth, signalling that even worse things are yet to come, [Deuteronomy 28:49-50](#). These first four trumpets have signalled great calamity, but the three remaining trumpets will signal even worse things.

REVELATION 9

INTRODUCTION

[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.’ [Revelation 9:1-6](#)

Here we have the fifth of seven angels sounding his trumpet, [Revelation 8:2](#). A star denotes a ruler and heaven his dominion, the falling symbolises a dethroning, [Revelation 9:1](#) / [Luke 10:17-18](#).

This is said of a Babylonian ruler in [Isaiah 14:2](#). The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss, and notice this star is personified as ‘he’, [Revelation 9:2](#) / [Revelation 9:11](#) / [Ephesians 2:2](#).

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It’s clear to me this is Satan. In [Revelation 22:16](#), we read of ‘the bright and morning star’. The Bright and Morning Star has the key of death and Hades, [Revelation 1:18](#), but the fallen star has the key of the abyss. That star represents a personality we are not left to doubt, for [Revelation 9:11](#) tells us so. He is their god, [2 Corinthians 4:4](#), and the king of the locusts.’

When the bottomless pit is opened, there is unleashed a great pollution of smoke so dense that the sun cannot shine through it, as the air is smoggy, it was darkness, [Revelation 9:2](#) / [Genesis 19:28](#). 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, [Revelation 9:3](#) / [Joel 1:1-20](#) / [Joel 2:1-32](#). They invade an area like an army, [Exodus 10:14-17](#) / [Joel 1:4-7](#).

This is further amplification of the woe pronounced upon the earth by the angel. These locusts have the power of scorpions, [Revelation 9:3](#). Thus, the distress which was to come upon the land is personified as being poisonous and able to kill.

We see that the locusts are commanded not to 'harm the grass of the earth, any green thing, nor any tree,' they can harm 'only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads,' [Revelation 9:4](#) / [Ezekiel 9](#) / [Habakkuk 1:5-17](#). 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 us that Rome was going to be taken over.

Roper, in his commentary, says the following.

'The primary purpose of the sealing of the 144,000 in [Revelation 7](#) was to protect God's people. [Revelation 9:4](#) gives an example of that protection. Since the locusts represent consequences of disobedience, the obedient are spared those consequences.'

The victims of these woes were not to be killed immediately but tormented for five months, [Revelation 9:5](#). 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, [Revelation 9:5](#). It's not surprising that these men want to die, [Revelation 9:6](#).

'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 9:7-12](#)

The locusts are further described as having hair like women and teeth like those of a lion, [Revelation 9:7-8](#). In other words, they look beautiful like the hair of a woman, but they will devour them like a lion.

The breastplates of iron depict the invader's armour; they come in chariots also, [Revelation 9:9](#). This army has the power to inflict great horror for five months, [Revelation 9:10](#) / [Ezekiel 22:31](#) / [Hosea 13:9](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'Their attack is to last for five months. The explanation of the five months is almost probably that the lifespan of a locust from birth, through the larva stage, to death is five months. It is as if we might say that one generation of locusts is being launched upon the earth.'

They have a king over them whose name in Hebrew was 'Abaddon', [Revelation 9:11](#), meaning destroyer and in Greek 'Apollyon', which means the same. This king was the angel of the bottomless, this is Satan himself, [Revelation 9:1-3](#).

John now tells us that of the three woes announced by the flying angel, one is now past and two are yet to come, [Revelation 9:12](#). The judgments in the seven trumpets seem to be divided into three woes, [Revelation 9:12](#). This would explain why each directive is applied to 'a three woes,' and would explain why each directive is applied to 'a third part,' [Revelation 9:15](#) / [Revelation 9:18](#).

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 worshipping 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

RIDERS ON HORSES AND A TEMPLE

Here we have the sixth of seven angels sounding his trumpet, [Revelation 8:2](#). Notice John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God, [Revelation 9:13](#).

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, [Revelation 9:14](#), which was symbolic of military might, [Isaiah 8:7-8](#).

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Revelation 9:14](#).

‘These are they who are appointed to attack Rome. These stand for the armies upon which God can call his bidding.’

Summers, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The three factors combined to overthrow the Roman Empire: natural calamity, internal rottenness, and external invasion. The first four trumpets involved natural calamity and proposed that the locusts of the fifth trumpet typified internal rottenness. The sixth trumpet is a symbolic representation of the third factor: external invasion.’

The symbolism of this section is also parallel to Joel’s vision of horsemen and chariots going into battle, [Joel 2:4-11](#). These four angels may be the same four mentioned in [Revelation 7](#), as ‘holding the four winds of the earth,’ [Revelation 7:1-3](#).

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, [Revelation 9:14](#) / [Genesis 15:18](#) / [Isaiah 8:7-8](#).

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, [Revelation 9:15](#). It could denote the time of suspension while the Romans were preparing for invasion.

Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is clear that John is speaking of a divine plan. God has a purpose, and it is worked out. It is a purpose of judgment; and, upon this occasion, the third part of man were to be slain.’

We have a picture of an overwhelming military power poised to kill, [Revelation 9:16](#). Notice the number of horsemen, this is two million. If this number of horsemen didn’t frighten Rome, nothing would.

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, Revelation 9:17. An awesome description is given of the doom that was given to the Roman Empire, Revelation 9:18-19. Similar descriptions of the 600 B.C. Babylonian invasions are given in Joel 2:2-4 and Jeremiah 25:9-11. Notice the power of the hoes comes from their mouth, Revelation 9:19. ‘Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Evil propaganda is clearly suggested by this. It is the flood of wicked, irresponsible, inflammatory, deceitful, and violence-oriented rhetoric of all kinds of Pied Pipers screaming for people to follow them which is evident here. His evil mouth is the ruination of man.’

The ‘rest of the men’, Revelation 9:20-21, were those who refused to repent; notice this is said twice. At the heart of any sin is the setting up of someone or something else in the place of God.

Notice how the form of worship goes in terms of worth; it goes from demons to gold to silver to brass to stone to wood, Revelation 9:20. This shows how worthless idolatry is. They shall not escape God’s final judgment.

History tells us that this 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? In Revelation 9, 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 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, 2 Peter 3:9.

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 worshipping 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.

REVELATION 10

INTRODUCTION

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.

THE ANGEL AND THE LITTLE SCROLL

“Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.”

Revelation 10:1-4

I’m sure you’ve noted that Revelation is filled with angels. This one is described as a mighty angel who came down from heaven, Revelation 10:1 / Revelation 5:2. He’s clothed in a cloud, which symbolises judgment, Jeremiah 4:13 / Ezekiel 30:3 / Revelation 1:7.

He has a rainbow over his head, which is symbolic of God’s everlasting covenant, Genesis 9:12-16. Because the rainbow is over his head, this indicates that it is at the head or forefront of all messengers from the throne.

What is getting ready to come when the seventh trumpet sounds is terrible indeed, but the righteous see that God’s covenant is there in a prominent place where it can be seen by all.

His face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars, Revelation 10:1. Whoever this angel is, he certainly appears to be important and carries a lot of weight concerning authority. The mighty angel was holding a little scroll, which lay open, Revelation 10:2. This little scroll is always open, Revelation 10:8.

Note the size of this mighty angel; his right foot is planted in the sea, and his left foot is planted on the land, Revelation 10:2. This appears to be saying that he covered the whole earth.

Even his voice commands authority, it’s like the roar of a lion, Revelation 10:3. A lion symbolises great strength, boldness and bravery. Notice the number seven again. When he speaks, the seven thunders speak, Revelation 10:3.

As we have already noted, the number seven represents completeness, and the thunder speaks of judgment. John hears a voice which tells him to seal up what the seven thunders said, but don’t write it down, Revelation 10:4.

“Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” Revelation 10:5-7

John tells us that the angel he saw standing on the sea and the land, Revelation 10:2, raised his right hand to heaven, Revelation 10:5-6. The raising of the right hand to heaven symbolises the taking of an oath, Daniel 12:7. His oath is obviously directed towards Jesus, Hebrews 7:24-25, because He’s the One who created all things, Ephesians 3:9 / Colossians 1:15-17.

It appears there will be no more delay, Revelation 10:6. In other words, time was up for the Roman Empire. This was going to happen in the days of the seventh angel, when he will sound his trumpet.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Why in his day? Because you remember, the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls, even as the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the whole course of judgment is covered. In

the seventh trumpet are the seven bowls. From the first trumpet to the last, that is the ‘time’ covered by the seventh trumpet.’

The mystery of God will be accomplished, that is, war between the church and Rome, but despite all the suffering Christians had to go through, Rome will be defeated.

This is what God told His ‘servants’ in the beginning, Revelation 10:7 / Revelation 1:1. Remember these things ‘must soon take place’, Revelation 1:1 / Revelation 22:6. The time is near, Revelation 1:3 / Revelation 22:10.

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

A voice from heaven, whom John had heard earlier, tells John to take the scroll from the mighty angel he saw earlier, the huge angel who stood on the sea and the land, Revelation 10:8 / Revelation 10:2 / Revelation 10:5. When John goes to take the scroll, he is told to eat it, but he is warned that it will be sour in his stomach but sweet as honey in his mouth, Revelation 10:9.

John now goes ahead and eats the scroll, Revelation 10:10. The idea of eating the scroll means that God’s Word is now a part of him, and he now takes full responsibility for what is revealed within it, Ezekiel 2:8 / Ezekiel 3:3. It was sweet in John’s mouth but would be bitter in his stomach, Revelation 10:10.

Carpenter, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Of course, the metaphor here is based upon the fact that some foods which taste good produce sickness or pain later. The sweet taste of God’s word is a frequent Old Testament metaphor, Psalms 19:9-10 / Psalms 119:103. It should not be forgotten that ‘eating the book’ means ‘The complete mastering of the contents, digesting it.’

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. John is now told that he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings, Revelation 10:11.

Hailey’s commentary says the following.

‘The rest of the Revelation from Revelation 11 through to Revelation 20, is the message within the little book.’

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

INTRODUCTION

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.

‘I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshippers. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.’ Revelation 11:1-2

John is now given a reed to act as a measuring rod, Revelation 11:1.

Lenski, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The reed must then symbolise the word or Gospel in its function of determining who is in the church and who is outside of its bounds.’

John is told to measure the temple, Revelation 11:1 / Revelation 21:15-17. Remember, the Temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans in AD. 70, so the temple he is referring to here must be God's people, 1 Corinthians 3:16-16 / Ephesians 2:19-22 / Revelation 3:12. He is told to measure the altar, Revelation 6:9-10, and its worshippers, Revelation 11:1 / 2 Kings 21:13 / Ezekiel 40:3 / Ezekiel 40:5 / Zechariah 2:1-5.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The measuring of the ‘worshippers’ would naturally mean the evaluation of their lifestyle, character, and behaviour by the principles taught in the word of God. Thus, the corporate body of the church, its doctrine, worship, and teaching, as well as the individual character and conduct of its members, would all be included in the measuring. Significantly, there have been pronounced departures from the word of God in all of these categories by the historical church.’

The reason for the measuring is to measure what is holy and what isn't. Note that he wasn't to measure the outer court because it has been given to the Gentiles, Revelation 11:2.

There is a contrast drawn here between those who are saved in the temple and those who are not saved, being outside the temple. The area outside the temple is populated by the nations of the earth, and they persecuted the church, and they will trample on the holy city for 42 months, Revelation 11:2. The 1,260 days or 42 months represent a period of time for persecution but God's care.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here are some of the passages in which the phrase appears. It's the period the ‘little horn’ Domitian, who 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

'And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. They are 'the two olive trees' and the two lampstands, and 'they stand before the Lord of the earth.' Revelation 11:3-4

The two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth, [Revelation 11:3](#).

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'We're being told here that the church of God cannot be stopped. They wear sackcloth. This indicates that everything is not roses, but the fact remains, they do continue to get the job done.'

Sackcloth was used for times of mourning and distress, [Job 16:15](#) / [Esther 4:1-3](#) / [Genesis 37:34](#) / [2 Samuel 3:31](#). The witnesses are mourning over the judgment message they are preaching, [Joel 1:8](#) / [Amos 8:10](#).

In Zechariah, Zerubbabel is of the royal line and the priest, Joshua son of Jozadak, [Zechariah 4:11-14](#), but here in [Revelation 11](#), we see God's two witnesses who are prophets of God, who represent God's Word and His church. Remember, Christians are a royal priesthood, [1 Peter 2:5](#) / [1 Peter 2:9](#) / [Revelation 1:6](#) / [Revelation 5:10](#) / [Revelation 20:6](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The identity of these two witnesses appears to this writer to be definitely and undeniably God's word, and God's church, those two witnesses indeed being the only two witnesses of God throughout the whole Christian age, since the ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord.'

But why two witnesses? 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](#). The number two represented strength and confirmation in the minds of the first-century Christians, [Luke 10:1](#).

Notice they are described as two olive trees and two lampstands, [Revelation 1:12-13](#) / [Revelation 13:20](#). They are the bearers of food and of the light of righteousness, and they stand before the Lord of the earth. Later, God's two witnesses are sent out to proclaim His message, but they are killed.

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

Notice the warning here: if anyone tries to harm these two witnesses, fire will come from their mouths, and they will devour them; they must die, [Revelation 11:5](#) / [Jeremiah 5:14](#) / [Luke 18:6-8](#). The fire coming out of the mouths of the witnesses is the condemnation of sin and the judgment of God on the unrighteous.

Notice also the power they have, just like Elijah, they can shut up the heaven so that the rain will stop, [1 Kings 18:41-19:8](#) / [Luke 4:25](#) / [James 5:17](#). Just like Moses, they can turn water into blood, [Exodus 7:20](#), and strike the earth with plagues, [Revelation 11:6](#) / [Exodus 8:-10:29](#).

‘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

After the 1,260 days, [Revelation 11:3](#), when the two witnesses had finished their testimony, the beast will come up from the Abyss attacks them and kill them, [Revelation 11:7](#). Who is this beast? It’s none other than Rome, we will see this later in [Revelation 13](#).

The people didn’t want to hear what the prophets had to say, so they put them to death, [Revelation 11:7](#). Their bodies lay in the street to be seen by all, [Revelation 11:8](#), and it looked like Christ and Christianity had been stamped out. Some people see the ‘great city’ as Jerusalem; however, it can’t be Jerusalem because by the time it happened, Jerusalem did not even exist. This is clearly speaking about Rome.

The words ‘great city’ occur in Revelation ten times in the King James Version. In all other instances, it is in reference to the Roman Empire, which was ruled from the ‘great city’ of Rome; often, it is referred to as Babylon in Revelation. Never was old Jerusalem referred to as a ‘great city’.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The city is called by three different names: Egypt, Sodom, and Jerusalem. It is Egypt because Rome is also the oppressor, as was Egypt, the worldly power which oppressed the people of God. It is Sodom because Rome was a foul and immoral empire, as was Sodom a city, worldliness. It is Jerusalem because Rome was an empire of vile and perverted religion.’

‘For three and a half days, some from every people, tribe, language, and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.’ Revelation 11:9-10

John, in his visions, sees the two witnesses, that is, God’s people, as being dead for three and a half days, [Revelation 11:9](#). The slain Christians did not even get so much as a decent burial.

They were left to serve as public displays for all who would see and know of their fate and why. The Jews believed that the human spirit left the body after three days, [John 11:38-44](#).

People from all over the world will look at their bodies, [Psalm 79:3-4](#), and refuse to bury them, [Revelation 11:9](#). It appears that those who hated the church celebrated the death of the two witnesses, that is, the church, by giving each other a gift, [Revelation 11:10](#). Is this the end of the church? Look what happens next.

‘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, [Matthew 16:18](#). He resurrected them by His breath, [Genesis 2:7](#); they stood on their feet, and we can only imagine what was going through the minds of those who saw they were alive again. On the heels of that message, we find what may well be the most important verse in the Book of Revelation.

‘Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. At that very hour, there was a severe earthquake, and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.’ Revelation 11:12-13

A voice then cries out from heaven and invites them to ‘come up here’, [Revelation 11:12](#). This is the reward of the faithful Christians who die in the persecution. They then went up to heaven as Elijah did, [2 Kings 2:1-18](#), and their enemies stood in amazement just as the apostles did when Jesus ascended into heaven, [Luke 24:50-51](#) / [Acts 1:11](#). Note what happens at this point: there was a severe earthquake, [Revelation 11:13](#). This earthquake, which destroyed part of the city, is a partial judgment. God uses earthquakes to signify His judgment against sin. God used an earthquake to destroy Korah and his followers, who started a rebellion, [Numbers 16:31-33](#).

David often speaks about how earthquakes are a demonstration of God’s anger against His people or a nation, [2 Samuel 22:8](#) / [Psalm 18:6-7](#). Isaiah speaks about how God will punish His people because of their sin using an earthquake, [Isaiah 5:25](#) / [Isaiah 29:6](#).

Jeremiah also speaks about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin using an earthquake, [Jeremiah 10:10](#). Nahum, [Nahum 1:5](#), Habakkuk, [Habakkuk 3:6](#), and Zechariah, [Zechariah 14:5](#), all speak about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin, using an earthquake.

Jesus Himself speaks of an earthquake which would happen when God was going to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, [Matthew 24:7](#). John, in his vision, speaks about how God will bring judgment against Rome and unbelievers, [Revelation 6:12-14](#) / [Revelation 8:5](#) / [Revelation 11:19](#) / [Revelation 11:13](#) / [Revelation 16:18](#). We are told that a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, [Revelation 11:13](#). The seven thousand persons killed would be the total destruction of God’s enemies in the part of the city that fell.

The city is likely more than just the city of Rome, representing the entire Roman Empire ruled from the world-city of Rome. Those who survived just gave glory to God, which doesn’t necessarily mean they became followers of Christ, [Revelation 11:13](#).

Lenski, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This cannot mean that now at last those not slain repented. Repentance without the Word is impossible.’

‘The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.’ Revelation 11:14

The second woe has passed, but the third one is one it’s way. Before the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, we have the pronouncement of three woes upon the inhabitants of the earth, each one associated with the sounding of a trumpet, [Revelation 8:13](#).

The first of the three woes, which was heralded by the fifth trumpet, was the plagues of disease which accompany the kind of decadent lifestyles the Romans were living, which struck them from within the empire, [Revelation 9:1-11](#). Then, following in [Revelation 9:12](#), we read, ‘The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.’ The second woe, which was heralded by the sixth trumpet, was the nations’ enemies of the Roman Empire, which struck them from without, [Revelation 9:13-21](#).

And then from [Revelation 10:1](#), to now is a buildup to what is about to happen, ‘But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets,’ [Revelation 10:7](#).

We see God’s swift retribution during this period, the bittersweet message that John took into his bowels and the instruction that he still had more to prophecy before all the people of the earth.

And then in [Revelation 11](#), we see the power of the saints over their enemies, the death of many of the saints and the appearance of the victory of evil over the Christians for a short period of time in various places.

We need to keep in mind that this is not a linear step-by-step progression, rather it is indicative of what was going on across the entire empire over a period of time.

Then, in the days when the seventh trumpet begins to sound, the mystery of God is now apparent to the saints as given to the prophets. The good tidings are the gospel, the good news, the way of redemption from sin and the ultimate victory of the righteous over the unrighteous.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

‘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

Here we have the seventh of seven angels sounding his trumpet, [Revelation 8:2](#). Don’t you just love these words concerning Christ’s kingdom, His Messiahship and His reign.

We as Christians today are a part of this very kingdom, [Colossians 1:13](#) / [Ephesians 5:5](#) / [Revelation 1:9](#). 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, [Revelation 10:7](#).

‘And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” Revelation 11:16-18

Here we are introduced to the twenty-four elders again, [Revelation 4:4](#) / [Revelation 4:9-10](#), and once again they fell on their faces and praised God and thanked Him, [Revelation 11:16](#) / [Revelation 7:11](#), because God saved the church from the hands of the Roman Empire. So many saints had died in the great persecution, but they were victorious anyway.

He truly is the Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, [Revelation 11:16](#). The words ‘Lord God’ are translated from the words ‘kurios’, which means supreme authority and is used like a title such as ‘Lord’ or ‘Sir’, and ‘theos’, which is the word for God. Jesus is therefore one of the distinct personages of the Godhead, thereby sharing the attributes of God the Father, [Exodus 3:14](#) / [John 1:1](#) / [John 8:58](#) / [Hebrews 1:8](#).

When it says that God has taken His power and begun to reign, [Revelation 11:16](#), we shouldn’t understand this to mean that He was never up until this point; God has always reigned and always will. Jesus is ruling, Jesus is in control. He is the ‘I AM,’ [Exodus 3:14](#). He is and was and is to come, [Revelation 1:4](#). He truly is the Almighty, [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) / [Revelation 19:6](#).

The nations are understandably angry, [Psalm 2:2](#), but the time had come for judging, [Revelation 11:18](#) / [Revelation 20:11-15](#), those who were against the Lord and His people, [Revelation 11:13](#) / [Revelation 8:11](#) / [Revelation 9:13-21](#), and rewarding those who were victorious, [Revelation 11:18](#) / [Daniel 7:25-27](#).

Note that God placed the blame for the destruction of the earth upon the unrighteous, [Revelation 11:18](#). All of the earthquakes, storms, famines, floods, and other plagues which afflicted the Roman Empire were their own fault, and those who brought this destruction upon the earth are going to be destroyed.

‘Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a severe hailstorm.’ Revelation 11:19

God’s temple in heaven is open, [Revelation 21:22](#), and when God’s temple is opened, the ark of ‘his’ covenant was seen, not the ark of the covenant but ‘His’. This symbolises God’s presence and that He never breaks or forgets His

promises. All the lightening, rumblings, thunder, earthquake, and hailstorm all represent God's judgment, Revelation 4:5 / Revelation 11:13.

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.

REVELATION 12

INTRODUCTION

In Revelation 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 the 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 WOMAN

'A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.' Revelation 12:1-2

Notice the description of the woman who appeared in heaven. She is clothed with the sun, the moon is under her feet, and she has twelve stars on her head, [Revelation 12:1](#).

The sun is our primary source of light, and God is our spiritual source of light. The woman illustrates the relationship between God and His faithful children.

The moon is representative of lesser figures of authority, so it's being under the feet of the woman places the leaders of the world in subjection to the faithful Israelites.

The twelve stars represent total victory; it's the victor's crown. The number twelve represents God's people; there were twelve tribes, and there were twelve apostles.

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.

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. Although she wears the victor's crown, she is clearly in pain as she is about to give birth, [Revelation 12:2](#) / [Genesis 3:16](#) / [John 16:21](#).

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'She must have this baby. Her whole destiny depends on it. The history of God's people is marked by periods of struggle, of one kind or another.'

THE DRAGON

'Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.' Revelation 12:3-4

Remember, this is not literal; John is having a vision. 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. It is enormous, signifying its power; it is red, signifying its bloodthirstiness, [Revelation 12:3](#).

Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

'The colour red is so prominent in the description of the dragon, it was to identify Satan with the beast ridden by the great scarlet whore of [Revelation 17:3](#).'

It has seven heads and ten horns, [Revelation 13:1](#) / [Revelation 17:7](#). Notice also that it has seven crowns on its head. His is not the same as the crowns worn by the righteous, which is the 'stephanos' crown of the victor, [Revelation 2:10](#) / [Revelation 3:11](#) / [Revelation 6:2](#).

Satan never wins any permanent victories, and he is going to be utterly defeated in the end, so he only wears a diadem and is never pictured wearing the victory crown.

Who is this dragon? 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.

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

Notice the power the devil has; his tail is powerful enough to tear down a third of the stars out of the sky and throw them to the earth, Revelation 12:4. The dragon’s tail, drawing a third part of the stars of heaven, points to Satan’s rebellion against God when he led many angels with him and they were cast down and bound in chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, 2 Peter 2:4 / Jude 6. He is standing before the woman because he wants to kill her, Revelation 12:4 / Exodus 1:15-19 / Matthew 2:13.

Plumber, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Having failed to destroy the mother (Israel), Satan was alert to destroy her child (the Christ); and failing also in that, his continuing hatred is vented against Christ’s servants throughout the ages. ‘This is another example of the personal history of Christ being repeated in the history of the church.’

‘She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.’ Revelation 12:5

Notice she gave birth to a son, one who will rule all nations with a rod of iron, Revelation 19:15. This harks back to Psalms 2, where we find a prophecy about Jesus reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords, Psalms 2:1-9 / Revelation 2:26-28 / Revelation 19:15.

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 that this was Jesus, 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.

Her child was snatched up to God and his throne. Jesus has ascended to the Father and is ruling all the nations of the earth from His throne in Heaven, Acts 2:33-35 / Hebrews 10:12-13.

Roberts, in his commentary, says the following.

‘John does not mean precisely the birth of Jesus (passing over the earthly life of Jesus and going directly to his ascension), but rather his death, resurrection and ascension.’

‘The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.’ Revelation 12:6

The woman flees to the wilderness and notice to a place prepared for her by God. God’s people were displaced from their homes and driven out into the unknown to seek new places to live. The places they found were actually prepared by God. It was in those places that God provided for them that God would also take care of them.

This is God, His Spirit and Jesus providing the nourishment from heaven, and the food in view here is in the form of both spiritual and providential. And under the care of the Godhood, the church prospered and grew. The 1,260 days or 42 months represent a period of time for persecution but God’s care, Revelation 11:1-3.

‘Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—

that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.’ Revelation 12:7-9

We must remember this isn’t a literal war happening here.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following concerning this war.

‘Where would we place this war chronologically? Would it be prior to the cross and resurrection? If so, the devil was whipped prior to the work of Jesus. After the accession? If so, the devil wasn’t defeated by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Does the battle take place between Michael and Satan? If so, it wasn’t the work of Jesus which destroyed the devil’s power, but the might of Michael, after Jesus had done all he could do.’

A battle is described occurring in heaven. Michael and his angels are fighting the dragon and his angels. Michael is not Jesus, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses would have us believe, but he is Jesus’ representative, Daniel 12:1 / Jude 1:9. The dragon and his angels are defeated and thrown down to the earth, Revelation 12:8-9.

Earle, in his commentary, says the following concerning the old serpent, Revelation 12:9.

‘This word carries us back to the garden of Eden, where Satan, under the guise of a serpent, successfully tempted Eve to disobey God’s command.’

Satan and a large host of angels couldn’t overcome God’s throne; the Roman Empire didn’t stand a chance. The work of Christ was completed, John 12:27-33. Jesus has destroyed the power behind the Roman Empire, that is, the devil.

‘Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 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. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”’ Revelation 12:10-12

John hears a loud voice in heaven declaring, ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,’ Revelation 12:10 / Matthew 6:10 / Luke 21:31 / Acts 2 / Revelation 11:15.

The loud voice also declares that the authority of the Messiah has also now come, Revelation 12:10 / Acts 2:36 / Revelation 3:7. The kingdom has come. The authority of Christ has come. The accuser has been thrown down. Christ has shown his power. Christ has exercised his authority in his victory on the cross.

Beasley-Murray, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 12:11.

‘This verse proves that the overthrow of Satan, as it regards human salvation, has actually taken place, not through Michael, but through the power of the sacrifice of Christ.’

The great accuser of God’s people has been defeated. He can accuse all he wants, but the Christians must listen to Jesus because there is no condemnation for those in Him, John 8:2-11 / Romans 8:1 / Romans 8:34.

If you’re standing in Jesus Christ and your sins have been forgiven, Satan can accuse all he wants, but your relationship to God hasn’t changed. But we understand something about Satan, he accuses not because he believes he can steal your salvation.

He accuses and condemns because he knows he can steal your joy and your effectiveness as a witness. Satan does have conclusive evidence that we have violated God’s law.

When he accuses us of sin, he is not lying. He’s the father of lies, and he’s good at it, but when it comes to making a case against me as a sinner, he doesn’t need to lie. He’s got evidence, all that he can use. My defence lawyer, the Lord Jesus Christ, does not plead extenuating circumstances; he doesn’t argue for my innocence.

The good news is that Jesus substituted his own sinless life for mine and took upon himself everything my sins deserve, [Romans 3:23-25](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#). And one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, when the accusations and condemnations start to come down, is to remind us of what Christ has done and even to speak to our hearts the kinds of words that the Son speaks to the Father, [Psalm 103:12](#) / [Hebrews 10:17](#).

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 12:11](#). 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](#). We overcome the devil through the sacrifice of Jesus, by obedience to the Scriptures, and by living a life of self-sacrifice.

It's no wonder heaven and everyone there is told to rejoice, [Revelation 12:12](#) / [Philippians 3:20](#) / [Revelation 13:6](#). While heaven and everyone in it rejoice, those who are on earth need to be aware that the devil is now on the earth. Satan doesn't have the power he enjoyed when Jesus lived on earth. Note the following passages which speak about how he operates today: [John 8:44](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:3](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#) / [Ephesians 6:11](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#) / [Revelation 12:9](#) / [Revelation 13:12-14](#) / [Revelation 19:20](#).

The devil knows the only way he can hurt God now is to hurt those he loved so much, and he can do this by deceiving them and leading them astray away from the shelter of His church.

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 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](#). Notice the devil is fuming because he knows his time is short, [Revelation 12:12](#).

McGuigan in his commentary, says the following.

'This 'short time' stands for the (controlled) opportunity of Satan to assault his enemies.'

'When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the

wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.'

Revelation 12:13-15

In his rage, after realising he has been hurled down to earth, the devil sets his eyes on the woman who gave birth to a male child, Revelation 12:13 / Revelation 12:5.

Remember, the woman represents God's people. In other words, when Satan realised he could no longer accuse the righteous, he set out to try and destroy the faithful children of God.

Notice that she is given the wings of a great eagle. Why? So that she might escape to a place in the wilderness prepared for her by God, Revelation 12:14 / Revelation 12:6. Eagles' wings speak of God's protection, Exodus 19:4 / Deuteronomy 32:11 / Psalms 36:7 / Isaiah 40:31.

Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

'There is a plain indication in this passage that the experiences of the church are the antitype of the escape of Israel from Pharaoh, "and her preservation in the wilderness.'

She is protected from the devil and taken care of for a time, times and half a time, representing an indefinite period of time, Revelation 12:14. Notice what the devil did, from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent, Revelation 12:15.

Water as a river is a familiar Old Testament picture of a flood of oppression against God's people, Isaiah 8:5-8 / Isaiah 43:2 / Psalms 32:6 / Psalms 144:7. The serpent sending a flood from his mouth is a figure for the amount of oppression he will send forth upon the children of God.

'But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.' Revelation 12:16-17

While the devil tried to oppress God's people with a flood, Revelation 12:15, here we are told that God made the earth to help the woman from the oppression and attack on the devil, Revelation 12:16. This is a picture of God removing the flood waters, that is, the oppression, in order to dry the land, Exodus 14:21-31 / Psalms 106:9.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'Nature itself is on the side of the man who is faithful to Jesus Christ.'

The devil is once again enraged and sets out to wage war against the rest of God's people, Revelation 12:17 / Matthew 16:18 / Galatians 3:16 / Galatians 3:29. This part of the vision is prophetic past the final destruction of the Roman Empire.

Satan is still at war with Christians, and those who 'keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus' are still fighting the battle between good and evil. It is a worldwide battle, and the stakes are the souls of mankind, both saved and unsaved.

REVELATION 13

INTRODUCTION

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.

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.

In this chapter, 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

'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. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" Revelation 13:1-4

In Revelation 13:1-10, we see some of the characteristics of the sea beast. John sees the dragon standing on the shore of the sea, and coming out of the sea, he sees a beast, Revelation 13:1. Who is this beast? It is none other than Rome; it's a representation of Rome.

The language and symbolism used for 'beast' were used by Daniel to represent a ruler or his government, Daniel 7:2-8. Daniel used the same animal imagery to represent the four world empires, which were Babylon, Medo-Persian, Grecian and then the Roman Empire. The fact that the leopard, bear, and lion are used here probably demonstrates that the Roman empire was a composite of the other three, Revelation 13:1-2.

Many Jewish Christians, who knew their Old Testament well enough, would instantly see a parallel and draw the conclusion that the beast of Revelation 13 and the beast of Daniel 7:23 were one and the same.

Notice the beast has ten horns, Revelation 13:1 / Daniel 7:7. This is the way the dragon was described back in Revelation 12:3. The number ten carries with it the meaning of completeness.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'The ten horns are the client kings of Rome. They are the kings who have submitted themselves to Rome and therefore have Rome's approval to rule, Revelation 17:12-13.'

The beast has seven heads, Revelation 13:1. The seven heads stand for seven hills, which represent seven kings, Revelation 17:10 / Daniel 7:24. The seven hills are the seven hills on which Rome sits. Every October, there was a commemoration of the fact that Rome was founded on seven hills.

The seven hills of Rome, Cermalus, Cispius, Fagutal, Oppius, Palatium, Sucusa and Velia, figured prominently in Roman mythology, religion, and politics. The seven heads could also have represented the seven Roman emperors from Augustus Caesar to Flavius Domitianus, better known as Domitian.

The beast has ten crowns, Revelation 13:1. The number ten carries with it the meaning of completeness. As a rule, set by Augustus, there were always ten senatorial provinces in the Imperial government system.

These crowns are not the same as the crowns worn by the righteous, which is the ‘stephanos’ crown of the victor, [Revelation 2:10](#) / [Revelation 3:11](#) / [Revelation 6:2](#). Satan or the beast never wins any permanent victories; they only wear diadems, but they are never pictured wearing the victory crown.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This beast has seven heads and ten horns. These stand for the rulers and the emperors of Rome. Since Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, there had been seven emperors: Tiberius, A.D. 14-37; Caligula, A.D. 37-41; Claudius, A.D. 41-54; Nero, A.D. 55-68; Vespasian, A.D. 69-79; Titus, A.D. 79-81; Domitian, A.D. 81-96. These seven emperors are the seven heads of the beast. But in addition, it is said that the beast had ten horns. The explanation of this second figure lies in this. After the death of Nero, there was a short period of almost complete chaos. In eighteen months, three different men briefly occupied the imperial power: Galba, Otho and Vitellius. They are not included in John’s list of the seven heads but are included in the list of the ten horns.’

Notice on each head there is a blasphemous name, [Revelation 13:1](#) / [Daniel 7:8](#) / [Daniel 7:25](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘These are the titles which the emperors took to themselves. Every emperor was called divus or sebastos, which means divine.’

These emperors reigned with such power and distinction that Roman temples were erected to each one of them. These emperors were worshipped in these temples as Gods and Lords. Under Domitian, those who refused to worship him as a God were subjected to various punishments from exile to death, [Revelation 17:3](#) / [Revelation 17:10](#).

The texts tell us that the sea beast has been given its power by the dragon, [Revelation 13:2](#), who we now know is the devil, [Revelation 12:9](#). 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.

John mentions that one of the beast’s heads had a fatal blow to it, but healed, [Revelation 13:3](#). This is speaking about the death and resurrection of Rome. The Roman Empire was destroyed and resurrected again. This event happened during the reign of Nero and would be something that definitely would be on the minds of the people of that day. The association in their minds between the burning of Rome and the wounded head of the Roman Empire would be easily recognised. There was plenty of time for this death blow to one of the heads to be healed. History tells us that Rome was built back bigger and better than ever.

Notice that people worship the beast, [Revelation 13:4](#). 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 13:5](#).

The people perceive the Roman Empire as invincible and unable to collapse. Because the beast was so powerful, because the beast had risen again from the dead, it’s not surprising the people thought that the beast was God and shouted, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?’ [Revelation 13:5](#).

Swete, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The beast’s claim to pre-eminence lies not in any moral greatness but in sheer brute force. Any empire founded on brute force and not on moral greatness is anti-God. The description of the beast as speaking haughty things, [Revelation 13:5](#), comes from the description in Daniel of the little horn, [Daniel 7:8](#) / [Daniel 7:20](#).’

‘The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.’ Revelation 13:5-8

The beast was now given a mouth which is full of pride and ignorance; it is also a mouth which is full of blasphemy, [Revelation 13:5](#). History tells us that Domitian was full of himself and claimed to be a deity, [Daniel 11:36–37](#). He was given authority to exercise his authority for forty-two months, [Revelation 13:5](#). The 42 months represent a period of time for persecution, [Daniel 7:25](#) / [Revelation 11:1-3](#).

When the beast opened its mouth, the first thing it did was blaspheme the Name of God, slander His Name, His dwelling place and those who live in heaven, [Revelation 13:6](#).

Beale, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Blaspheming implies speaking out against God through self-deification.’

This is all-out disrespect for God and His people. Remember God’s dwelling place is within His people, [Revelation 1:2-3](#) / [Revelation 2:24](#) / [Revelation 2:27](#) / [Revelation 3:6](#) / [Revelation 3:24](#) / [Ephesians 2:20](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:19](#).

All this power and authority may well have come from the dragon or from God, but God is the One who ultimately gives the authority. The sea beast is identified as a persecutor of the saints and as a dominant world power, [Revelation 13:7](#) / [Daniel 7:21-22](#). Who persecuted Christians? Rome did. Who was the dominant world power during the first century? Rome and her rulers, the Caesars.

[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, [Revelation 3:5](#) / [Revelation 20:15](#). It was the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the ancient world, rulers kept registers of those who were citizens of their realms; only when a man died or lost his rights as a citizen was his name removed. The Book of Life is the register of those who belong to God.’

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. 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 two thousand 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.

These verses give 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.

‘Whoever has ears, let them hear. “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.’ Revelation 13:9-10

The words, ‘Whoever has ears, let them hear’ were one of Jesus’ favourite phrases, [Matthew 13:43](#) / [Mark 4:9](#) / [Revelation 2:7](#) / [Revelation 2:11](#), and it means we must not listen but pay close attention to what is being said.

This war that the beast will make against God's people is going to be bad; some Christians will be taken captive while others will be killed, Jeremiah 15:2. Because of this, the Christians need to be patient, Matthew 26:52.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Brace yourselves for the impact of the persecution and suffering that will come from the Roman Empire. The world is standing for the beast, worshipping the beast, and honouring the beast. The Christians will not do this, and suffering will come from this.’

THE LAND BEAST

‘Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.’ Revelation 13:11-12

Who is the land beast? The land beast represents the people under the power of the Roman government. The earth beast has two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon, Revelation 13:11.

The horns are symbolic of power and authority; it only has two horns, which implies it's inferior to the sea beast, which has ten horns befitting the awesome power of a dragon, Revelation 13:1. The horns of the sea beast represent the emperors of Rome. Note that the land beast is like a lamb, but it is not the Lamb of God.

The land beast exercises the authority of the first beast, Revelation 13:12. 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, who, if you remember, was fatally wounded but healed, Revelation 13:3.

‘And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.’
Revelation 13:13-14

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The land beast is a religious-slanted beast both by its work and its name. It is twice called the ‘False Prophet’, Revelation 16:13 / Revelation 19:20.’

Notice the false miracle it does, it causes fire to come down from heaven as Elijah did, 2 Kings 1:12. I say they are false miracles because we see that the land beast, through trickery and other things that were not real, Exodus 7:10-12. The signs were counterfeit, these wonders were lies, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 / 2 Timothy 3:13.

The signs and wonders were designed to make people think that the sea beast is a god. Remember that people viewed Roman emperors as gods, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

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 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.

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 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.

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

‘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

Here we read the second beast, the land beast, was given power to even put people to death if they did not worship the sea beast, [Revelation 13:15](#). The land beast could give breath to the idols of Domitian and cause them to speak, [Revelation 13:15](#).

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, either worship Domitian and live, or refuse and die.

Osborne, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Emperor Domitian especially encouraged this, calling himself, ‘our Lord and God.’

Some people who worshipped the sea beast, and who were known by marks on their hands and foreheads, [Revelation 13:16](#). 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, [Revelation 11:17](#). Remember, the land beast is identified as a false prophet, [Revelation 13:13](#) / [Revelation 19:20](#).

We now come to a number that has become so popular in our day and age that it deserves to be discussed here: 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 the 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.

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 is, what the mark is on their ‘foreheads’ refers to, and the mark was also physical, that is, 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 loyal 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, [Revelation 13:17](#). 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, and 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 they were 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, symbolising 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

INTRODUCTION

In [Revelation 14](#), we find the number 144,000. While the number 666 is probably the most-popular number today in the Book of Revelation, the number 144,000 is probably the second most popular number.

THE LAMB AND THE 144,000

‘Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. Revelation 14:1-5

In the previous chapter, John saw a beast that looked like a lamb, [Revelation 13:11](#), but here he sees the real Lamb, which is Jesus, [John 1:29](#) / [Revelation 5:6](#), standing on Mount Zion, [Revelation 14:1](#) / [2 Samuel 5:6-7](#). Notice, He is standing, [Acts 7:56](#). He is standing in the place of salvation, [Psalm 14:7](#) / [Isaiah 59:20](#) / [Romans 11:26](#) / [Hebrews 12:22-23](#).

Notice that with Jesus are the 144,000, [Revelation 14:1](#). 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. The number 144,000 is the redeemed of all the ages who have obeyed God and who are living faithfully to Him.

Rather than having the name of the beast or the number of his name on their foreheads or hands, [Revelation 13:16-17](#), the 144,000 had the Name of Father and Jesus written on their foreheads, [Revelation 14:1](#) / [Revelation 3:12](#).

Remember this isn’t literal.

John now hears the sound from heaven, which sounds like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. He says it sounded like the noise of a harpist playing their harp, [Revelation 14:2](#).

John didn’t literally hear water, thunder and harpers with harps. The water probably represented soothing peace and tranquillity, the thunder described volume, and the harpers with harps, beauty, and harmony.

Now the 144,000 sing a new song, [Revelation 5:9](#), before the throne and before the four living creatures, [Revelation 4:6-11](#) and the elders, who represent the church, [Revelation 3:3](#).

Apparently, now one could sing with song except for the 144,000, those who had been redeemed from the earth, [Revelation 3:3](#). This implies that only those who had experienced salvation could really sing the new song. This is a song praising God for his victory over the enemy and thanksgiving for God’s work. The 144,000 are victorious, and they are singing a song of victory.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning the new song, [Revelation 3:3](#).

‘Here, there is a truth which runs through all life. To learn certain things, a man must be a certain kind of person. The Lamb’s company were able to learn the new song because they had passed through certain experiences.’

The 144,00 didn’t defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins, 2 Corinthians 11:2 / Ephesians 5:27 / Romans 7:4 / Revelation 19:7-8.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Jesus glorified marriage, saying that for this cause a man left his own family and was so closely united to his wife that they were one flesh, and warning that what God has joined no man may put asunder, Matthew 19:4-6. In his highest teaching, Paul glorified marriage, likening the relationship of Christ to his Church to the relationship between man and wife, Ephesians 5:22-33. The writer to the Hebrews lays it down: ‘Let marriage be held in honour among all’, Hebrews 13:4.’

Refusing to worship Domitian was a priority to those who would stand with the lamb on Mount Zion, but it was by no means the only requirement. In addition to refusing to bow down to Domitian, the redeemed had to be faithful to Jesus and keep His commandments, whatever they may be or wherever they may lead, Matthew 16:24-26 / John 14:15.

They were also purchased, purchased by the Lamb, Acts 20:28. They offered firstfruits to God and the Lamb. The use of the word ‘firstfruits’ leaves no doubt that there will be more redeemed than those pictured in this imagery, Revelation 14:4, and they told no lies, Psalms 32:2 / Isaiah 53:9, and as we know, there will be no liars in heaven, Revelation 21:7-8 / Revelation 22:15.

They were also blameless, they were blameless because they had been washed in the blood of the Lamb, Ephesians 1:4 / Colossians 1:22 / Revelation 14:5 / Revelation 1:5.

THE THREE ANGELS

‘Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”
Revelation 14:6-7

John now sees yet another angel, this one flying in midair, Revelation 14:6 / Revelation 8:13. And what is this angel doing? He’s proclaiming the eternal Gospel, that is, the Gospel message which was always in the mind of God before the world was created, Romans 16:25.

This is the Good News which was to go out to everyone on earth, Revelation 14:6. The angel mentioned here is representative of God’s saints preaching the gospel to the whole world, Matthew 24:14 / Colossians 1:23.

His message is clear: fear God, because God is ready to judge. Give Him glory, worship Him, not Domitian. God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water, not Domitian, Revelation 14:7. God is about to bring judgment upon Domitian.

‘A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,” which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” Revelation 14:8

John now sees yet another angel, who speaks of the fallen Babylon, which is a reference to Rome. Note the text says, ‘fallen’, not will fall.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This proclamation, and when the book of Revelation was written, the Roman Empire had not yet fallen. So, what is happening in this proclamation? This is something that is called “prophetic certainty.” An event is prophesied as having already occurred, not because it had happened yet, but because God had decreed it. Therefore, the event must happen. Isaiah did the same things in his prophecy, Isaiah 21:9. The fall of the Roman Empire is pictured as a certainty even though it had not occurred yet.’

Rome is described as adulterous because of the many associations it had with other nations. In other words, Rome seduced other nations into a relationship with it.

‘A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.” This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.’ Revelation 14:9-12

Another angel followed them who basically said, don’t worship the beast or the idols of the beast and do not receive the stamp of the emperor Domitian, Revelation 14:9.

Anyone who worships the beast will drink the wine of God’s wrath, Revelation 14:10. John says it is full-strength wine; they will drink of God’s wrath undiluted, Jeremiah 51:7. God’s judgment is not going to be watered down. They will receive the full brunt of God’s anger for their sins.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 14:10-11.

‘The doom of the apostate is thought of in pictures of the most terrible judgment that ever fell on this earth—that of Sodom and Gomorrah. ‘Lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace’, Genesis 19:28. John echoes the words of Isaiah describing the day of the Lord’s vengeance, Isaiah 34:8-10.’

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The everlasting punishment of the unforgiven does not take place in heaven. It does not take place in the presence of the holy angels of the Lamb, 2 Thessalonians 1:9.’

The angel declares that those who keep the faith, those who endure and die in the Lord, will be the ones numbered at the side of the Lamb, Revelation 14:12.

‘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

To Christians who were suffering, and to those who had seen family members die for the cause of Christ. 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, Psalms 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.

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 walks 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](#). This verse is practical for us today, too, but we must be faithful unto death, and then God will give us the crown of life, [Revelation 3:5](#).

HARVESTING THE EARTH AND TRAMPLING THE WINEPRESS

‘I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.’

Revelation 14:14-16

John now sees a white cloud with someone seated on it, [Revelation 14:14](#). They are white, which signifies purity. He sees someone like a son of man, which is a clear reference to Jesus, [Revelation 1:7](#) / [Revelation 1:13](#) / [Daniel 7:13-14](#) / [Matthew 24:30](#).

Jesus is wearing a crown of gold, symbolising the highest of authority, and He has a sharp sickle in his hand, which was a sharp-edged tool used to harvest grain. An angel calls out to Jesus and tells Him now is the time for reaping and harvesting, [Revelation 14:15-16](#) / [Joel 3:13](#) / [Matthew 13:24-43](#).

‘Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.’ Revelation 14:17-20

Here again, we find another angel coming out of the temples with yet another sharp sickle, [Revelation 14:17](#). And another angel who had charge of the fire came from the altar, [Revelation 14:18](#).

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The second angel is associated with the altar of burnt offering (brazen altar) at which all the sacrifices are burned. God is about to sacrifice something or someone.’

This angel tells him to take the sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe, [Revelation 14:18](#). Those who were cut and gathered were cast into a press and trodden out with an enormous river of blood issuing forth, [Revelation 14:19-20](#) / [Lamentations 1:15](#) / [Isaiah 63:1-3](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We may regard the one like the son of man, the risen and victorious Lord, reaping the harvest of his own people, while the angel with the sharp sickle reaps the harvest of those destined for judgment.’

The devastation of this onslaught is in the distance of 1,600 stadia, [Revelation 14:20](#).

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The wicked are put into the winepress of God’s wrath, and the blood flowed as high as a horse’s bridle for 1600 stadia. The distance is approximately 184 miles, and a horse’s bridle is a few feet high.’

REVELATION 15

INTRODUCTION

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 are singing the song of the Lamb. These songs contain thanks, victory, and praise.

THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB

‘I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire, and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and 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 15:1-4

John now sees another great and marvellous sign; he sees seven angels with the seven last plagues, Revelation 15:1. As we have already mentioned, the number seven represents completeness to the people of the time. God’s anger is complete, Revelation 14:10-11, and will be poured out on the Roman Empire until His purpose is fully executed. God’s wrath being completed, Revelation 15:1, signifies that the Roman Empire is going to eventually fall as a result of their persecution.

Notice John says that he saw what looked like a sea glass glowing with fire, Revelation 15:2. The glass was earlier mentioned in conjunction with the eyes of the living creatures, Revelation 4:6, and probably illustrates the transparency of everything to God, who knows all things, 1 John 3:20.

In Revelation 21, the sea, which stands between God and His children on earth, is gone. Standing beside the sea of glass mixed with fire are those who had been victorious, those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, Revelation 15:2. They had been given harps by God, Revelation 15:2. These harps are not to be taken literally.

Pieters, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Literalism is here hopeless. How could one put the wrath of God in a bowl and pour it on the sun?’

Ladd, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The harps are a symbol of their victory, of praise and worship to God.’

They are rejoicing, Revelation 15:3. The song of Moses brings to our minds, Exodus 15. The people had escaped from Egyptian bondage, and 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 15:1-19.

Notice the people aren't merely singing the song of Moses, instead, they are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, [Revelation 15:3](#). 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, [Revelation 14:3](#).

The song of the lamb is a figurative expression for the deliverance from the bondage of sin. 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.

God is just and true in His ways, and He is the King of the nations, [Revelation 15:3](#) / [Psalms 145:17](#). The question is asked, who will not fear the Lord and bring glory to His Name? [Revelation 15:4](#) / [Isaiah 45:23](#).

Only God is holy, [Revelation 15:4](#) / [1 Samuel 2:2](#), and the nations will certainly know about the Lord, [Psalms 86:9](#), but they will not accept Him as Lord, [Revelation 15:4](#) / [Psalms 86:9](#). However, they will, like all people will bow down to Him, [Philippians 2:9-11](#).

According to my footnote, it says the following, concerning [Revelation 15:4](#).

'Phrases in this song are drawn from [Psalm 111:2-3](#) / [Deuteronomy 32:4](#) / [Jeremiah 10:7](#) / [Psalms 86:9](#) / [Psalm 98:2](#).' McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

'The saints are to know the battle is not just between them and Rome, but between God and the Dragon, between God and Satan, between holiness and unholiness!'

'After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.' [Revelation 15:5-8](#)

John now sees the temple in heaven, that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law, [Revelation 15:5](#). The word 'temple' here is rendered from the Greek word 'naos' and it alludes directly to the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle, known as the Holy of Holies. Within this chamber of the tabernacle was kept the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tables of the law, called 'the testimony'.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The tent of witness, or the tent of testimony, is a common title in the Old Testament for the tabernacle in the wilderness, [Numbers 9:15](#) / [Numbers 17:7](#) / [Numbers 18:2](#). It is, therefore, clear that John is seeing this picture, not in terms of the Jerusalem temple, but in terms of the ancient tabernacle.'

Notice that it was opened, [Revelation 15:5](#). This tells us that heaven itself was opened up and God Himself is about to come forward and send the seven angels with the seven plagues, [Revelation 15:6](#). As noted before, the number seven is representative of that which is complete.

The seven seals in [Revelation 5](#) and [Revelation 6](#) reveal the wrath of God, the seven trumpets announce and warn of the coming wrath of God, [Revelation 8](#), and the seven bowls execute the wrath of God. The doom of the Roman Empire is sealed.

Notice they are clean, they have shining linen and wear golden sashes around their chests, [Revelation 15:6](#). They are dressed as High Priests., [Revelation 1:3](#) / [Leviticus 16:2-23](#) / [Ezekiel 28:13](#) / [Isaiah 61:10](#). The adjectives 'clean' and 'shining' are representative of the purity and holiness of the judgments of wrath to come.

Once again, we're introduced to the four living creatures, [Revelation 15:7](#) / [Revelation 4:6](#) / [Revelation 5:6-8](#) / [Revelation 5:14](#) / [Revelation 6:1-6](#) / [Revelation 7:11](#) / [Revelation 14:3](#) / [Revelation 19:4](#).

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The living creatures are the cherubim. They are the chariot of God, 1 Chronicles 28:18 / Psalms 104:3.’

The wrath of God’s judgment is now given over to the angels for implementation, Revelation 15:7. The fact of their being ‘golden’ speaks of the extreme value in God’s purpose of judgment. The plan is complete, God’s will on the matter is settled. The sanctuary is filled with smoke, Revelation 15:8, because God is about to act, Exodus 40:34-35 / Numbers 16:31-50 / 2 Chronicles 5:13.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The idea of the glory of God being symbolised as smoke is common in the Old Testament. In the vision of Isaiah, the whole house was filled with smoke, Isaiah 6:4. Further, the idea that no one could approach while the smoke was there is also common in the Old Testament. This was true both of the tabernacle, Exodus 40:34-35, and of the temple, 1 Kings 8:10-11.’

REVELATION 16

INTRODUCTION

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 SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD’S 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 worshipped its image.’ Revelation 16:1-2

THE FIRST BOWL OF WRATH

John now hears a voice from the temple, which is God’s voice, Revelation 15:8, giving a command to the seven angels, and as we see throughout this chapter, the angels obey. The number seven represents completeness.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Greek indicates that these come one after the other in rapid succession. Just like that! When the judgment (or hardening) finally comes, it comes in a hurry.’

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, [Exodus 9:8-12](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning the ‘sores’.

‘The word is the same as is used to describe the boils and the sores in the plague in Egypt, [Exodus 9:8-11](#); the pains which will follow disobedience to God, [Deuteronomy 28:35](#); the sores of the tortured Job, [Job 2:7](#).’

Note that the angel knew who would receive this plague because they had the mark of the beast and worshipped its image, [Revelation 13:16-17](#).

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 angel poured out the second bowl of wrath upon the sea. The imagery paralleled the plague of Egypt, where the Nile was turned to blood, [Exodus 7:20-21](#). This isn’t to be taken literally, as God promised to protect the Christians who made their livelihood from 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 angel now poured out the third bowl of wrath 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, [Galatians 6:7-8](#). God’s final words of judgment to Edom speak similarly of them suffering equally for what they had inflicted, [Obadiah 15-16](#).

Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The pouring out of the bowls is not a series of arbitrary actions, but a solemn judgment.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The only way in which such wicked men can be contained and corrected by God is in removing the restraints, giving them up, [Romans 1:24](#) / [Romans 1:26](#) / [Romans 1:28](#), and throwing the derail switch at the head of the canyon.’

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 angel poured out the fourth bowl of wrath, and it 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 whom this was written were told that God is in charge of what’s going on. Of significance 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 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.

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; it hardened them.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In Revelation 16:9 / Revelation 16:11, and Revelation 16:21, we have a kind of refrain which runs through this chapter. The men on whom these terrors fell cursed God, but they did not repent, impervious alike to the goodness and to the severity of God, Romans 11:22. It is the picture of men who had no doubt of the existence of God and even saw his hand in events—and who still went their own way.’

The fourth bowl completes the first section of plagues involving the 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

The fifth angel now pours out the fifth bowl of wrath, being poured out on the throne of the beast, Domitian, and his entire kingdom is darkened. This imagery brings to mind the plague of darkness which God struck Egypt with, Exodus 10:21-23 and 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, Matthew 6:23. 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. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

“Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed. Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.’

Revelation 16:12-16

The sixth angel now pours out the sixth bowl of wrath, which was said to be poured out directly on the Euphrates River, causing it to dry up, Exodus 14:21-22 / Joshua 3:15-17 / Isaiah 11:15 / Isaiah 44:27-28 / Isaiah 50:2 / Isaiah 51:10.

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.

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Their evil influence is shown under the figure of frogs, because it was by producing frogs that the magicians deceived Pharaoh, Exodus 8:7.’

Notice the dragon, which is the devil, Revelation 12:9, the beast, which is Rome, Revelation 11:7, and the false prophet, which is Rome and her rulers, Revelation 19:20, will do anything they can to survive, Revelation 16:13-14.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 16:13-14.

‘In the Greek, there is a kind of play on words. The unclean spirits came out of the mouths of the evil forces. The mouth is the organ of speech, and speech is one of the most influential forces in the world. Now the word for spirit is pneuma, which is also the word for breath. To say, therefore, that an evil spirit came out of a man’s mouth is the same as to say that an evil breath came out of his mouth.’

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The unclean spirits remind us of the deceptive nature of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The unclean spirits also remind us of their immorality through their paganism, idol worship, and Caesar worship. These three are full of uncleanness. The imagery of demons (unclean spirits) is used in the New Testament to speak of idolatrous worship, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21.’

Notice it is Jesus who declares, He comes like a thief, Revelation 1:7, that is, unexpected, and He declares a blessing on those who stay awake, remain clothed, Revelation 16:15 / Romans 8:31.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 16:15.

‘According to the Mishna, the captains of the temple in Jerusalem went their rounds of the precincts at night, and if a member of the temple police was caught asleep at his post, his clothes were taken off and burned, and he was sent away naked in disgrace.’

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. History tells us that the external invasion did indeed occur, after which, the mighty Roman Empire was reduced to a declining world power.

ARMAGEDDON

Here we read of 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](#) / [Revelation 22:6](#). These were things that were ‘near’, [Revelation 1:3](#) / [Revelation 22:10](#).

Whatever battle is going to occur will take place during the time period of the people who were reading the Book of Revelation. 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 [Revelation 16](#), 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?

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 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. Please look closely at the actual word. ‘Ar’, or ‘Har’ Mageddon?

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 sixty miles north of Jerusalem, there is a valley about ten 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.

We must note the significance 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.

Let’s look at the events described in Judges 4. Jabin, king of the Canaanites, had oppressed Israel for twenty years, and the reason for his apparent superiority and invincibility was the fact that his army commander, Sisera, had at his disposal nine hundred 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 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? 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.

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.

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 Revelation 16, 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. 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.

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 angel now pours out the seventh bowl upon the air, symbolising 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.

The flashes of lightning, rumblings, thunder and the earthquake, [Revelation 16:18](#), all speak of God’s judgment, [Revelation 4:5](#) / [Revelation 8:5](#) / [Revelation 11:19](#).

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-Mageddon 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, shake the earth, all of which are manifestations of divine retribution.

The city of Rome is divided into three parts, [Revelation 16:19](#). 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.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The great Babylon, that is Rome, is split into three. Rome had thought that she could do as she liked with impunity—but now her sin was remembered, and her fate was on the way. The mills of God may grind slowly, but in the end, there is no escape for sin.’

It did no good for Rome to rally help from other nations, for God would destroy Rome regardless of any help Satan may recruit, [Revelation 16:19](#). There were no islands left and no mountains, [Revelation 16:20](#), simply because God shook them out of existence, [Psalm 18:7-15](#) / [Psalm 97:4-5](#) / [Micah 1:2-4](#) / [Nahum 1:5](#).

Notice the size of the hailstones that fell on the people, ‘a hundred pounds’, [Revelation 16:21](#). They had no chance of surviving this; no wonder they cursed God. This again reminds us of what happened in Egypt, [Exodus 9:22-26](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘How strange is the thought that hardened sinners will not stop their blasphemy even in the judgment. How could it be supposed that the Father will accommodate to that type of persistent wickedness in any other manner than that of the final and complete destruction of it?’

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. The vision of the bowls of wrath was designed to set forth the assurance of the 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.

REVELATION 17

INTRODUCTION

‘One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. With her, the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” Revelation 17:1-2

BABYLON, THE PROSTITUTE ON THE BEAST

In this chapter, we’re introduced to a woman described as a great prostitute. In the vision, the angel removes John from where he was and takes him into a wilderness where he sees ‘a woman.’

This great harlot in [Revelation 17:1](#) is described as ‘sitting on many waters’ [Revelation 17:1](#), and [Revelation 17:15](#) tells us exactly to whom this is referred. The great harlot is the city that is ruling over the peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages of the earth.

Notice again, we have a description of people getting drunk with wine with her adulteries, [Revelation 17:2](#) / [Ezekiel 6:9](#) / [Ezekiel 16:15-17](#) / [Jeremiah 2:1](#) / [Hosea 4:11-12](#) / [Hosea 1:1](#) / [Revelation 2:14](#) / [Revelation 2:20](#) / [Revelation 14:8](#).

The question immediately arises: Is this the same woman previously mentioned? A closer examination of her characteristics reveals that she is adorned with those items signifying royalty.

We know the Dragon is Satan, [Revelation 13:1](#) / [Revelation 12:9](#), but we also must understand who the harlot and Babylon are. These two figures are mentioned in [Revelation 17](#) and [Revelation 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 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. [Revelation 17](#) identifies a city that fits the description of none other than Rome itself.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘She sits on the seven hills, [Revelation 17:9](#). She rules the earth in John’s day, [Revelation 17:18](#). She is a terrible persecutor of the saints, [Revelation 17:6](#) / [Revelation 18:20](#) / [Revelation 18:24](#). She is the leading commercial power on earth, [Revelation 18:3](#) / [Revelation 18:11-14](#) / [Revelation 18:15-19](#). She is supported by the military might of Rome, [Revelation 17:3](#) / [Revelation 17:7](#). She is destroyed by her own military power, etc., [Revelation 17:16-17](#).’

‘Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.’ [Revelation 17:3-4](#)

John is now carried away in the Spirit, which means that John is seeing a vision, an inspired message from God, [Revelation 17:3](#) / [Ezekiel 2:2](#). In a wilderness, ‘a woman,’ [Revelation 17:3](#). Who is this woman?

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘John had seen another woman, and she fled into a wilderness. There was quite a difference between the two. This one is supported by the seven-headed beast, but the other was sustained by the Lord God. The one woman was the city of the Living God, and the other was the ‘Eternal City’ (as Rome is called over and over again).’

This beast mentioned here, [Revelation 17:3](#), sounds like the beast mentioned in [Revelation 13:1](#). Notice the beast was ‘covered with blasphemous names’, [Revelation 17:3](#).

Domitian, during his reign, issued his decrees as ‘Lord God Domitianus’. 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 scarlet colour would indicate that the beast was deadly and wicked.

A figurative view of the imagery would be that the beast had seven heads, [Revelation 1:3](#) / [Revelation 17:9-10](#), indicating perfection, and ten horns, [Revelation 17:3](#) / [Revelation 17:12](#), indicating complete 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 either Nero returned or reincarnated.

The woman is dressed as royalty, and she is carrying a 'golden cup filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries, [Revelation 17:4](#). The 'abominable things' represent all the evils which have come from her idolatry and persecution.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is symbolic of the luxury of Rome and of the meretricious and lustful way in which it was used, the picture of a wealthy courtesan, decked out in all her finery to seduce men.'

'The name written on her forehead was a mystery: BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come.' [Revelation 17:5-8](#)

The name was a mystery, [Revelation 17:5](#). The word 'mystery'. shows that this name is a symbol for a worldly, wicked city. Notice the words, Babylon the great', [Revelation 16:19](#). What did real Babylon and the great prostitute named Babylon in [Revelation 17](#) share in common? They both imposed forced worship of an idol of the king of their country on their citizenry, [Revelation 13:14-15](#).

She is called the 'mother of prostitutes', [Revelation 17:5](#), and she is drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus, [Revelation 17:6](#) / [Revelation 16:6](#). This certainly fits the city of Rome and her severe oppression of the first-century Christians.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The implication is that Rome did not simply persecute the Christians as a legal necessity but took fiendish delight in hounding Christians to death.'

Notice that John appears to be at a loss for words, he's greatly astonished, and so the angel has to explain to him what he's seeing and happening, [Revelation 17:7](#). The beast that was and is not and is about to come and then go, [Revelation 17:8](#), is probably a reference to the changing leadership of the Empire.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Revelation 17:8](#).

'The beast begins its work again when Domitian comes on the scene and resumes persecution. Thus, the beast is about to come up out of the Abyss, [Revelation 13](#).'

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'Even when Nero died, his wickedness lived on, and John sees it re-emerging in Domitian, the new Nero. Everyone leaves something behind in this world. It may be a memory which is a helper of all that is fine and good; it may be an evil influence which lays a trail of trouble for many generations to come. Every man's life points somewhere; he must see that it points to goodness and to God.'

It appears that John wasn't the only one who would be astonished, especially those whose names are not written in the book of life, [Revelation 17:8](#) / [Revelation 13:8](#), that is, those who are not Christians. They will be astonished because they thought the beast was gone once and for all, [Revelation 17:8](#).

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.

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

John says the only way to understand all of this is by using wisdom. The seven heads of the beast were seven heads of the Roman Empire. Rome ruled its 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 twenty-eight imperial provinces at the height of the empire. All of these provinces were subject to Roman rule.

The first five emperors are Augustus (26BC-13AD), Tiberius (14AD-37AD), Caligula (37AD-41AD), Claudius (41AD-64AD) and Nero (64AD-68AD). Revelation 17:10 says these five are fallen, thus out of the picture. ‘The one is,’ Revelation 17:10 would be Vespasian, the sixth king/emperor, who ruled from 69AD-79AD.

The ‘other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while’, Revelation 17:10, would be Titus, who only reigned from 79AD-81. His reign was short, only a ‘little while’, Revelation 17:10, and he was the seventh king. This is what we would call the honeymoon period.

Now we come to the king in Revelation 17:11, who is the ‘eighth’. This is the first mention of this king, who would have been Domitian. He is the one who ‘was and is not’, Revelation 17:11, which refers back to Domitian’s claim that he was the reincarnation of Nero.

The eighth king was ‘of the seven’, Revelation 17:1,1 which means that he was related to them. Domitian was the brother of Titus and the son of Vespasian of the Flavian dynasty.

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. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will 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 17:12-14

The angel now explains to John what he saw earlier concerning the ten horns, Revelation 17:12 / Revelation 17:7. The ten horns represent the power of the empire, which was concentrated in the provinces and not in the city of Rome itself. They enjoyed some authority from Rome for an hour, Revelation 17:12, in other words, a short period of time. Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following concerning these verses.

‘Rome had given power to various regents and procurators, like the Herods, to rule over the regions and provinces. Yet their power was only from the Roman empire itself and was not their own. These rulers gave their allegiance to the Roman Empire (the beast) and would make war against God and his people who did not worship the beast.’

Daniel’s 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 Roman Empire.

The beast is going to wage war against the Lamb, Revelation 17:14, who is obviously Jesus, John 1:29 / John 1:36, but notice the beast will fail because Jesus is the ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’, Revelation 17:14 / Deuteronomy 10:17 / Psalms 136:4 / Revelation 1:5 / 1 Timothy 6:16 / Revelation 19:16. And who is with Jesus, His called, His chosen, His faithful followers, Revelation 17:14.

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, 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 battle was over before it even started. God and His people would be victorious.

‘Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.’ Revelation 17:15-16

This was the explanation of the waters upon which the harlot sat, given to John by the angel in Revelation 17:1. 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 this is precisely what happened to the Roman Empire. She was defeated from within by her own subjects, Daniel 2:43.

‘For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.’ Revelation 17:17-18

Remember God doesn’t create evil, but He can use evil to serve His purposes, and that’s what we’re reading here, God’s will, will be done, Revelation 17:17. The identity of the woman John saw earlier, Revelation 17:1-2, is now revealed, she is the great city, Revelation 17:18, that is Rome.

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

INTRODUCTION

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 avenge Rome. That vengeance was seen in the seven bowls discussed earlier 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.

LAMENT OVER FALLEN BABYLON

‘After this, I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendour. With a mighty voice, he shouted: “‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!’ She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” Revelation 18:1-

3

John now sees another angel coming down from heaven and notice that this angel had great authority and was illuminated with splendour, Revelation 18:1. This angel shouts that Babylon the Great has fallen, Revelation 18:1 / Isaiah 28:9. This is a message of judgment.

Babylon takes 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, Isaiah 13:19-22. Although Babylon of the Old Testament wasn’t a righteous force, God used it for His purposes.

But who is Babylon mentioned here? It is none other than Rome. Babylon is 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 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.

Notice that the angel’s message is written in the past tense, Revelation 18:2. Remember, at this time, Rome hadn’t fallen yet, so why write as though it had? It’s written in the past tense to demonstrate the certainty that Rome and her empire will fall.

Every evil activity we can think of was happening in Rome. There were demons and impure spirits, there were unclean birds and detestable animals. In other words, they were evil to the core and practising evil, Revelation 18:2.

It appears that their ungodliness had a huge effect on the nations around her; they too are involved in adultery, the merchants of the earth have prospered through the immorality of Rome, Revelation 18:3. History tells us that when the Roman Empire declined and eventually fell, several nations shared in that fate.

WARNING TO ESCAPE BABYLON’S JUDGMENT

‘Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “‘Come out of her, my people,’ so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart, she boasts, ‘I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn.’ Therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. Revelation 18:4-8

John now hears another voice from heaven saying, ‘come out of her, my people’, [Revelation 18:4](#). This again takes our minds back to when God’s people were told to come out of Babylon after their captivity time was up, [Jeremiah 50:8](#) / [Jeremiah 51:6](#) / [Jeremiah 51:9](#) / [Jeremiah 51:45](#) / [Isaiah 52:11](#).

They were to come out in order that they would not share in Rome’s sins, [Ephesians 5:11](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:17](#), and not receive any of her plagues, [Revelation 18:4](#). The warning is very clear: if any of God’s people don’t come out and separate themselves from the sins of the Roman Empire will suffer in her plagues.

It appears that Rome’s sins were so numerous and so evil that they piled up to heaven, [Revelation 18:5](#). Notice that Rome will be paid back double for all the persecution, pain and suffering she inflicted upon God’s people, [Revelation 18:6](#). They are going to reap what they sowed, [Isaiah 47:7-9](#) / [Matthew 7:2](#) / [Galatians 6:7](#).

Notice how Rome glorified herself as a queen, and how they lived in luxury, [Revelation 18:7](#). Oh, how Rome was full of herself, thinking that no one could touch her and destroy her, but oh, how wrong Rome was, [Isaiah 13:3-23](#).

There will be no escaping God’s judgment, because when it comes, it’s going to be swift, severe and sure, [Revelation 18:8](#). Rather than life and prosperity, the Roman empire will crumble into death, mourning, and famine.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Revelation is not predicting that Rome fell in one day, just as the scriptures are not predicting other nations falling in one day, [Isaiah 47:9](#). It is a symbol of the suddenness of the loss of power and authority. It would seem that the empire would never end, and suddenly the empire will be in trouble. It will lose its power and be destroyed. This is the imagery of the fire. Revelation is not predicting Rome literally burning, [Isaiah 47:14](#). The fire is a symbol of judgment. Its time of glory and rule is over. The empire has fallen. Rome has lost her power.’

THREEFOLD WOE OVER BABYLON’S FALL

‘When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: “Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour, your doom has come!’ Revelation 18:9-10

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the rest of this chapter, we have the dirges for Rome; the dirge sung by the kings, [Revelation 18:9-10](#), the dirge sung by the merchants, [Revelation 18:11-16](#), the dirge sung by the shipmasters and the sailors, [Revelation 18:17-19](#). Again and again, we hear of the greatness, the wealth and the wanton luxury of Rome.’

All those surrounding nations who were involved with Rome and her evil practices now realise that Rome couldn’t keep them safe anymore; they can’t provide them with protection, [Revelation 18:9](#). Their rich lifestyles are ripped away as nation after nation falls to invading conquerors of the Roman Empire.

It’s evident because of fear that the surrounding nations don’t want to share in what Rome is suffering, so they stand far off; they hated to see her fall, but not badly enough to go share in her fate, [Revelation 18:10](#) / [Jeremiah 51:9](#).

‘The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of

incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves. They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered.' Revelation 18:11-14

Many merchants the world over enjoyed great trade opportunities with Rome. The merchants of the earth are going to survive the onslaught against Rome; however, they're not crying because Rome falls, they're crying because their businesses are going to be affected, Revelation 18:11.

All the things mentioned are the things they bought and sold because of the trade coming in and out of Rome, Revelation 18:12-13, and it appears they were doing rather well; however, since Rome has fallen, they have lost it all, Revelation 18:14.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The lament of the merchants is purely selfish. All their sorrow is that the market from which they drew so much wealth is gone. It is significant that both the kings and the merchants stand afar off and watch. They stretch out no hand to help Rome in her last agony; they were never bound to her in love; their only bond was the luxury she desired and the trade it brought to them.'

'The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "'Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!' Revelation 18:15-16

Those merchants who gained great wealth from Rome mourn her downfall, but they stay well clear of the city just in case they get caught up in her destruction, Revelation 17:18 / Ezekiel 27:29-36.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is why the harlot was so popular, she made everyone rich. Alliances with her were money in the bank. The Harlot if Rome as a commercial leader. With whom to commit fornication was a promise of prosperity.'

'In one hour, such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning, cry out: "'Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour, she has been brought to ruin!' Revelation 18:17-19

'In an hour', refers to the suddenness and unexpectedness for which this all happened, Revelation 18:17 / Revelation 18:19. Notice once again, that those sea captains who traded with Rome stand at a distance and from a distance they see Rome's destruction, Revelation 18:18. It's clear they too don't want to get caught up in Rome's destruction.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'First, the kings uttered their lament over Rome, then, the merchants, and now, the shipmasters, Ezekiel 27:28-30.' There was no other city on earth that could compare to the great city of Rome, hence why they exclaimed, was there ever a city like this great city, and mourned her loss, Revelation 18:18.

'Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.' Revelation 18:20

The long wait for justice is now over, Revelation 6:9-11, and the heavens rejoice. The saints, apostles and prophets who had been slain by the Roman Empire finally saw judgment handed out for the slaughter, the pain, the suffering, and the persecution wrought on them by an evil empire that glutted herself in their blood, Revelation 11:18.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Heaven, but can’t rejoice at the death of such a monster. Apostles have every reason to. Prophets (Daniel or John) will have reason to smile. Their word has come true, and their fellow servants are now having rest from the ungodly empire.’

THE FINALITY OF BABYLON’S DOOM

‘Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again.

The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s important people. By your magic spell, all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of God’s holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.” Revelation 18:21-24

A mighty angel takes a boulder, the size of a large millstone and casts it into the sea, Jeremiah 51:63-64. While doing this, the angel says that Babylon has been thrown down with violence and will never be found again, Revelation 18:21 / Jeremiah 51:61-64.

Because Rome has been destroyed, seductive music won’t be heard again, Ezekiel 26:13; no trade will be done with her, and no millstone will be heard, Revelation 18:22. In other words, Rome has gone, along with all the things she was famous for; her light has gone out, Revelation 18:23 / Jeremiah 25:10.

The bridegroom’s voice and the bride will never be heard again in Rome, and her magic spell used to deceive the nations around to join in with her idolatrous worship, pagan ceremonies and lascivious lifestyles were gone. No more will they be able lead people astray, Revelation 18:13.

The faithful Christians refused to bow down to the emperors and the other false gods, and as a result, many Christians were slaughtered because of their faith, Revelation 18:24 / Revelation 17:6. This tells us that anyone, any nation who hurts God’s people in any fashion, will be punished, Deuteronomy 32:43 / Jeremiah 51:48.

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.

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 that reigns in the hearts and lives of men and women.

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. In Revelation 19-22, the battle is over, and God explains what will happen to the enemies of Christianity and the redeemed.

REVELATION 19

INTRODUCTION

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, we will live and reign forever. Note the great tribute to the power of the Lord.

THREEFOLD HALLELUJAH OVER BABYLON'S FALL

‘After this, I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. And again, they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”’ Revelation 19:1-3

John now hears a sound like the roar of a great multitude celebrating in heaven, Revelation 19:1 / Revelation 6:9-10 / Revelation 7:9. Hallelujah! Which means ‘Praise the Lord’, is the cry because salvation, glory and power belong to God, and because his judgments are true and just, Revelation 19:1-2.

Once again, we see the judgment of the Empire spoken of in the past tense. The final judgment would see the Empire destroyed from the earth for all time. They are celebrating because Babylon, that is, Rome, has fallen, Revelation 19:2. They are celebrating because God has avenged the lives of all those Rome had murdered, Revelation 19:2. “Hallelujah! once again is the cry because the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever, Revelation 19:3 / Revelation 14:9-11. The nation has collapsed, and the people are judged, Isaiah 34:9-10. The saved dead in Christ are rejoicing now that God’s righteous judgment has come.

‘The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!”’ Revelation 19:4-5

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, once again, fall before God and worship Him, Revelation 5:14 / Revelation 7:11, indicating all of heaven is now celebrating, Revelation 19:4. When they celebrate, they say, ‘amen’ before the Hallelujah! Revelation 18:4 / Psalms 113:1 / Psalms 115:13 / Psalms 135:1 / Psalms 135:20. A voice from the throne says encourages those in heaven, those who fear him, to praise God, Revelation 19:5. The fact that it comes from the throne indicates that it is a directive from God.

‘Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)’ Revelation 19:6-8

John now hears another sound like a great multitude, this time it sounds like the roar of rushing waters and pearls of thunder, Revelation 19:6. They, too, are celebrating and praising the Lord, because the Lord God Almighty reigns, Revelation 19:6.

He truly is the Almighty, Isaiah 9:6-7 / Revelation 19:6. The words ‘Lord God’ are translated from the words ‘kurios’, which means supreme authority and is used like a title such as ‘Lord’ or ‘Sir’, and ‘theos’, which is the word for God. Jesus is therefore one of the distinct personages of the Godhead, thereby sharing the attributes of God the Father, Exodus 3:14 / John 1:1 / John 8:58 / Hebrews 1:8.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, God Almighty.

‘The Lord speaks of his majesty. The Almighty speaks just of that, his illimitable power.’

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, God Almighty.

‘The significant thing about this great word is that it occurs ten times in the New Testament. Once it is in an Old Testament quotation in 2 Corinthians 6:18, the other nine times are all in the Revelation, Revelation 1:8 / Revelation 4:8 / Revelation 11:17 / Revelation 15:3 / Revelation 16:7 / Revelation 16:14 / Revelation 19:6 / Revelation 19:15 / Revelation 21:22. In other words, this is the characteristic title for God in the Revelation.’

The great multitude is rejoicing because the wedding time has now arrived, between Christ, the Lamb and His bride, the church, Revelation 19:7. The bride has made herself ready through their righteous deeds.

The redeemed prepared themselves as brides by being obedient to the word of truth, 1 Peter 1:22, and as a result of their faithfulness to the Lamb, and their righteous deeds, 1 John 3:7, they are given the bride clothes, fine linen, Revelation 19:8 / Ephesians 5:25-27.

Charles, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The marriage symbolism denotes ‘the intimate and indissoluble communion of Christ with the community which he has purchased with his own blood’, a communion which is ‘first reached in fullness by the host of the martyrs.’

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The thought of the relationship between God and his people as a marriage goes far back into the Old Testament. Again and again, the prophets thought of Israel as the chosen bride of God, Hosea 2:19-20 / Isaiah 54:5 / Jeremiah 3:14 / Ezekiel 16:1-63. The marriage symbolism runs all through the Gospels, Matthew 22:2 / Matthew 22:10-11 / Mark 2:19 / Matthew 25:1 / John 3:29 / 2 Corinthians 11:2 / Ephesians 5:21-33.’

‘Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” At this, I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.” Revelation 19:9-10

An angel now tells John to write, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19:9. What an invite! What a blessing! What an honour! Matthew 22:14.

Along with those words, we find he is to write, these are the true words of God, Revelation 19:9, indicating that everything John has seen and heard is absolutely true, Revelation 1:1.

After writing those things down, John appears to be overwhelmed by the situation, and so he falls down to worship the angel who told him to write those things down, Revelation 19:10.

However, the angel stops him, Acts 14:11-18, and notice the angel puts himself on the same level as a servant, brothers, sister who held to the testimony of Jesus, Revelation 19:10. The angel tells John to worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus, Revelation 19:10.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following, concerning Revelation 19:10.

‘The testimony given by Jesus is the substance of what the Spirit inspires Christian prophets to speak. The angel is not the source of this awesome prophetic revelation. Jesus is the source. Therefore, worship him.’

THE HEAVENLY WARRIOR DEFEATS THE BEAST

‘I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice, he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron sceptre.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’ Revelation 19:11-16

John now sees heaven open and sees a white horse, signifying victory, whose rider is called Faithful, that is, reliable, trustworthy and True, that is, genuine, and he judges with justice and wages war, [Isaiah 11:4](#), that is, a righteous war, [Revelation 19:11](#).

This is clearly Christ Himself being spoken of here. The time for the judgment of Rome is at hand. Jesus is mounted on His war horse and is about to carry out God’s righteous judgment on the enemies of the Christians. Jesus is the One Who is the Conqueror; He is victorious.

His eyes are like blazing fire, which means He never misses a thing, [Revelation 19:12](#) / [Daniel 10:6](#) / [Revelation 1:14-15](#) / [Revelation 2:18](#), nothing is out of His sight, and on his head are many crowns, [Revelation 19:12](#). Why? Because of Who He is, He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, [Revelation 19:16](#) / [1 Timothy 6:15](#) / [Revelation 17:14](#).

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following concerning these crowns.

‘Earlier in the book of Revelation, we saw Jesus wearing seven crowns. Now he is pictured as wearing diadems. I believe the change of imagery suggests that he is wearing the diadems of the beast because he has conquered the beast. The beast has been vanquished, and he is wearing those diadems on his head, showing he has conquered it.’

Notice that He has a name written on him that no one knows except Himself, [Revelation 19:12](#). The tetragrammaton YHWH is unpronounceable. Man has given the pronunciation ‘Jehovah’ to this, but no one knows for sure if this is correct. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, [Revelation 19:13](#). This could mean the blood of the enemy or His own blood, [Isaiah 63:1-3](#).

Notice His name is the Word of God, [Revelation 19:13](#). This takes us right back to John’s Gospel, where he declares Jesus is the Word, [John 1:1-2](#). The armies in heaven mentioned here, [Revelation 19:14](#) / [Psalm 110:1-7](#), are figurative for all the saved who follow and serve Jesus Christ.

They are riding white horses, indicating they share in Christ’s victory, and they are dressed in fine linen, white and clean, indicating that they are spotless and without sin, [Revelation 19:14](#).

Out of Christ’s mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, [Revelation 19:15](#) / [Hebrews 4:12-13](#) / [Revelation 1:16](#). He will rule with an iron sceptre, [Revelation 19:15](#) / [Psalm 2:9](#) / [Isaiah 11:4](#). Jesus rules the nations with the word of God. It is unchangeable, it is eternal, and it will not fail.

In the words, He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, we see Christ acting in the anger of the Lord against the disobedient nations and peoples, [Revelation 19:15](#) / [Revelation 14:17-20](#). Worldly people of the nations may not submit to His authority, but they are governed by it and will be judged by it.

Notice that the name ‘King of kings’ and ‘Lord of lords’ were written on His robe and His thigh, [Revelation 19:16](#). The thigh was the location of the sword, and the place where oaths were made, [Genesis 24:2](#) / [Genesis 24:9](#) / [Genesis 47:29](#). Jesus truly is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, [Revelation 19:16](#) / [1 Timothy 6:15](#) / [Revelation 17:14](#).

‘And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” Revelation 19:17-18

John now sees an angel standing in a strange place, in the sun. This implies that he is standing in a place, high in the sky, where he can be seen by everyone. He sends out an invitation for all the birds of prey to come and eat the great supper of God.

It's an invitation to eat of the carnage and destruction of the kings, military captains, mighty men, horses, and of all men, both free and slaves. There is nothing left, except the dead bodies of the horses and their horsemen, the bodies of the slaves and free, which the vultures and buzzards eat, Ezekiel 39:17-20.

‘Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs, he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.’ Revelation 19:19-21

John now sees the beast; the kings of the earth and their armies gather to fight against Christ and His army, Revelation 19:19.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the alliance we read of in Revelation 16:13-16. When the three frogs went on their round trip.’

The sea beast, which was the Roman Empire, and the false prophet, which was the land beast, the Roman militia, are both defeated and thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 19:20, which signifies the utter defeat of the enemy, Revelation 19:14:10-11 / Revelation 19:3-4.

The rest are killed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of Christ, Revelation 19:21 / Hebrews 4:12-13 / Revelation 19:15 / Revelation 1:16, and all the birds ate the flesh of the dead bodies which lay slain from the battle, Revelation 19:21.

When the sword comes out from Christ's mouth, the battle belongs to the Lord and the enemies are crushed. Christ's victory is immediate, but notice that there is no actual war. The Roman Empire was broken and destroyed from within and from without by numerous forces over a period of time, all of which were used by God to achieve His purpose.

REVELATION 20

INTRODUCTION

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 THOUSAND 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 worshipped 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.’ Revelation 20:1-6

John now sees an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain, Revelation 20:1. The Dragon, that ancient serpent, the devil or Satan who had the key to the Abyss, Revelation 9:1-11, is now defeated and bound in chains for a thousand years, Revelation 20:2.

The angel now throws the devil into the Abyss, locks him up and seals him in, and notice, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended, Revelation 20:3. The number 1000 was symbolic of completeness or fullness, and so in this passage signifies a complete or full period of time.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Even the way in which the word thousand is used in Scripture warns us against taking this literally. Psalms 50:10 says that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God, and Job 9:3 says that a man cannot answer God once in a thousand times. A thousand is simply used to describe a very large number.’

Notice, however, that after the thousand years, the devil must be set free for a short time, Revelation 20:3. When he is set free, he is really restricted in what he can do.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following concerning the ‘little time’.

‘The devil is let loose to have another go at Christ and the church. This is God’s way of speaking on any manifestation of Satan. In that case, he will get, not Rome, for she’s gone, but Gog and Magog. God and Magog stand for anyone, anytime, who would be Satan’s tool against the church.’

Notice John sees thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge, Revelation 20:4. He also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God, Revelation 20:4.

These are God’s martyred people, those who remained faithful to God and His Word, Daniel 7:21-22 / Daniel 7:26-27 / Revelation 2:26-18 / Revelation 3:21 / Revelation 13:1-2.

Beasley-Murray, in their commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 20:4.

‘This assurance was of importance for the Christians of John’s day. even if they were called to yield up their lives, their sacrifice would issue in God’s vindication of them.’

It was those fallen martyrs who hadn’t worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands, Revelation 20:4 / Revelation 13:15-18 / Revelation 14:9-10 / Revelation 16:2.

They were the ones who came to life, which implies that they were dead but raised to life, and they reigned with Christ for 1000 years, Revelation 20:4. These faithful martyrs are sharing in the victory of life and reigning with Christ for 1000 years.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 20:4.

‘This is a simple image of triumph for the people who have gone through this ordeal. Those who have died for the cause of Christ are not left out or left behind but are reigning with Christ.’

John tells us that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended, Revelation 20:5, that is, those who died in service to the beast. This is, Revelation 20:5. The second resurrection will deal with the rest, and their outcome will be determined at the white throne scene in Revelation 20:11-15.

Notice it is the Christians who died who are blessed and holy, 1 Peter 1:2, because they died in the Lord, Revelation 20:6. Note the first resurrection only involves the blessed and the holy, but the second resurrection involves only the unholy.

The second death has no power over them, Revelation 20:6, why? Because they were a part of the first resurrection, they are victorious, Revelation 20:5. Those martyrs who died in Christ will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years, Revelation 20:6 / 1 Peter 2:9.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following, concerning ‘the first and second resurrection’, Revelation 20:5-6. ‘What is the first resurrection? The resurrection of the martyrs for Jesus! Why is it first? Because John is about to see a ‘second’ resurrection. He has seen a ‘first’ death (as it were). He will see a ‘second death’. Saints and sinners alike die under the first death (some in service of the beast and some serving Jesus), but the saints are in the ‘first resurrection’, so the second death holds no fear for them. That ‘first’ resurrection is to life and reigning, but the ‘second’ resurrection will be to the second death.’

Another commentator says the following, concerning the ‘first and second resurrection,’ Revelation 20:5-6.

‘The first resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Several people were raised from the dead during Biblical times, but Jesus Christ is the first one resurrected who would live forever, never again to die. There are only two resurrections mentioned in scripture which will do this. The first one has already come to pass. The second one is yet to come, John 5:28-29. Those who participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ are priests of God and of Christ. How do we participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? When we are baptised, we are buried in a symbolic way with Jesus Christ when He was buried, Colossians 2:12 / Romans 6:4-5. Christians have a participatory part in the resurrection of Jesus Christ at baptism. And upon these, the second death hath no power. What is the second death? Hebrews 9:27. The second death is the judgment of the unrighteous who will die the spiritual death, which is eternal separation from God in everlasting punishment. This death has no power over faithful Christians who have participated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’

THE THOUSAND-YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST

This chapter of Revelation is considered the most difficult chapter of the book of Revelation if not the entire Bible. Dispensationalists freely employ this difficult chapter to prove that Christ will reign on earth for a literal thousand years. Revelation 20:4 specifically is the passage that is so heavily relied on to prove their theory.

A close reading of Revelation 20:4 nowhere states any of the basic tenets of the Dispensational doctrine.

1. It does not mention the second coming of Christ with a rapture.
2. It does not mention a bodily resurrection.
3. It does not mention a thousand-year reign on earth.
4. It does not mention the throne of David.
5. It does not mention the city of Jerusalem.
6. It does not mention or say anything about those raptured reigning with Christ.

7. It does not mention the rapture anywhere.
8. It does not say that fleshly Israel will return to Palestine.
9. It does not say the raptured (faithful Christians) will be placed in positions of rulers.

Now notice what the text does say.

1. It does say 'they' lived and reigned, not we, the raptured, will live and reign.
2. It says they 'lived' and 'reigned' with Christ, not shall live and reign, future tense.
3. It says they lived and reigned 'with Christ', not that Christ reigned.
4. It says 'souls' reigned with Christ, not resurrected physical bodies.
5. It says it was the souls that were 'beheaded' that reigned with Christ.

There is no way one can take Revelation 20:4 and make it teach the dispensational doctrine. A careful reading will show that it does not even hint at such a theory. Men have no right to tamper with God's word, implying things it does not teach.

LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE?

Dispensationalists make a fatal mistake by making the book of Revelation literal. This is especially true of the 20th chapter. But are they willing to accept all of the passage as literal? Reading it literally presents some very awkward problems.

Do they accept a literal angel coming down with a literal key and a literal chain? Revelation 20:1. Do such material things exist in heaven? This was for the purpose of literally binding a literal dragon, Revelation 20:2.

This literal dragon's body literally filled the whole earth, and his literal tail reached to the literal heavens and literally plucked the literal stars of the heavens out of their literal orbits millions of miles away!

Are they willing to accept this position? The literal dragon, which filled the whole literal earth, was to be put in a literal pit, tail and all. If his body filled the earth, where could a pit be dug on earth large enough to accommodate his literal body?

If the thousand years are literal, then the beheading is literal and only those who have been literally beheaded will get into the millennium, Revelation 20:4. If the reigning ends with the thousand years, the living ends also, for John says they 'lived and reigned' a thousand years with Christ. If we accept the dispensationalist view, the inescapable conclusion is that when the millennium ends, everyone dies.

We can see that if Revelation 20 is taken literally, we get into all kinds of problems. Any literal conclusions force us into positions that are ridiculous. The 'thousand years' is but one symbol in this chapter.

Note the use of '1000 years' in the following passages, Exodus 20:6 / Deuteronomy 7:9 / Psalms 50:10. The 1000 years are figurative; they speak of perfection. Satan was perfectly bound up for 1000 years, Revelation 20:2, meaning he was completely defeated.

Jesus reigned for 1000 years, Revelation 20:4, meaning that Jesus was completely triumphant over Satan. A proper understanding of the chapter, as well as the other chapters, begins by recognising that all of John's visions are described in highly figurative, apocalyptic language.

Also, to understand this chapter, we must keep in mind that it is a sequel to Revelation 19. Revelation 20 is the climax to the last scenes of Revelation 19. The dragon, Revelation 20:2, that is, Satan, the instigator of all opposition to Christ and His church, is about to be cast into the abyss, the bottomless pit, thus the final and complete defeat of Satan.

We must consider ‘a thousand years’ as symbolic just as we consider most all the other numbers to be symbolic. 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, nor His reign on earth with His disciples for a literal thousand years is in this verse.

The number 1000 symbolises completeness, thus the complete defeat of Satan and his foes, the complete victory of Christ and His Cause over persecution and oppression. Look at what the Hebrew writer wrote in Hebrews 2:14.

Through the death of Christ, every persecuted Christian gained victory. If they would remain faithful till death, they would gain victory. While the symbols of this chapter apply primarily to the early Christians and their persecutions, it has a general application to all today who are faithful to him.

In this last and great dispensation, Christ is on the throne of His kingdom, Hebrews 1:8. Christians who overcome ‘sit with Him in His throne’, NOW, in complete victory over the devil. Every Christian today is a citizen of the kingdom of Christ, for that kingdom is now in existence.

We do not have to wait for a future time. It was established on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. This kingdom is not an earthly temporal kingdom manifesting political, military, and carnal characteristics, but it is entirely spiritual.

Those in Palestine who heard Jesus preach had great difficulty in understanding the nature of His kingdom because they were looking for a kingdom which would have its capital in Jerusalem.

Jesus told the woman at the well that Jerusalem would not be the central place of worship, John 4:21, yet dispensationalists like the Jews in Christ’s time want to put it there in a visible way.

Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world, Luke 17:20-21. Thus, the kingdom would not have a visible earthly manifestation. While this chapter of Revelation is difficult, it certainly does not teach any of the doctrines of dispensationalism.

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. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.’ Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are ended, Satan is going to be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations again. In Revelation 20:7, during this little time he is revealed, Revelation 12:12, it appears the nations will see through him and his deceptive works. Satan goes to the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to muster his hosts for the final struggle against God and the Christians, Revelation 20:7.

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 reappear 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.

It’s during this time that he will unleash one more effort to defeat God’s people, as he did during the days of the Roman Empire, Revelation 20:8. Satan is going to try to destroy the people of God yet again, Revelation 20:9. Notice it’s ‘the city he loves’, Revelation 20:9.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The city in the vision is Jerusalem. The truth is, it’s the church of God. The fire out of heaven ends the contribution of Gog to this apocalyptic story. Since this army and invasion stand for any and all of the devil’s assaults against the church (after the Roman offensive), its failure signals the end of Satan’s career as an opponent.’

As a result of his defeat, the devil was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, indicating his total defeat; the triumph of God is complete. He will endure torment forever, Revelation 20:10. The lake of burning sulphur is where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown in there earlier, Revelation 19:20.

Wallace, in his commentary, says the following.

‘These passages were not written as a dissertation on eternal punishment.’

THE JUDGMENT OF THE DEAD

‘Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to 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 20:11-15

We must bear in mind that just as the judgment scene in Revelation 20:4 wasn’t literal, neither is this judgment scene we read about here. John now sees a great white throne, signifying purity, and he sees someone sitting on it, Revelation 10:11. It is God Himself who is the judge, Psalms 9:4-7 / Matthew 25:31-46 / John 5:22 / Acts 17:31 / 2 Timothy 4:1.

The earth and the heavens flee from him, and there was no place for them, Revelation 10:11. This clearly indicates there will be a new heaven and earth, Revelation 21:1-5. The earth and all that is in it will be destroyed, 2 Peter 3:10. He sees the dead, standing before the throne, and books were opened, Revelation 20:12. Another book is opened, which is the book of life and the dead were judged according to what they had done, Revelation 20:12 / Daniel 7:9-12.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 20:12.

‘When John spoke about the ‘first resurrection,’ he was contrasting it with this one. Those who participated in the first resurrection were blessed and holy. They were holy, and they were blessed because they were raised to live and reign, to share the victory of the Lamb. These are the unholy. They died too, and now they are (in figure) raised but only to die a second time.’

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, Revelation 20:13. I’m sure you noticed that the sea, death and Hades are all personified here.

HADES

‘Hades’ in the New Testament means ‘the realm of disembodied souls’. The New Testament words ‘Hades’ and ‘Gehenna’ are the final destination of the wicked ‘soul’, the place of punishment, hell.

In other words, everyone’s ‘body’ will go to the grave, and their ‘spirit’ will go back to God, Ecclesiastes 12:7, but the ‘soul’, which is the part of man, will go on for eternity, either with God in heaven or in Hell with the devil and his angels.

Remember, ‘Sheol’ in the Old Testament means ‘the realm or place of the dead’. The realm or place of the dead is the grave where our bodies end up, but the realm of disembodied souls is where our soul ends up without our physical bodies.

In the account of the Rich man and Lazarus, we find Jesus using the other word for hell, which is Hades, Luke 16:19-31. Where were Abraham and Lazarus? When Lazarus the beggar died, he was carried to ‘Abraham’s side,’ Luke 16:22. This is the Hebrew way of saying that he was in ‘the paradise of God’, that is, heaven.

The word ‘heaven’ simply means ‘the heights or lifted up’, but notice in Genesis 1:1 that God created the heavens, plural. The Bible teaches there are actually three heavens, and this was firmly believed by the Jews.

1. They saw the area of the clouds in the sky as the first heaven. This is the atmosphere and the place where the birds fly. This is physical and is created by God.

2. They saw the area in which the sun, moon, and stars hung as the second heaven. This is physical and is created by God.

3. The third heaven was known as the dwelling place of God. This is God's spiritual, eternal home. This isn't physical and isn't created.

This third heaven is also known as 'paradise', which is used in connection with 'the third heaven.' Paul speaks about being 'caught up in the third heaven and caught up in paradise' in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.

In other words, the third heaven and paradise are the same location. And there's no need to speculate where Paul was because John tells us that paradise is the heavenly realm of God, Revelation 2:7.

And there's no need to speculate where Lazarus was located; he was in paradise, the heavenly realm of God. And there's no need to speculate where Jesus and the thief on the cross were going that very day, Luke 23:43. They were both going to paradise, the heavenly realm of God. The third heaven, paradise, is the place where Paul and all Christians long to go, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

Where was the rich man? The rich man found himself in Hades, which is hell and notice he was in torment, he was in agony in the fire. Don't those words 'torment' and 'fire' describe what we now know as hell? Matthew 13:41-43 / Matthew 25:41.

The apostle Paul uses the Greek word 'Hades' in 1 Corinthians 15:55, but he never uses the word 'Gehenna' in any of his other letters, which were mainly addressed to Greek-speaking churches.

The only place outside of the Gospels where "Gehenna" is used is in James' letter, which is addressed to Hebrew-speaking Jews, James 3:6. The Jewish-speaking audiences would understand that 'Gehenna' was a reference to hell, and the Greek-speaking audiences would understand that 'Hades' also referred to hell.

DEATH AND HADES

The term 'death and Hades' occurs only in the Book of Revelation. Jesus has the keys of death and Hades, Revelation 1:18. The one who sits on the pale horse has the name Death, with Hades following after him, Revelation 6:8.

In Revelation 20:13, death and Hades gave up the dead, who are then judged at the final judgment. Then both 'death and Hades' are thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:14, along with anyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life, Revelation 20:15.

THE LAKE OF FIRE

It's often thought by many that the 'lake of fire' mentioned in Revelation 20:14 refers to hell. However, if Hades is hell, which I believe it is, then how can hell be thrown into hell? That wouldn't make any sense. If we carry on reading the next few words in Revelation 20:14, it becomes quite clear what the lake of fire is a reference to: 'The lake of fire is the second death.'

The first death is physical. When we die, our bodies end up in the grave, 'the realm of the dead,' our spirit goes back to God who gave it, Ecclesiastes 12:17, and our soul goes straight to God's presence, 'paradise', that is heaven, if we have obeyed the Gospel, or straight to hell, Hades/Gehenna, 'the realm of disembodied souls' if we haven't obeyed the Gospel.

Upon death, the soul is separated from the body, and the unbelievers who don't have their names written in the Book of Life continue to be separated from God. At the second death, their resurrected body is joined to their soul, and both are separated from God for all eternity.

The Scriptures say very little about what the bodies of those who haven't obeyed the Gospel will be like when they are resurrected from the dead, and then thrown into 'the lake of fire', but it does tell us that the bodies of those who have obeyed the Gospel will be glorious, [Philippians 3:20-21](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:50-57](#) / [1 Thessalonians 4:13-17](#) / [1 John 3:2](#).

At this point in time, all sin and evil have been judged and punished, [Revelation 20:11-15](#). The two greatest fears of mankind are death and hell, which is eternal banishment from the presence of God, [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#), but Jesus will have victory over them both, [1 Corinthians 15:24-26](#).

Please note this isn't speaking about total annihilation, but separation forever from God and everything which is good, [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#). Therefore, the 'lake of fire', the second death, is permanent. From that death, there will be no resurrection, [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#).

What's being described here in [Revelation 20:14-15](#) is nothing less than the final, complete accomplishment of total victory over sin. The judgment is complete. Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. Eternal punishment involves spending eternity in the presence of all those who have chosen to reject God's grace and His love.

In other words, with the unforgiven, this means the immoral, murderers, liars, and all the vicious, cruel and evil in the history of the world, [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) / [Galatians 5:19-21](#) / [Ephesians 5:3-5](#) / [Revelation 21:8](#).

The New Testament clearly describes the destination of the wicked after the Judgment and their place of punishment, as 'eternal banishment from the presence of God', [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#).

The wicked will be denied the fellowship and blessing of 'everlasting life', 'the life of the ages', and there will be no need for fire and brimstone, for they will know that their banishment is something they have deserved because they rejected God's offer of forgiveness.

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

INTRODUCTION

In [Revelation 21](#), we find a glorious picture of the church and of Heaven.

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

'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

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, [1 Peter 1:3-4](#). 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?

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. The words, 'my holy mountain', are a clue that identifies the time and nature of the fulfilment, [Isaiah 65:25](#).

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.

[Isaiah 66:22](#) 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.

[2 Peter 3:13](#) is in a totally different context; 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; 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](#).

John, in [Revelation 21:1](#), 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.

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 it’s 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.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is a new environment, a new state of affairs. In that new heaven and earth, the oppressor doesn’t exist. He’s been dealt with, and his world has been destroyed. It’s a new beginning for the people of the Lord. It deals specifically with the removal of a specific oppressor or a radical change of circumstances.’

Notice John says there was no sea, Revelation 21:1. The crystal sea mentioned in Revelation 15:2 was a figure for the barrier between God and His people, and it appears that because there is no sea, the barrier has been removed. As Christians, we have full access to God.

‘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.’ Revelation 21:2-4

In contrast to the old Jerusalem, John now sees the Holy city, the new Jerusalem, Revelation 21:2, which obviously isn’t literal, Revelation 20:9. Notice he sees it coming down out of heaven, Revelation 21:2, which signifies its divine nature and origin.

It’s clear that it is speaking about the church, because they are described as a bride, dressed for her husband, Revelation 21:2 / Revelation 19:7-9 / Ephesians 5:27.

The voice from the throne says, God’s dwelling place is now among the people and He will dwell in them, Revelation 21:3. The church, is the dwelling place of God, He dwells within each of us, 1 Corinthians 3:16 / Ephesians 2:20-22 / 2 Timothy 1:14 / 1 Peter 2:5. In this new Jerusalem, God Himself will be with the saved. Revelation 21:3. With Rome and her rulers destroyed, there will be no more sorrow, death, because it has been defeated, Revelation 21:4 / Revelation 14:3 / Revelation 20:12-15. With Rome and her rulers destroyed, there will be no more crying, tears, or pain, Revelation 21:4.

‘He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.” Revelation 21:5-8

The one sitting on the throne is making everything new, which Implies the future is certain.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘For the first time God himself speaks; he is the God who is able to make all things new. Again, we are back among the dreams of the ancient prophets. Isaiah heard God say: ‘Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing,’ [Isaiah 43:18-19](#). This is the witness of Paul: ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,’ [2 Corinthians 5:17](#). God can take a man and re-create him, and will someday create a new universe for the saints whose lives he has renewed.’

John is then told to write down words which are trustworthy and true, [Revelation 21:5](#). Who is it who is trustworthy and true? It is Jesus, the Faithful and True; it is Jesus who is reliable and genuine, [Revelation 19:11](#).

As is often the case in Revelation, future happenings are described in past tense terms. Notice the words, ‘It is done’, [Revelation 21:6](#), the destruction of the enemies and salvation of the saints has been accomplished. Notice how Christ identifies Himself in [Revelation 21:6](#).

How anyone can deny the deity of Christ is beyond me, especially in light of what John declares about Jesus here. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet.

Jesus is the first and the last, [Isaiah 44:6](#), the beginning and the end, and everything in between, [Revelation 1:17](#) / [Revelation 2:8](#) / [Revelation 21:6](#) / [Revelation 22:13](#). Jesus is ruling. Jesus is in control. He is the ‘I AM.’ He is and was and is to come, [Revelation 1:4](#). He truly is the Almighty, [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) / [Revelation 19:6](#).

The promise is to give to the thirsty freely from the spring of living water as a gift, [Revelation 21:6](#) / [Isaiah 55:1-2](#) / [John 7:37-39](#). It is those who are victorious who will inherit all these blessings, [Revelation 22:7](#). He will be their God, and they will be His children, [Revelation 21:6](#) / [1 John 3:2](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The bliss is not to everyone but only to him who remains faithful when everything seeks to seduce him from his loyalty.’

The second death has already been mentioned a few times in Revelation, [Revelation 21:8](#) / [Revelation 2:10-11](#) / [Revelation 20:6](#) / [Revelation 20:14](#). Here we read that the second death awaits those who choose not to follow Christ, [Revelation 21:8](#).

The Bible mentions many sins which will stop a person from inheriting the kingdom of God: [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) / [Galatians 5:19-21](#) / [Ephesians 5:3-5](#) / [Revelation 22:15](#). Notice they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur, [Revelation 21:8](#) / [Revelation 20:14](#).

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.

Please note this isn’t speaking about total annihilation, but separation forever from God and everything which is good, [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#). The second death is permanent; from that death, there will be no resurrection, [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#).

THE NEW JERUSALEM, THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB

‘One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There

were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.’ Revelation 21:9-14

One of the angels who had the seven bowls of the seven last plagues appear again, Revelation 17:1, and speaks to John, Revelation 21:9. Although many people see these verses and the following verses as a picture of heaven, John isn’t shown heaven.

Notice what he is shown, he is shown the bride and the wife of the Lamb, Revelation 21:9 / Ephesians 5:22-23 / Ephesians 5:27 / Revelation 18:23 / Revelation 19:27 / Revelation 21:2. This is God’s people; these are those who were washed clean by the blood of the lamb and, because of their perseverance and faithfulness, gained the victory over Satan.

Notice that John was carried away in the Spirit, Revelation 1:10 / Revelation 4:2, to a mountain great and high and was shown the Holy City, Jerusalem, Revelation 21:10. This is what happened to Ezekiel, Ezekiel 40:2-4. Once again, we see the divine nature and origin of the new Jerusalem, it comes down out of heaven, Revelation 21:10 / Revelation 21:2.

Just as Jesus Himself came down from heaven to manifest the Father’s glory, John 1:14, so now the church, the Lamb’s wife, manifests the glory of the Father, Revelation 21:11. The people of God are symbolised as a great city coming down from heaven, shining with the glory of God, Revelation 21:11.

The reference to the three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west, Revelation 21:13, is a reference to the tabernacle, where God’s people surrounded it, Ezekiel 48:31-35. Notice the number twelve, twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes, twelve foundations, twelve apostles, Revelation 21:12-14.

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. This whole scene is about the people of God.

‘The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.’ Revelation 21:15-21

Earlier, John was asked to measure the temple of God, the church in Revelation 11:1. Here, the angel does the measuring with a gold rod; he is to measure the city, its gates and its walls, Revelation 21:15.

The city was laid out like a square, Revelation 21:16; the holy of holies in Solomon’s temple was perfectly square, 1 Kings 6:20. God dwelt within the holy of holies, and so here, we see God dwelling within His people, John 14:23 / Ephesians 2:20 / Colossians 1:27 / 1 Corinthians 3:16 / 2 Timothy 1:14.

This clearly isn’t a literal city because the literal size of it is staggering. A stadia is an eighth of a mile; therefore, the city in the vision is about 1500 miles long by width with buildings 1500 miles tall, Revelation 21:16-17.

The mention of jasper, sapphire, emerald, onyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, agate, topaz, gold, etc., all relate to something which is precious, and take our minds back to Isaiah 54:11-12. God’s people are precious. All in all, what the angel is measuring is the holiness and glory of God’s people, Revelation 21:16-21, just as Ezekiel did in Ezekiel 42:20 / Ezekiel 43:10-12.

‘I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever

enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. [Revelation 21:22-27](#)

The physical temple was God's dwelling place but now because the Lord God Almighty and His Lamb dwell in His people, there is no need for a temple, they dwell in their people, His people are their temple, [Revelation 21:22](#) / [John 14:23](#) / [Romans 8:9](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:19](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:16](#) / [1 John 2:24](#) / [Revelation 21:3](#). He is the protection, the sanctuary, the security and the home of the righteous.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The city of God needed no created light because God, the uncreated light, was in the midst of her. 'The Lord,' said Isaiah, 'will be your everlasting light', [Isaiah 60:19-20](#).'

The glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. Just as Moses reflected the glory of God after being in His presence, [Exodus 33:20-23](#). Christians reflect the glory of God and the Lamb in their lives; there is no need for the sun and moon to give light, because God's glory gives light, and the Lamb is the light, [Revelation 21:23](#) / [Isaiah 60:19](#). The world will stumble around in the darkness, but Christians walk in the light because He is light, [John 8:12](#) / [1 John 1:5](#) / [1 John 1:7](#).

The nations, that is, the glorified saints, [Revelation 5:9](#) / [Revelation 7:9](#), walk in His light, [Revelation 21:24](#). Since there is no night there but constant light, there is no need to close the gates, [Revelation 21:25](#) / [Isaiah 60:20](#). In other words, there is no threat from our enemies. In contrast to those who opposed the Lamb and were destroyed, those kings who gave their allegiance to the Lamb now bring their glory and honour into the city, [Revelation 21:26](#) / [Isaiah 60:3](#) / [Isaiah 60:5](#) / [Isaiah 60:11-12](#).

Note the emphasis on the holiness of the city, nothing impure, anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, will not have entrance into the city, only those whose name are written in the Lamb's book of life, that is, only those who are saved, [Revelation 21:27](#) / [Revelation 3:5](#) / [Revelation 20:15](#). All the ungodly will be outside of the city, [Revelation 22:15](#) / [Isaiah 52:1-2](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The chapter ends with a threat. Those who will not lay aside the evil of their ways are barred from the city of God. There is a sinner who sins against his will; there is a sinner who deliberately sins. It is not the repentant sinner, but the defiant sinner, who is barred from the city of God.'

REVELATION 22

INTRODUCTION

Jesus closes the Book of Revelation by instructing us not to add to or take away from its message.

EDEN RESTORED

'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No

longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.’

Revelation 22:1-5

The angel mentioned in Revelation 21:9 now shows John the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, Revelation 22:1. This means all the blessings of life are catered for God’s people by God and the Lamb, John 4:10 / John 7:37-39 / Revelation 7:16-17.

All life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, Revelation 22:1 / Revelation 22:4. All who belong to God have access to the river of the water of life because it flows through the middle of the city, Revelation 22:1 / Ezekiel 47:1-2 / Ezekiel 47:8-9 / Zechariah 14:1 / Zechariah 14:8 / Joel 3:18.

Notice John is shown the tree of life, Revelation 11:2 / Genesis 2:9. Notice it is set in three places. On this side of the river, in the midst and on the other side of the river, Ezekiel 47:7 / Ezekiel 47:12. Notice the number twelve again, Revelation 22:2 / Revelation 21:12-14.

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. This whole scene is about the people of God. The tree of life yields twelve crops every month, Revelation 22:2.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Not only does this tree produce twelve different kinds of fruit, but it also provides them twelve times a year. Over and over again, we are being told that these blessings belong to the people of God. The whole scene takes place inside the city and for its inhabitants.’

Not only are God’s people blessed, but so are the nations around them because of God’s people. Not only does God’s people offer light to the nations around them, Matthew 5:14-16 / Revelation 21:24-26, but God’s people also offer healing from the leaves of the tree of life, Revelation 22:2. In other words, God’s people have everything they need to be blessed in order to be a blessing to those around them, Proverbs 11:25 / Luke 6:38.

When mankind sinned in the garden, both Adam and Eve were cursed by God, Genesis 3:16-19, and as a result, they were both driven from the paradise of Eden, where the tree of life was found, Genesis 3:23. Here, however, there will be no more cursing, Revelation 22:3 / Zechariah 8:13.

Since the throne of God and the Lamb are in the midst of this city, indicating they are ruling, Psalm 2:6 / Isaiah 24:23 / Ezekiel 43:6-7, and since sin and darkness have gone, there will be no more curse, and God’s people will live and serve Him, Revelation 22:3.

Oh, how Christians long to see the face of God, Revelation 22:4. Seeing the face of God means that Christians are in perfect and eternal fellowship with God, Exodus 33:20 / Psalm 11:7 / Psalm 17:15 / John 1:18. The servants of God and the Lamb will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads, Revelation 22:4 / Revelation 3:12.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Having His name on our foreheads means that we will be His and will reflect His divine glory in our persons. Having a name on one’s forehead appeared three times earlier in this book, Revelation 3:12 / Revelation 7:3 / Revelation 14:1. In each case, it was a great privilege indicating ownership and protection as well as identification, Exodus 28:36-38.’

We’re reminded once again, there will be no night, no darkness of any kind, Revelation 22:5. This is because the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light, Revelation 21:23 / Isaiah 60:19-20.

Christians will reign for ever and ever, Revelation 22:5 / Daniel 7:27 / Revelation 3:21, simply because God reigns and always has, Exodus 15:18 / Psalm 146:10 / Lamentations 5:19 / 1 Timothy 6:15 / Revelation 1:5 / Revelation 11:15.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The vision ends with the promise that the people of God will reign for ever and ever. In perfect submission to him, they will find perfect freedom and the only true royalty.’

JOHN AND THE ANGEL

‘The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.” Revelation 22:6-11

The angel now confirms to John that the words are trustworthy and true. They confirm the contents of the Revelation and an assurance that these things will soon be fulfilled, Revelation 22:6. Revelation 1:1-3.

Remember the words, ‘must soon take place’, Revelation 1:1. In Revelation 1:3, we are told that ‘the time is near’, and the book closes with the reminder that these things ‘must soon take place’, Revelation 22:6, and the words, ‘the time is near, Revelation 22:10.

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, Mark 1:15.

Jesus promising to come in judgment upon Rome and deliver the faithful from this awful oppressor, Revelation 22:7 / Revelation 1:3 / Revelation 2:16 / Revelation 3:11 / Revelation 14:14-20 / Revelation 16:15.

John appears to be overwhelmed by everything he has seen and heard, and so, once again, he falls down to worship the angel, and once again, he is told not to do that; he must worship God, Revelation 22:8-9 / Revelation 19:10 / Acts 14:11-18.

Notice the angel puts himself on the same level as a servant, with all who keep the words of this scroll, Revelation 22:9. Notice that John is told not to seal up the words of the prophecy, because the time is near, Revelation 22:10. This contrasts with Daniel’s prophecies, which were to be sealed because they pointed to far-off events of the first century, including the destruction of Jerusalem, Daniel 8:26 / Daniel 10:14 / Daniel 12:4 / Daniel 12:9. The Revelation was not sealed because it spoke to the conditions of John’s day and the years of persecution to follow until the fall of the Roman Empire.

The angel now gives a stern warning: no one should continue in doing wrong, no one should continue to live vile, Revelation 22:11. The angel also gives encouragement for those who do right and those who are holy; they must continue to do so, Revelation 22:11 / Daniel 12:10 / Isaiah 32:6-8 / Ezekiel 3:27 / 2 Timothy 3:13-14. The goal of the righteous is to be righteous and holy regardless of the actions of others, Romans 12:19-21.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 22:11.

‘Daniel’s prophecy is the best explanation of what the angel is saying to John. The wicked are not going to understand that their doom is predicted and sealed. The wise, that is the righteous, will understand and remain faithful through the prophesied tribulations.’

EPILOGUE: INVITATION AND WARNING

‘Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” Revelation 22:12-16

Jesus once again reminds John that He is coming soon, Revelation 22:12 / Revelation 1:1 / Revelation 1:3 / Revelation 22:6. He is coming with His reward, to give to each person a reward according to what they have done, Revelation 22:12 / Isaiah 40:10 / Isaiah 62:11 / Romans 2:6 / Romans 14:12 / 1 John 3:5-7 / Revelation 20:12 / Revelation 22:7.

Once again, Jesus declares His deity, Revelation 22:13. How anyone can deny the deity of Christ is beyond me, especially in light of what Jesus Himself declares about Himself here. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet.

Jesus is the first and the last, Isaiah 44:6, the beginning and the end, and everything in between, Revelation 1:17 / Revelation 2:8 / Revelation 21:6 / Revelation 22:13. Jesus is ruling. Jesus is in control. He is the ‘I AM.’ He is and was and is to come, Revelation 1:4. He truly is the Almighty, Isaiah 9:6-7 / Revelation 19:6.

He says blessed are those who wash their robes, Revelation 22:14 / Isaiah 41:4 / Isaiah 44:6 / Isaiah 48:12 / Revelation 1:8 / Revelation 1:11 / Revelation 21:6. How are their robes washed? They were washed with the blood of the Lamb, Revelation 3:4 / Revelation 7:14 / Revelation 7:14

It’s only those who have been washed with the blood of the lamb who have the right to the tree of life and can enter the city, Revelation 22:14 / Daniel 12:12 / 1 John 3:24 / Revelation 2:7 / Revelation 21:27 / Revelation 22:2.

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.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning ‘the tree of life.’

‘These words regarding the ‘tree of life’ are found in Genesis 2:9, and in Revelation 22:2 / Revelation 22:4 / Revelation 22:19, thus binding the beginning and the end of the Bible together, all of which, first to last, is concerned with the recovery of that which was lost in the Fall.’

Those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood, are not in the city, Revelation 22:15.

Dogs were regarded as despised creatures throughout the scriptures and are used metaphorically of unbelievers, Matthew 7:6. In other words, no one who hurts, or causes pain, or suffering will ever set foot inside, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 / Galatians 5:19-21 / Philippians 3:2 / Colossians 3:6 / Revelation 9:20-21 / Revelation 21:8.

Notice that Jesus personally authenticates the book, Revelation 22:16. He is the root and offspring of David, Zechariah 6:12 / Revelation 5:5, and He is the bright and morning star, Numbers 24:17 / 2 Peter 1:19 / Revelation 2:28.

Peter says the day star arises in our hearts, and so floods us with light, 2 Peter 1:19. 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 Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. 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. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” Revelation 22:17-21

Here we read that the Spirit and the bride, that is, God’s people, invite the saints to come, Revelation 22:17. The promise is to give to the thirsty freely from the spring of living water as a gift, Revelation 22:17 / Revelation 21:6 / Isaiah 55:1-2 / John 4:14 / John 6:44-45 / John 7:37-39.

It is those who are victorious who will inherit all these blessings, Revelation 22:7. He will be their God, and they will be His children, Revelation 21:6 / 1 John 3:2.

Then we have another warning about the seriousness of what has been revealed within it, Revelation 22:18 / Deuteronomy 4:2 / Proverbs 3:6 / Proverbs 30:6 / 2 John 9.

McGuigan, in his commentary, says the following concerning the plagues, Revelation 22:18.

‘The plain import of the passage is, that as man had better not tamper with the book, or else God will punish them.’

There are those who believe that this is speaking about literal plagues upon anyone who tampers with God’s Word in Revelation. However, if it is to be taken literally, why do we not see this happening throughout history? If they speak of nuclear war and such, how could that have happened to those in the centuries before?

Then we have another warning about the seriousness of what has been revealed within it, Revelation 22:19. Those who tamper with God’s word, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, Revelation 22:19. This again emphasises how serious God’s Word is. There are terrible consequences for anyone who would tamper with God’s Word, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following.

‘I fear that many will suffer the consequence described in Revelation 22:18-19, because they have falsely taught from this book. They have distorted and perverted the message of Revelation for their own financial gain and notoriety. God will judge anyone who adds or takes from God’s holy word, 2 Peter 3:16.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Book of Revelation opened with a blessing on all who obey its instructions, Revelation 1:3, and it closes with a strong curse on all who disobey it.’

A final assurance is given in Revelation 22:20 that Jesus will act on behalf of the faithful, Revelation 22:6-7 / Revelation 22:10 / Revelation 22:12 / Obadiah 15 / Luke 18:8 / John 14:1-3 / Romans 16:20 / 1 Corinthians 16:22-24 / Philippians 4:5 / Revelation 1:4 / Revelation 1:7.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning Revelation 22:20.

‘He who testifies to these things is Jesus. The things in view are the words of Jesus in Revelation 22:12-19, but beyond that, everything in this book, Revelation 1:2.’

We can imagine John thinking about all the horrors God’s people have to go through at the hands of the Roman Empire as he responds by saying, ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,’ Revelation 22:20.

If there were ever a time in history when God’s people needed the grace of the Lord Jesus to be with God’s people, it was during this time. No wonder John ends with the amen, signifying, so be it, Revelation 22:21.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is both pathos and glory in the way in which the Revelation ends. Amidst the terrible persecution of his day, the one thing which John longed for was the speedy return of Christ. That hope was never realised in the way in

which he expected, but we can never doubt that Christ nevertheless abundantly kept his promise that he would be with his own even to the end of the world, **Matthew 28:20.**’

CONCLUSION

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.