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Lesson One: Introduction to the Revelation

The Study of the Book:

Attitudes toward the study of John's Revelation differ widely. Many people are convinced that time and energy expended in such a study is time and energy wasted. They believe that the book is so confusing in its presentation and so vague in its message that one should direct his attention elsewhere. It is not uncommon for Bible classes to eliminate Revelation from their planned curriculums. On the other hand, many others are just as sure that Revelation's message is relatively easy to understand if one is able to see its connection with world events of modern times. To them, every detail in the book has its fulfillment in a corresponding occurrence yet to take place. Consequently, many speculations and false doctrines have arisen among religious people because of the careless handling of the things that were sent by God to the seven churches of Asia. For example, a "Bible" lectureship conducted some years ago in a major city featured lessons to "explain" the meanings of John's Revelation. Some of the topics discussed were:

"The Beast and the New World Order"; "The Real Truth About the Antichrist"; "The Beast's Greatest Deception Affecting You"; "Ghosts, Spirits and Armageddon"; "1,000 Years and the Lake of Fire"; "The Middle East Key to the End Times"; "The Mark of the Beast"; "The Seven Last Plagues"; "The Scarlet Harlot and the Woman in White"; and other equally exotic and appealing subjects. A gullible public is usually eager to devour such a diet of "compelling" information about matters hitherto withheld from the average person.

Our attitude toward the study of this awe-inspiring revelation of John should be one of cautious optimism. Revelation challenges the Bible student with a study much more difficult than the study of most other books in God's word. But the basic lessons of John's message *can* be understood if the student is willing to offer the necessary effort. Its treasures *can* be mined by those who dig deeply enough. The comfort and encouragement it affords present-day believers make it well worth their while.

The Quality of the Book:

Serious students of Scripture have long appreciated the value of this book. Homer Hiley, in his Revelation, an Introduction and Commentary, has this observation of its worth:

In the Bible, God's great temple of spiritual truth, there is one special room filled with mysteries and wonders that fire the imagination to celestial heights and leave us amazed at the grandeur of its portrayal of the spiritual. The room is designated as The Revelation. Man may fathom many of the mysteries of the physical world, coming to an almost complete understanding of them, at least to the point that he loses his sense of awe in their presence. But in contrast, although we can grasp something of Revelation's meaning and use for us, we never cease to stand in amazement and wonder at its mysteries which continue to challenge us.

William Hendricksen, in More Than Conquerors, says:

Beautiful beyond description is the last book of the Bible. Beautiful in form, in symbolism, in pur-

pose, and in meaning. Where in literature do we find anything that excels the majestic description of the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, Rev. 1:12-20? Where in Scripture do we find a more vivid and picturesque portrayal of the Christ, Faithful and True, going forth unto victory, seated upon a white horse, arrayed with a garment sprinkled with blood, followed by the armies of heaven, Rev. 19:11-16? Where, again, do we find a sharper contrast than that between the doom of Babylon, on the one hand, and the felicity of Jerusalem the Golden, on the other, Rev. 18, 19, 21, 22? And where are the Throne set in heaven and the blessedness of heavenly life depicted in a manner more serenely simple, yet beautiful in its comfort; what an insight into the future; above all, what an unveiling of the love of God is contained in the words of the prophecy of this book!

And Jim McGuiggan is equally impressed with the impact of John's Revelation as he introduces his discussion of the epistle in his The Book of Revelation:

Revelation has one grand thrust. Comfort in the knowledge of ultimate triumph! It has an historical setting and deals with historical events. It is Rome against the Church-- it is Satan against Jesus! The principles involved in the book-- the principles of good and evil-- are timeless. Truth *will* triumph whether in the first centuries or in these. Evil will wage an unceasing war with truth. The record of the victory of the Church of God over Rome stands for all time as a token of its deathlessness! Of the supremacy of its Lord; the truth of its doctrines; the strength of its hope and the reality of its joys.

The Uniqueness of the Book:

When one begins to read the book of Revelation, he soon realizes that this is a book different from any other he has encountered in his New Testament. If he were reading from the Greek text, the strangeness of this book perhaps would not surprise him. Its title is "*Apokalupsis Ioannou Tou Theologou*," literally, "The Uncovering of John the Divine." *Apokalupsis* ["unveiling"] is transliterated, "apocalypse," and from it the genre of apocalyptic literature takes its name. Thus, the original Greek name for this book was, "The Apocalypse," an "uncovering, a laying bare, making naked" [Henry Thayer]. Immediately, it is apparent that the message of this book will be presented in an unusual way.

Through the centuries, apocalyptic literature has been popular in stressful times. Both religious and nonreligious writings have been clothed in its symbolic language to preserve the interests of their authors and advocates. The Old Testament books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah are examples of apocalyptic literature. The noncanonical collection of works known as the *Apocrypha* [Enoch, Assumption of Moses, Baruch, Fourth Ezra, etc.] is also classified with this type of writing.

Inspired apocalyptic literature is intended to comfort God's people and to prepare them for their future trials. The "covering up" of the message also is designed to protect the recipients from any harm that might come to them from their enemies should the content be "uncovered."

The characteristics of apocalyptic literature, as noted by Ray Summers in Worthy is the Lamb, are:

- (1) It always has historical significance;
- (2) It always presents its messages through visions;
- (3) It has a strong predictive element;
- (4) It makes extensive use of symbolism. Summers says, “The writer [of Revelation-RG] was faced with the task of seeing the invisible, painting the unpaintable, and expressing the inexpressible.” Summers’ definition of symbolism is, “a system in which qualities, ideas, principles, etc. are represented by things concrete. These symbols have a meaning for the initiated but are hopeless jargon to one unacquainted with such terms”;
- (5) A dramatic element makes the message “as vivid as possible.”

The Symbolism in the Book:

Hailey investigates the use of *symbolism* in the Revelation rather extensively. He records symbols of deity [God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit]; symbols of the spiritual realm [the devil, angels, demons, souls]; symbols of the natural world [sun, moon, stars, rivers, etc.]; symbols of religion [priests, altars, incense]; symbols of attire [white robes, sackcloth, purple and scarlet]; symbols of animals [lion, bear, calf, lamb, horses, vultures, locusts, frogs]; and many others. Numerous symbols are taken from the Old Testament but are used in unusual ways. For example, in 11:8, the city of Sodom and the land of Egypt are used to represent the great sin-city of Babylon, which in turn symbolizes Roman tyranny. It is said that there are more than four hundred references in Revelation to the Old Testament, but there is not one quotation used throughout the book!

Additionally, there are many symbolic numbers to be found in John’s vision. Three is used to represent completeness and divinity; four stands for the world or creation; seven also indicates completeness or perfection [used 54 times]; ten is a rounded total; twelve is associated with religious concepts. Multiples of these numbers are also used symbolically, and partial numbers like three and a half signify incompleteness or hardship and oppression.

Symbolism strongly affects the interpretation of Revelation. In most Bible study, the student understands to view everything as *literal* unless otherwise indicated; in the Revelation, everything is *figurative* unless the text strongly suggests a literal meaning.

Understanding the Book:

There are several different basic approaches taken by various students of Revelation that strongly affect their efforts to find the real meaning of the book.

- (1) The futurist interpretation. This viewpoint assigns almost the entirety of the book
- (3)

to events in the world just prior to the next advent of Christ. Premillennialists usually are in this camp and make many *modern* applications of the things that transpire throughout the narrative. For instance, futurists run rampant to draw parallels between the events in John's vision and those presently occurring on the political, social, and military stages of the earth. The problem with any such effort, however, is that, over time, frustrated prognosticators find it necessary to change their applications when their prophecies are unfulfilled. The same phenomenon that once was to be fulfilled in Russia is today identified with Iran or some other current major player on the world stage. There are also other problems with this approach:

- a. The events of the Revelation were things that were to "shortly take place" (1:1);
 - b. There would have been no comfort in the book's message to first century saints if the encouragement had been intended for disciples in *our* time and not in theirs;
 - c. John was instructed not to "seal the words of the prophecy" because the time of their fulfillment was "at hand" (22:10). Contrariwise, Daniel was told to "seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future" (Dan. 8:26).
- (2) The continuous-historical interpretation. This outlook is based on the idea that the book is intended to foretell the history of God's church from John's day until the end of time and into heaven. It supposedly deals with such historical movements as the rise of Catholicism, Islam, and the Reformation. Like the futurists, those of this persuasion allow for no message of hope to churches of the first century, which obviously was a prime motive in its transmission to them (1:11).
 - (3) The preterist interpretation. Preterists [Latin-- praeter-- "past, beyond"] believe that almost all of Revelation's events transpired by the third century during the days of the Roman Empire. They say that perhaps only the last chapters relating to heaven are an exception to this time frame. This position denies comfort and encouragement to Christians of *our* time who face different but difficult problems of their own.
 - (4) The philosophy of history interpretation. This view holds that the book deals with the forces or influences underlying the events unfolded but not with actual historical events. Its intent is to promote certain principles needful to the spiritual success of the Lord's people. These forces may be repeatedly active over long spans of time and the lessons displayed may be applied to many events of earth's history. This explanation disregards many obvious citations of historical occurrences and background situations displayed in the various visions in the book. We will also refer to this approach to understanding Revelation as the generalist interpretation.
 - (5) The historical background interpretation. This approach requires that the symbols used in the record be understood within the background of actual historical events. This stance acknowledges the timeliness of the message for first-century disciples

who needed immediate encouragement about their current problems. It also allows that some of its prophetic segments have already taken place, while it regards others as yet to happen for the benefit of Christians living outside of the early years of the church. Best of all, it presents the principles that truth will be victorious over error and that Christ's followers will ultimately dominate the forces of Satan. And that message transfuses great optimism into the difficulties of our own modern lives.

- (6) The progressive parallelism interpretation. This view is advocated by William Hendricksen in his classic study of Revelation, More Than Conquerors. It supposes that the book reveals parallel cycles of conflict between the church and the world and between Christ and the devil. It divides the narrative into seven sections, with *each* section spanning the expanse of time between the first and second appearances of the Lord. Each series of events is seen from a different perspective.

The Author of the Book:

It would appear that the authorship of Revelation is clear and without controversy. The first verse speaks of "His servant John." Verse four says, "John, to the seven churches..." and verse nine calls him "I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation." Much later, the author declares, "Now I, John, saw and heard these things" (22:8). Nevertheless, controversy about authorship *does* exist among critics. Unquestionably, someone named "John" wrote this book. The traditional view has always been that it was John, the original apostle who also authored the fourth Gospel and the three epistles of "John" near the end of the New Testament.

A minority of scholarship has for a long time attempted to attribute this book to some "John" other than the apostle. Men such as John Mark and a man who was a bishop in the church at Ephesus have been named, but little evidence has been offered for these views. An attempt is sometimes made to challenge the style and language of Revelation as being too different from the Gospel of John to have come from the same individual, but close investigation seems to discount this position. There are compelling reasons to accept the popular view that the apostle wrote both the Gospel and the Revelation, such as:

- (1) The simple reference to "John" without further identification seems to indicate that the recipients of the book would readily recognize the man from whom it came. No other candidate qualifies for such recognition;
- (2) The simplicity of language and style in the Gospel and in Revelation are said to be singular enough to strongly suggest that both came from the same pen;
- (3) John the Baptist's graphic description of Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, etc.) also appears some twenty-two times in Revelation and nowhere else;
- (4) Jesus is called "the Word [*Logos*]" both in the Gospel (John 1:1, etc.) and in the Revelation (19:13), and in no other place.

The Place of Writing the Book:

The location from which John wrote his Revelation is clearly identified: “I ...was on the island that is called Patmos” (1:9). It was “for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” that he had been sent there by the edict of Rome [as tradition holds]. The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible describes Patmos as a “small, rocky island...about thirty miles south of Samos, and is about ten miles long and six wide, and generally barren.”

The Recipients of the Book:

John, the writer of the Revelation, states in 1:4 that he is sending his book to “the seven churches which are in Asia.” These congregations are specified in verse eleven: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Within those groups of disciples, the book is directed to “His servants” (1:1), “he who reads,” “those who hear the words of this prophecy,” and to saints who “keep those things which are written in it” (1:3).

The Date of the Book’s Writing:

Perhaps the most controversial detail about the origin of Revelation involves the time at which John sent this communication from tiny Patmos to the troubled Christians of Asia. Two dates have been prominent in the discussions and are usually called the “early date” and the “late date.” Scholarship is sharply divided between these two times.

- (1) The early date theory contends that Revelation was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 A.D. Some of the arguments used to promote this position are:
 - a. The language of Revelation is claimed to be less “correct” than that of John’s Gospel, suggesting that the book was written earlier than the Gospel [c. 70-80 A.D.];
 - b. The temple is thought to have been still standing when Revelation was written (11:1,2); it was destroyed in 70 A.D.;
 - c. The twelve tribes of Israel were still considered as distinct peoples (7:4-8). The tribal records were obliterated when Jerusalem fell to the Romans;
 - d. Nero, identified as the sixth emperor of Rome, is said to fit the picture of the king who “is” on the throne at the book’s writing (17:10). Nero was ruler of the empire between 54 and 68;
 - e. Nero’s name [NERO(N)] reputedly satisfies the cryptographic numbering of “666” found in 13:18 and associated with the “beast” whose “mark” was forced

upon the heads and hands of all men;

- f. It is thought that only seven churches were organized in Asia at the time that the Revelation was dispatched to them alone (1:4,11).
- (2) The late date theory holds that Revelation was not written until the reign of Domitian, who ruled the empire from 81 to 96 A.D. This position is based upon several arguments, such as:
- a. Iranaeus, one of the early “church fathers” [130-200 A.D.], wrote that the book was written by John “about the end of Domitian’s reign”; other writers agree;
 - b. Another leader, Victorinus [end of third century], recorded that John had been banished to Patmos by Domitian. Banishment was a common occurrence during Domitian’s tenure;
 - c. The persecution of Asian Christians is more compatible with the rule of Domitian than that of Nero. It is generally agreed that the persecution of disciples by Nero was confined to the city of Rome. His attacks on Christians was motivated by political rather than by religious reasons. He sought to blame the burning of Rome on Christians to divert attention from himself. Domitian’s oppression, on the other hand, was focused on Asia and involved the refusal of the disciples to engage in emperor worship, which had gained popularity by the time of Domitian’s reign. Asian persecution was not significant before Domitian or Trajan, or even later; [See the chart on page 9]
 - d. There had been a drastic change in the attitude of the saints between the time when other N. T. books were written and the date of Revelation’s writing. Passages such as Acts 16:37, Romans 13:1, and 1Timothy 2:2 reveal a cautious respect for and a distinct dependency on Roman law and administration by the early Christians. However, when Revelation displays its view of the empire, it reveals an open contempt for the behavior of that government and its corrupt dealings with the people of God. Now, it is a “harlot” (17:1,5) and a “beast” (11:7), and it is the great enemy of the church. It does not seem likely that such a severe change would have occurred so quickly as required by the early date;
 - e. The early date focuses on Jewish rather than Roman persecution of the saints. However, history does not suggest that Jewish attacks on the church outside of Palestine were life-threatening in nature, which is not the case with the dangers described to the seven churches (2:10, 13). The limited number of Jews throughout Asia would have made a widespread persecution unlikely [e.g., there was no synagogue in Philippi, the “foremost city” of the colony of Macedonia, Acts 16:12]. With the Romans, of course, it was different;
 - f. The condition of the seven churches of Asia at the time of Revelation’s origin is perhaps one of the most convincing arguments for a later date:
 - (aa) The church at Ephesus was told [A.D. 62] that Paul gave thanks for their faith and love (Eph. 1:15). Yet, in John’s Revelation letter to Ephesus the

- church was reprimanded for having left its first love (2:4). This would have happened within about four years, according to the early-date theory;
- (bb) Sardis had only a “few” names undefiled by sin. This suggests a period of several years during which a departure from truth had taken place;
 - (cc) Laodicea was cited in Col. 4:13 [A.D. 62] as being deserving of the admiration of godly men such as Epaphras. But in Rev. 3:14-22, the church is complacent and deserving of rejection by God. The membership is described as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” Probably, this was a condition that had developed over a longer period of time than allowed by the early date position.
- (3) Determining the date of John’s authorship is of no small consequence. The early date [c. 66 A.D.] opinion interprets the message of Revelation in the context of the persecution of Christians by Jewish zealots. The great judgment of the Lord is identified with the destruction of Jerusalem and its accompanying punishments on the Jewish nation. The comfort promised to disciples is in the form of relief from those who were dedicated to the Law of Moses and its rituals. On the other hand, the late date [c. 96 A.D.] attributes severe religious persecution to the Roman government and its emperor Domitian. It focuses on a much more formidable foe that is responsible for its tribulations. It also addresses a much longer time frame before the victory over evil can be achieved against the Roman enemies of the church. Hendricksen’s interpretation, while accepting the later date, adds to the Roman Empire all other governments or influences throughout time that stand in opposition to the cause of Christ in the world. This approach has much to recommend it.

The Theme of the Book:

Perhaps the theme of the Revelation message is basically the same, regardless of which view is taken of its date and focus. Whether the oppression of God’s people is centered in Jerusalem or in Rome, or in some other place; whether it is perpetrated by ungodly Jews or ungodly Gentiles, the end result will be the same. The Lord will never abandon His own, and although prospects for their security may seem precarious at times, His power is more than adequate to secure complete victory over the forces of evil in this world. In the words of Summers:

Revelation is a series of apocalyptic images...to set forth Christ as eternally victorious over all world conditions and thus to encourage the Christians of John’s day and every succeeding day until the return of the Lord.

ROMAN EMPERORS AND THEIR PERSECUTIONS

<u>Emperor</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Recorded Persecutions, Places, and Approximate Dates</u>		
[Julius Caesar]	48-44 B.C.			
Augustus [Octavian]	31 B.C.- 14 A.D.			
Tiberius	14- 37 A.D.			
Gaius Caligua	37- 41 A.D.			
Claudius	41- 54 A.D.			
Nero	54- 68 A.D.	Rome	64 A.D.	XX
[Galba. Otho, Vitellius]	[Brief time]			
Vespasian	69-79 A.D.			
Titus	79-81 A.D.			
Domitian*	81- 96 A.D.	Rome, Asia	96 A.D.	XX
Nerva	96-98 A.D.			
Trajan	98- 117 A.D.	Pontus, Bythynia	100-113 A.D.	XX
Hadrian	117-138 A.D.			X
Antonius Pius	138-161 A.D.			X
Marcus Aurelius	161-180 A.D.		177 A.D.	XX
Commodus	180-192 A.D.			X

*Many “early date” advocates contend there was little, if any, persecution by Domitian.

ROMAN EMPERORS AND THEIR PERSECUTIONS [Continued]

<u>Emperor</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Recorded Persecutions, Places, and Approximate Dates</u>		
Septimus Severus	193- 211 A.D.		202 A.D.	XX
Caracallo	211- 217 A.D.			
Heliogobulus	218- 222 A.D.			
Alexander	222-235 A.D.			
Maximus I	235- 238 A.D.	Pontus, Cappadocia	235 A.D.	XX
[Several minor emperors]	[Brief time]			
Decius	249- 251 A.D.		249- 251 A.D.	XX
[Several minor emperors]	[Brief time]			
Valerian	255- 260 A.D.		257 A.D.	XX
Gallienus	261- 268 A.D.			
[Several minor emperors]	[Brief time]			
Diocletian	284- 305 A.D.	Whole Empire	303 A.D.	XXX
Maximus II	305- 313 A.D.	Whole Empire	305 A.D.	XXXX
Constantine	313- 337 A.D.	Tolerated, then Embraced Christianity		

X= Moderate Persecutions
XX= Severe Persecutions

XXX= Very Severe Persecutions
XXXX= Most Severe Persecutions

Outline of Revelation

I. EARTHLY CONFLICT: The world against the church. Chapters 1- 11

- A. Christ among the lampstands [candlesticks]. 1- 3**
 - 1. John's vision and charge. 1:1- 1:20
 - 2. Letters to *four* churches of Asia. 2:1- 2:29
 - 3. Letters to *three* churches of Asia. 3:1- 3:22

- B. The Book and the Lamb. 4, 5**
 - 1. The throne room of heaven. 4:1- 4:11
 - 2. The sealed Book. 5:1- 5:4
 - 3. The worthy Lamb. 5:5- 5:14

- C. The Book unsealed. 6:1- 8:1**
 - 1. The first *six* seals removed. 6:1- 6:17
 - 2. An interlude: the sealed and the saved. 7:1- 7:17
 - 3. The *seventh* seal removed. 8:1

- D. The sounding of *seven* trumpets. 8:2- 11:19**
 - 1. Making ready to sound. 8:2- 8:6
 - 2. *Four* trumpets of destruction. 8:7- 8:12
 - 3. *Two* trumpets of woe. 8:13- 9:21
 - 4. Another interlude: 10:1- 11:14
 - a. John and the little book. 10:1- 10:11
 - b. John and the temple. 11:1,2
 - c. God's witnesses. 11:3- 11:14
 - 5. The sounding of the *seventh* trumpet. 11:15- 11:19

II. SPIRITUAL MEANINGS: Satan against the Savior. Chapters 12- 22

- A. Evil plans thwarted-- the Savior lives! 12:1- 12:12**

- B. Violence against the church. 12:13- 13:18**
 - 1. Persecution begun. 12:13-17
 - 2. Satan's sea beast. 13:1-13:10
 - 3. Satan's land beast. 13:11-13:18

- C. Comfort to saints; warning to sinners. 14:1- 14:20**
 - 1. The 144,000. 14:1-5
 - 2. Judgment is coming. 14:6-20

D. God's vengeance prepared: the bowls [vials] of wrath. 15:1- 15:8

- 1. The song of Moses and the Lamb. 15:1-4**
- 2. Preparing for the bowls of wrath. 15:5-8**

E. *Seven* plagues poured out. 16:1- 16:21

F. The vision of a harlot and a beast. 17:1- 17:18

- 1. Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots. 17:1-6**
- 2. The scarlet beast. 17:7-11**
- 3. The ten horns of the beast. 17:12-18**

G. The fall of Babylon the Great. 18:1- 18:24

- 1. Babylon is fallen! 18:1-8**
- 2. Kings and merchants lament. 18:9-20**
- 3. Babylon's utter destruction. 18:21-24**

H. Christ's complete victory over Satan's agents. 19:1- 19:21

- 1. Rejoicing in heaven-- God reigns! 19:1-6**
- 2. Anticipating the marriage supper of the Lamb. 19:7-10**
- 3. Christ prepared for battle. 19:11-16**
- 4. Victory at Armageddon. 19:17-21**

I. Satan defeated and judgment executed on his agents. 20:1- 20:15

- 1. The devil is bound. 20:1-3**
- 2. Martyrs reign with Christ. 20:4-6**
- 3. Satan loosed. 20:7-10**
- 4. The great judgment of God. 20:11-15**

J. Ultimate reward for the faithful. 21:1- 22:5

- 1. A new heaven and a new earth. 21:1**
- 2. New Jerusalem in heaven. 21:2-27**
- 3. The new heaven. 22:1-5**

K. Final charges and last warnings. 22:6- 22:21

- 1. Reward and punishment. 22:6-17**
- 2. Sanctity of the revelation. 22:18-21**

NOTE-- Citations and quotations are taken from the New King James Version [NKJV] except where noted otherwise. Other versions: King James [KJV]; American Standard [ASV]; Revised Standard [RSV]; Confraternity (Catholic) [Conf.]. Greek word definitions are from W.E. Vine, except where noted.

1. Why is Revelation sometimes considered the “turn around” book of the N.T.?
2. What was the original name of the book [as translated from the Greek]?
3. What are three examples of apocalyptic writing found in the O.T.?
4. Symbols in Revelation may be grouped into categories. What are some of them?
5. Give three common ways of interpreting Revelation and explain in a few words the approach taken by each one.
6. What two terms are used to describe Christ both in John’s gospel and in Revelation and nowhere else in the N.T.?
7. John was on the island of _____ when he received this vision from Christ.
8. List the seven churches to which this Revelation was to be sent by John.
9. Scholars are divided about *when* Revelation was written. Some claim an _____ date [time: _____]; others insist on a _____ date [time: _____].
10. The Roman emperors in power at these two dates [above] were _____ and _____.

Lesson Two: Chapter 1:1-20

Christ Among the Lampstands

Chapters 1-11 of Revelation are sometimes characterized as “CONFLICT: The World Against the Church.” In this first of two main sections, visions are seen by John that show how the church must expect harsh opposition by Satan’s agents in the world. The opening visions focus on the seven typical churches of Asia and reveal the dangerous inroads already being made by the devil into the faith and faithfulness of the Lord’s people in those congregations. Subsequent visions proclaim the supreme power of God to take control of this threatening situation, giving rise to confidence and encouragement for saints who are willing to stand firm against the forces of evil in the world. Then, another series of visions reveal that the Lord of heaven has His own plans to employ all manner of things both human and nonhuman to defeat those who seek to destroy His cause. Finally, the ultimate victory of the Lamb’s kingdom over its enemies is proclaimed with great anticipation.

Christ Among the Seven Golden Lampstands-- Chapters 1-3

I. John’s vision from the Lord. 1:1-10.

A. The authority underlying this very unusual and challenging revelation to the disciples must be established at the outset. If its goal of encouraging discouraged saints was to be realized, the origin of the message must be viewed by them as divine.

1. God gave this Revelation to John to give to His people (vs. 1).
2. John had heard the voice of God speaking to him (vs. 10).
3. He had seen Christ the Revelator with his own eyes (vs. 12,13).
4. He was commanded to write exactly what he saw in the heavenly visions (vs. 19).

B. The authority of the revelation resided in the nature of the Revelator. 1:1-8.

1. Its primary source was God (vs. 1).
2. Its secondary source was Jesus Christ to whom it was given by the Father (vs. 1).
 - a. He was a faithful witness (vs. 5).
 - b. He was validated by heaven as the firstborn from the dead (vs. 5).
 - c. He was ruler over the kings of the earth (vs. 5).
 - d. He loved His saints enough to die for them (vs. 5).
 - e. He had washed the redeemed from their sins with His own blood (vs. 5).
 - f. He had made them kings to rule and priests to serve in heavenly things (vs. 6).
 - g. He would return in power to execute His will upon men (vs. 6) [See Acts 1:11.].
 - h. He is worthy of glory from all and of dominion over all forever (vs. 6).
 - i. His enemies will be vanquished both now and at the end of the world (vs. 7).
 - j. He is ALL in ALL-- Alpha and Omega; the Beginning and the End (vs. 8).

- C. The authority of the message also resided in the *nature* of the message. 1:1-3.
 - 1. It concerned matters that would “shortly take place” (vs. 1).
 - 2. It was underpinned by the witness of John of what he saw (vs. 2).
 - 3. It promised great blessings to all who accepted it as true (vs. 3).
 - a. Seven beatitudes [blessings] are promised throughout the revelation.
 - b. See the “Beatitudes of Revelation” on page 16.
- D. The authority of the message resided in the *circumstances* surrounding it. 1:9-12.
 - 1. Its spokesman [John] was their brother in the kingdom of Christ (vs. 9).
 - 2. He was a companion [sharer] in the tribulation brought by the world (vs. 9).
 - 3. His salvation, like the recipients’, would depend on exercising patience (vs. 9).
 - 4. The revelation was *specific* as to where John was, what he actually *heard* and *saw* when he received the revelation, and what he was told to do (vs. 9-12, 17ff.).
 - 5. The Holy Spirit controlled the giving and receiving of the message. John was “in the Spirit” *on the Lord’s Day* (vs. 10a).

II. John’s *charge* from the Lord. 1:10b-20.

- A. What John heard and saw when he received the Revelation. 1:10b-16.
 - 1. He *heard* a loud voice like a trumpet (vs. 10b).
 - 2. He *saw* seven golden lampstands (vs. 12), representing the seven churches (vs. 20).
 - 3. He *saw* one “like” a [son of] man [ASV] among the lampstands (vs. 13) who:
 - a. Did not *closely* resemble an ordinary man (vs. 13-16);
 - b. Wore a long garment and a golden girdle (vs. 13);
 - c. Had white hair and eyes like flame (vs. 14);
 - d. Had feet like brass and a voice like roaring waters (vs. 15);
 - e. Held seven stars in His right hand (vs. 16), representing the churches’ messengers [angels] (vs. 20);
 - f. Had a sharp sword going out of His mouth (vs. 16) [See Heb. 4:12.];
 - g. Had a face that shone like the sun at its brightest (vs. 16).
- B. What John was told to do when he received the Revelation. 1:17-20
 - 1. He was not to be afraid because this was the Jesus whom he had trusted and who had shown special love to him at an earlier time (vs. 17). [See John 1:1,2; 13:23; 19:26; 21:20.]
 - 2. He who had overcome Satan’s most potent weapon [death] and who controlled its power [had the keys] over others could keep John from all harm (vs. 18). [See Matt. 16:18,19.]
 - 3. John should write all he had seen and would see in these visions (vs. 19).
 - 4. The “mystery” of the Revelation directly involved the seven churches [lampstands] and their messengers/readers [stars] (vs. 20).
 - a. The “angels” were likely not literal angels. Local churches would have messengers or readers but not heavenly angels assigned to their service.

- b. “Angels” were not elders of the churches, because each church had only one angel. Local congregations always had a plurality of elders. [See Acts 20:17.]
- c. The “angel” of a church was possibly, as some suppose, its spiritual character that would determine its response to the message sent by John.
- d. The “angels” possibly were the readers (vs. 3) who would also serve as messengers of the heavenly message to the churches. They bore a heavy responsibility, especially toward any members who could not read. In some instances this responsibility might have been assigned to a certain minister or elder of the church.

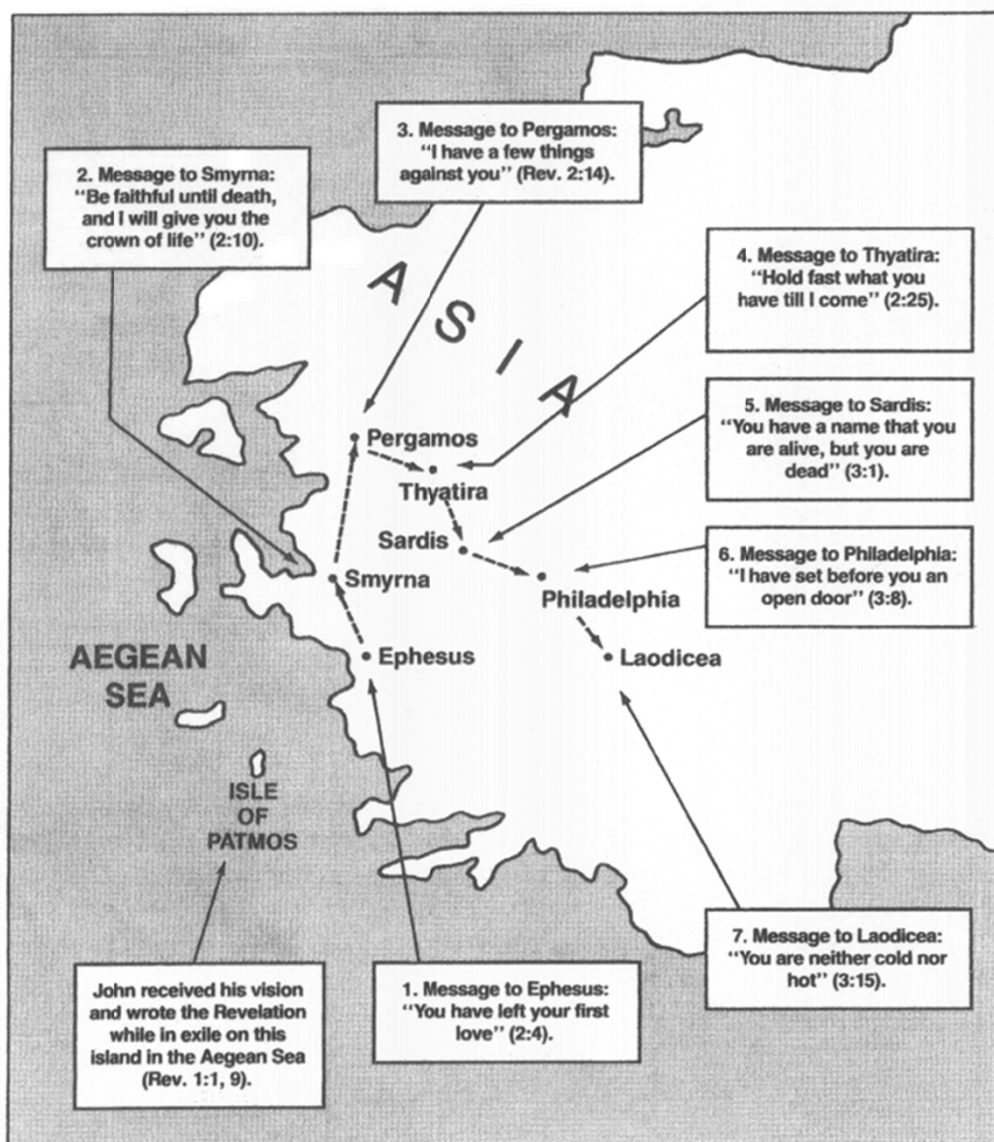
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REVELATION’S BEATITUDES

- 1. Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it...”
- 2. Revelation 14:13: “...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”
- 3. Revelation 16:15: “Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”
- 4. Revelation 19:9: “...Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”
- 5. Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.”
- 6. Revelation 22:7: “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
- 7. Revelation 22:14: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”

- 1. What is said about when the prophecy of Revelation would be fulfilled? (1,3)**
- 2. By what authority does John claim to give this revelation? (1,2)**
- 3. Who will receive a blessing from the revelation? (3)**
- 4. Name the Persons from whom the revelation came. (4,5)**
- 5. What does John say about Jesus as a Revelator? (5,6)**
- 6. Why is it vital to respect the authority of Jesus Christ? (7,8)**
- 7. How does John describe himself and his faithfulness? (9)**
- 8. Consult a map showing the seven churches. [See map on page 18.] Draw a line connecting the localities. What is your impression of the result? (11)**
- 9. List the elements of the vision seen by John. (12-16)**
- 10. What effect did the vision have on John, and what reassurance was he given? (17,18)**
- 11. What instructions did John receive about the revelation? (19)**
- 12. How were the stars and lampstands of the vision explained? (20)**

The Seven Churches



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Lesson Three: Chapter 2:1-29

Letters to Four Churches

There were *seven* churches in Asia Minor that seem to have been fairly typical of all congregations of the Lord's people throughout that area as well as in other locations. The challenges faced by these *seven* churches were the same problems faced by other churches. All churches needed to be warned about the pitfalls into which some of these *seven* had fallen. All disciples who attempted to live godly lives would suffer persecution at the hands of the enemy (2Tim. 3:12). Every persecuted saint stood in need of the reassurance and encouragement offered by these visions to John from the Lord. The Revelation probably had a wide circulation among Christians at the end of the first century and thereafter.

I. Letters to *four* churches of Asia. 2:1-29. [Locate these churches on the map, page 18.]

A. The letters generally follow a *pattern* in their presentations:

1. Identification of the church being addressed;
2. A description of Christ from whom the message came;
3. Commendation [where possible] for good works done;
4. Criticism [where needed] for spiritual shortcomings;
5. A warning of retribution for failures;
6. God's promise of blessings for the faithful;
7. Encouragement to heed God's message to each church.

B. The letters are *specific* to these Asian churches but *universally applicable* to other churches and individuals. These were *typical* churches, members, problems, and needs. The letters are filled with lessons for Christians that never become obsolete.

C. The letter to the church at Ephesus ["The Loveless Church"]. 2:1-7.

1. Ephesus was a wealthy and prosperous city near the coast of Asia Minor. For many years it was the commercial center of the region. The great temple of the pagan goddess Diana was located there. Paul visited the city briefly in Acts 18:19-21 and returned for a more lengthy stay, according to Acts 19:1-10. He left Ephesus following a protest instigated by shrine-makers who were fearful of the effects of the gospel on their livelihood (Acts 20:1).
2. The pre-eminent Christ holds *every* church responsible for faithfulness (vs. 1).
 - a. The seven stars [messengers] of the churches are in His right hand of power. Their messages are under the complete control of the Lord and possess all the authority of heaven.
 - b. He is aware of the churches' attributes, both good and bad because He "walks" among them. His knowledge is firsthand, and it is *accurate*.

3. Ephesus was credited with several positive characteristics (vs. 2):
 - a. Their works were known [approved] by Christ. Their faith had been active (James 2:24), and their labor [“toil resulting in weariness”-- Vine] had been diligent in many areas (Heb. 4:11);
 - b. They had exhibited patience in the face of adversity (Jas. 1:4; Heb. 12:1);
 - c. They were intolerant of false teachers:
 - (1) They could not bear those who were evil (vs. 2);
 - (2) They had rejected and exposed pseudo apostles (vs. 2); [See 1John 4:1.]
 - (3) They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans (vs.6). Some identify these as a form of Gnosticism, but details are unknown;
 - d. They had persevered and had not become weary in spite of obstacles (vs. 3).
4. Ephesus had one great failing in its service to Jesus. “*This*” was against them:
 - a. The members had “left their *first* love” (vs. 4);
 - b. This likely described their *dedication*, not their *activity*;
 - c. The lack of love [commitment] could have been toward:
 - (1) The doctrine of Christ. Years earlier, the Ephesians had burned their books of magic in preference for the truth of the gospel (Acts 20:19,20);
 - (2) Their brethren in Christ. They had once been commended for their love of *all* the saints (Eph. 1:15);
 - (3) The preaching of Christ. As new Christians, they had supported Paul in *boldly* speaking the gospel (Eph. 6:18-20).
 - d. Regardless of which area(s) had suffered a diminished commitment, their lack of zeal had become a serious problem. However, it was a problem common to churches and individuals in the first century, and it is still a threat today. The Ephesian church was at this time more than forty years old, and maintaining enthusiasm for any good work over that long a time is very difficult. The nation of Israel had made a similar mistake following the death of Joshua (Judges 2:10,11).
5. Jesus sternly warned this church about a remedy for this sin; they must (vs. 5):
 - a. Remember the zeal that had accompanied their activities as a young church;
 - b. Repent of having “fallen away” from behavior that once had brought God’s approval;
 - c. Replicate previous internal zeal when doing current acts of obedience.
6. The consequences of continuing in half-hearted compliance were serious (vs. 5):
 - a. Time had run out on the Lord’s patience. He would “come quickly” for an accounting if their response to his warning was not immediate;
 - b. The lampstand [church] would lose its recognition as a faithful congregation. Its “fall” from God’s grace would be complete;
 - c. Every receptive ear must pay heed to this message to Ephesus and to the other

letters being sent to the other six congregations. Apparently, all letters were to be circulated among all churches for the benefit of every member (vs.7).

7. Penitent hearts that renewed their vows of devotion to Jesus would be forgiven of their shortcomings. Their sins would be “overcome” (vs.7).
 - a. Overcomers would “eat” from the tree of life in God’s Paradise (vs. 7).
 - b. The tree is in heaven, and it gives *eternal life* to the saved (Rev. 22:2). Sin had canceled Adam’s access to the tree in the physical paradise (Gen. 3:24).

D. The letter to the church at Smyrna [“The Persecuted Church”]. 2:8-11.

1. Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a prosperous and flourishing city and stood as a rival to Ephesus in many ways. The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the congregation at Smyrna are obscure, but many think that Paul was involved in that event on his third journey, 53-56 A.D. (Acts 19:10).
2. Smyrna was a city intensely loyal to Rome and steeped in the pagan religion of the Romans. It displayed unwavering devotion to the emperor and made emperor worship a high priority in its civic activity.
3. Religious intolerance made it very difficult for Christians there to be faithful to their duties in the Lord’s church. They were confronted by (vs. 9):
 - a. Tribulation. We are not told about the nature of all their persecutions and hardships, but we can safely conclude that they were numerous and severe;
 - b. Poverty. During the reign of emperor Domitian [81-96 A.D.], it was common practice for the Roman government to confiscate the property of professed believers as a means of punishing them for their loyalty to Jesus. This action left many disciples in abject poverty;
 - c. Blasphemy. Jewish zealots joined the Romans in making life as miserable as possible for Christians. What they lacked in political power, they made up in personal ugliness toward the Lord’s people, whom they regarded as traitors to Jehovah and to His Law through Moses. Their wicked behavior in reality denied their Jewish connections to God and revealed their true inward allegiance to Satan, who was the moving force behind the vile conduct of every enemy of Jesus. Jesus had suffered the same blasphemy from zealous Jews;
 - d. Imminent imprisonment. The agents of the devil would soon throw some of the disciples into jail. Their suffering there would last “ten days,” which possibly suggests that their imprisonment would be long enough to test them and to make a display to their adversaries of their deep faith (vs. 10);
 - e. Death. During the “ten days” of their imprisonment, some of them possibly could be so mistreated that they would die from their afflictions. Facing this possibility would present the greatest of tests and afford the greatest of opportunities to proclaim what Jesus means to His disciples (vs. 10).
4. None of “these things” [above] should cause fear in the saints at Smyrna (vs.10).

- a. Even death, the thing most to be feared by the faithless, was of little consequence to true believers. Faithfulness until [unto--ASV] death would qualify the believer for the gift [crown] of eternal life (vs. 10).
 - b. Jesus Christ's own experience with death was ample testimony to His disciples that death holds no real fear for the faithful. His enemies killed Him, but He "came to life" in a glorious resurrection, demonstrating that He is indeed the "First and the Last," the Eternal One who "Is" (John 8:58). The same power that accomplished the marvelous feat of resurrection for Jesus would likewise do the same thing for His followers who made the ultimate sacrifice for His name.
 - c. Many saints proved themselves true to the Savior by showing courage in the face of execution by their religious enemies. It is told that Polycarp, an aged Christian at Smyrna [c. 156 A.D.], was ordered to swear devotion to Caesar. When he refused, he was threatened with death by wild beasts or by fire, but he declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" He was soon thereafter burned at the stake when he persisted in confessing Jesus rather than bowing to Caesar.
5. God knew of their good works despite severe obstacles to their faith (vs. 9). No act of obedience by a Christian goes unnoticed or unrewarded by a faithful Lord (Mark 9:41).
 6. "Do not fear" because physical death for the sake of Jesus would assure that martyrs for the faith would remain untouched by the "second" [spiritual] death that carried far more serious consequences than any punishment imposed by wicked men (vs. 11). [See Rev. 20:14.]
 7. The Lord did not find it necessary to rebuke the saints at Smyrna for any particular transgressions. This letter stands as a tribute to their conviction and absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ as their only Lord.
- E. The letter to the church at Pergamum ["The Compromising Church"]. 2:12-17.
1. Pergamum was for a time the capital city of Asia and the center of emperor worship. Devotion to the empire and to the emperor was the foundation upon which every prosperous enterprise was built. Numerous temples of worship were constructed throughout the city, and citizens were expected to participate in the rituals that paid tribute to the name of the current Caesar. Life for any Christian who refused to engage in the popular idolatry of Pergamum was so difficult that Ray Summers labels the town, "Hell's Headquarters." Both economic survival and social acceptance were usually dependent on conformity to its pagan norms.
 2. Christ's self-description, "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (vs. 12), is designed to encourage the disciples in their struggle to be faithful in such a profane place. The sword typified the great power of the Romans to enforce their

demands on subjugated peoples, and they were not reluctant to use it. The Roman sword brought fear to the heart of anyone who dared to deviate from the empire's expectations. But there was another sword far more powerful than any raised by human hands. Christ's sword was efficient [two-edged] and it was *sharp*! No earthly power could resist its thrusts to destroy sin and false religions!

3. In spite of the obstacles that sought to defeat them, the Christians at Pergamum could be commended for faithful acts (vs. 13):
 - a. They had unidentified good "works" that were known to Christ;
 - b. It was hard to be faithful where "Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwells";
 - c. They had confessed the name [Person] of Christ as Lord rather than offering even lip-service to the name of Caesar;
 - d. They had remained loyal to the Lord even when a certain Antipas [and likely others] was killed because of that same loyalty.
4. Sadly, a blanket endorsement of the church was impossible because of the sins of some who had not been as faithful as the rest (vs. 14).
 - a. Some members held to the doctrine of Baalam [See Num. 22-25] who failed to openly curse Israel but accomplished the same sinful goal by showing Balak how to tempt the Israelites into the sinful conduct of idolatry and fornication (Num. 25:1-3). False teachers seemingly had been allowed to teach that compromising with emperor worship was better than being persecuted for unwavering loyalty to Jesus. Outward participation in emperor worship and the immoral conduct that often accompanied it was harmless to the disciples' faith, they said, as long as *mentally* they "retained" [reserved] their convictions about true worship and godly living.
 - b. Other members were guilty of holding to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. They had not "hated" those teachings as the Ephesians had done (2:6). We can only speculate about this doctrine since no details are disclosed about it, but the fact is clear that it was evil enough for Christ to hate it, and *all* His children were expected to hate it, too.
5. Some of those who had not been entangled in the web of false doctrine had been too tolerant of those who had. "You [still] *have*" those who have strayed into error (vs. 14,15). Strong opposition and perhaps church discipline had been called for but had been withheld. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians was very much in order for the church at Pergamum: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1Cor.5:6).
6. Wrongdoers at Pergamum could choose between repentance and the avenging sword of the Lord. The same sword that offered protection to the faithful (vs. 12) would also punish the unfaithful with retribution for their waywardness (vs. 16).
7. Overcomers of the temptation to compromise with the evil teachings and prac-

tices of the Baalamites and the Nicolaitans would receive rich rewards in return for holding on to the truth.

- a. They would be allowed to eat some of the “hidden manna” (vs. 17). The connection between this manna and the heavenly manna discussed by Jesus in John’s other writing (John 6:31-33) is clear. And in the same way that people failed to understand how Jesus could be the “spiritual bread from heaven” (Jn. 6:36), only saints who had fully embraced the gospel could truly appreciate this eternal “manna” that had been given to them from heaven. To lost men in the world and to unconverted people “in the church,” it was and would remain forever hidden.
- b. Also, loyal disciples at Pergamum would receive a “white stone” upon which a “new name” was written (vs. 17). Many opinions exist about the significance of this stone. Summers suggests four possibilities:
 - (1) A white stone was given to someone tried and acquitted of a crime;
 - (2) A white stone was given to a freed slave when he acquired citizenship;
 - (3) A white stone was the sign of victory for the winner of a contest;
 - (4) A white stone was conferred upon a victorious warrior.
- c. Hendriksen is divided in his opinion between two viewpoints:
 - (1) The white stone represents the pure and enduring character of the saint to whom it is given. The “new name” is the representation of his new and sanctified nature in Christ. This name [character] is “known” personally and fully only by its bearer;
 - (2) The white stone is the fellowship that the Christian enjoys with Christ, whose name is “written” on the stone as the Savior and the Mediator for the overcoming disciple. Overcomers are also promised in Rev. 3:12 that the “new name” of Christ will be “written” on them to signify His ownership. Unbelievers are said to receive a “mark” on their foreheads to show their allegiance to the devil (Rev. 20:4). Only Christians can fully comprehend and appreciate the real worth of their attachment to the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- d. Perhaps each of the suggestions above has something of value to contribute to our grasp of the Lord’s meaning in these promises to loyal followers.

F. The letter to the church at Thyatira [“The Corrupted Church”]. 2:18-29.

1. Thyatira was situated amid several valleys that made it militarily vulnerable to enemy forces. Accordingly, it was heavily defended by Roman soldiers. It was a trading city and was replete with trade guilds of all kinds, each of which had its tutelary deity. Devotions offered to these pagan mini-gods raised serious problems for sincere disciples. Dyes to color fabrics were among the items produced in the city and dispersed throughout Asia. Lydia, one of Paul’s prominent converts,

was a “seller of purple from the city of Thyatira” (Acts 16:14).

2. Anticipating the criticism He would offer to this church about its compromising practices, the Lord describes Himself as having eyes like fire and feet like brass (vs. 18). Those who had compromised principles of truth for the sake of “making a living” should remember that Christ’s “flaming eyes” could see through their smoke screen of shallow excuses and could detect a weak faith as the real reason for their disloyal behavior. They might fool themselves about their traitorous conduct, but they could not fool the Lord!
3. Not only did the Lord have “flaming eyes” with which to measure the sincerity of the wavering saints at Thyatira but also He had feet like “fine brass” by which to show them that standing firm against severe temptation is both necessary and possible for truly committed disciples (vs. 18). He too had been pressed to compromise His divinity but chose to die rather than deny his relationship with His Father (John 19:4). Some church members claimed that “a man must live” as justification for their participation in guild-sponsored activities, but Jesus had denounced that concept when He demonstrated that serving God was His highest priority, far above the physical “necessities” of life (Luke 9:58).
4. Like the churches previously addressed, Christ was aware of their positive attributes [love, patience, faith, service]. He also acknowledged that their “last” works were *more* than their “first” (vs. 19). Instead of allowing time to erode their zeal for serving the Lord, the passing of years had witnessed an *increase* in their works of obedience [which is an uncommon occurrence]. They had “abounded more and more” in compliance with God’s will for His people (1Thes. 4:1).
5. One criticism had been leveled against Ephesus; a “few things” were wrong at Pergamum, as were some things at Thyatira (vs. 20):
 - a. A “prophetess” had been allowed to teach false doctrine to some members and to lead them into the ungodly practices of sexual immorality [fornication] and eating meats dedicated to idols. Strong opposition from the faithful evidently had been lacking; this “Jezebel” [perhaps not her real name] had been “allowed” to accomplish her vile purpose of “beguiling” God’s servants (vs. 20);
 - b. We are told nothing more about this self-proclaimed prophetess “Jezebel” or about what lies she was promoting at Thyatira. Her doctrine was associated with “the depths of Satan” (vs. 24) and may have been akin to gnostic principles that would soon cause severe damage to the work of Christ in this area of the world. This philosophy held that one could “sin” in the flesh without causing harm to the spirit, and that would have fit exactly into the rationalizing at Thyatira about fraternizing with the guilds while maintaining an identity as saints;
 - c. Jezebel and her followers in some way had been warned previously by Christ about the condemnation attached to their conduct. They had been called on to repent but had refused to heed heaven’s warning (vs. 21). An unspecified but

- adequate period of time had been allowed for a change, which suggests that the present situation was not a new development at Thyatira. Also, the Lord's words indicate that the vile woman was "practicing what she preached";
- d. All spiritual transgressions and all physical sins into which some disciples had been seduced would be harshly punished by the avenging Jesus if they remained unrepentant (vs. 22):
- (1) Jezebel would suffer severe illness [physical or spiritual, or both];
 - (2) Her supporters would experience great tribulation of an undescribed nature;
 - (3) Her "children" [literal or figurative] would be killed [actually or spiritually] (vs. 23);
 - (4) Retribution would be given openly to assure that everyone [all the churches] would be impressed that the Lord (a) knows exactly what is going on among disciples and (b) will reward and punish strictly according to their *works*, good or bad (vs. 23).
6. Some members at Thyatira had not been actively involved in supporting the false teaching and the vile lifestyle of Jezebel or the efforts that had prevented an appropriate response to her filthy activities on the part of sincere brethren in the congregation. To them, and to "you" [either John or the angel/messenger/reader of the church], a comforting promise was given. God would not seize upon the sins of saints at Thyatira as a reason to add additional restrictions on Gentile believers (vs. 24). It would be enough for them to "hold fast" to the standards of righteous living that had been placed on them long before (vs. 25). [See Acts 15:28,29.]
7. Two more grand promises were added to encourage the faithful to remain so:
- a. Overcomers [of Jezebel's temptations] would be given "power" over the nations (vs. 26). A quotation from Psalm 2, in which Jesus was assured the control of all peoples and all things in the world, is here applied to His disciples as well. Christians will "reign" [in the exalted position of overcomers] through the Person of Christ both in eternity (2Tim. 2:12) and as spiritual "kings" over the unsaved world (Rev. 5:10). "Potter's vessels" [worldly people and earthly enterprises] cannot endure against the plans that heaven holds for the destiny of the saved;
 - b. The "morning star" had been given to Jesus by His Father and would in turn be given to Christ's loyal saints. The literal morning star is "any of the planets Venus, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, and Saturn when it precedes the sun in rising, esp. Venus" [Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary]. Obviously, this is a figurative reference to something received first by Jesus that would be of great value to His followers. Probably, just as the morning star signifies the end of night's darkness and the arrival of day's light, the symbolism points to the end of persecution and suffering and to their arrival at a state of comfort and blessing. The same relief that the Son of God had enjoyed at the end of His ordeal at the hands of the Jews would be

conferred on the sons of God who dared to be loyal to their Lord despite bad treatment from their enemies.

- 8. Those who were disposed to respect inspired revelation were given heavenly advice to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Any other response to this letter would risk eternal negative consequences.**

II. All churches and individuals must still “hear what the Spirit says...”

- A. The Spirit speaks to all men through His “word of truth.”**
B. “Hearing” involves obeying the word as well as listening to the Spirit.

- 1. List the positive characteristics of the Ephesian church. (2,3,6) What negative assessment was made of them? (4)**
- 2. What remedy did Christ offer for their spiritual illness? (5)**
- 3. Overcomers at Ephesus were given what promise? (7) What Old Testament event comes to mind with this promise?**
- 4. What did Jesus say He knew about Christians at Smyrna? (9,10) Their enemies? (9)**
- 5. Why was Jesus an appropriate one to encourage the Smyrna church about its approaching problems? (8,10, 11)**
- 6. The spiritual environment at Pergamum[os] was described in what two terms? (13)**
- 7. To what extent were the saints at Pergamum faithful? (13)**
- 8. Name two false doctrines not adequately condemned by the church at Pergamum. (14,15) What do you know about these doctrines?**
- 9. What warning and what promise were given to the church at Pergamum? (16,17)**
- 10. What commendation was given to saints at Thyatira? What about their works? (19)**
- 11. Who was “Jezebel,” and how was she like her namesake in the O.T.? (20-23; 1Kings 18-21, especially 21:25,26)**
- 12. What would happen to Jezebel? To those who sinned with her? To her children? (21-23) To those who had resisted sin? (24-28)**

Lesson Four: Chapter 3:1-22

Letters to Three Churches

- I. Letters to *three* Asian churches. 3:1-22. [Locate these churches on the map, page 18.]
- A. The letter to the church at Sardis ["The Dead Church"]. 3:1-6.
1. By the time this letter was addressed to Sardis, the city had experienced a long cyclical history of rising to and falling from prominence among other cities in its vicinity. From it many kings had ruled, of whom perhaps the most famous was the fabled Croesus. In numerous reversals of fortune, it had been conquered and subjected to the rule of other kingdoms. Sardis was situated atop a lofty hill of such great height and with such rocky, almost perpendicular sides that its inhabitants considered it to be impregnable from any attack by its enemies. However, it had been taken by the army of Cyrus, king of Persia, in 549 B.C. when, it is told, a crevice was discovered in one side of the mountain, and enemy soldiers swarmed into the city by that route.
 2. The church at Sardis does not appear to have been faced with problems involving pagan religions or the worship of the Roman emperor as were some of these seven congregations. The threat to their spiritual security was from within. They suffered from their own inattention to what was really important in serving the Lord and from devoting themselves to matters that looked good on the surface but had no real spiritual value to anyone.
 3. Christ is described as having "the seven Spirits of God" and the "seven stars" (vs. 1). The seven Spirits, perhaps representing the completeness of God's power to guide cooperative men into acceptable conduct, will be encountered again in 4:5, where they burn like lamps before God's throne. They are the source of compliance with the will of God as they shine the light of truth into the hearts of willing disciples. The stars are the agents [messengers] of compliance as they deliver God's messages to the saints and offer the churches opportunities for change, even when, like Sardis, their waywardness has become extreme.
 4. Sardis, by their "works," had built a reputation as a strong and prosperous congregation. We are not told what these works [activities] were or who judged them to be signs of spiritual strength. We do know that the Lord looked at their activities differently from other observers. He looked for *substance* rather than for *ornamentation*, and He saw *none!* By the heavenly measurements used to determine the true spirituality of a church, Sardis was *dead!* And, what was worse, they

- had nobody to blame but themselves (vs. 1).
5. Two Christians, it is said, were discussing conditions in several congregations. The name of a large rural congregation was mentioned with its big numbers of people attending on Sunday morning, the “big name” preachers who spoke in its gospel meetings, and other such things. One person observed, “And the best thing about that church is, there is never any friction among the members.” “Well, no wonder that there’s no friction there,” the other replied, “because there are no moving parts!” It is alarming to realize that this description could likely be applied as well to many other local churches throughout the land.
 6. Fortunately, the outlook for the church at Sardis was not totally hopeless. There were still a “few” there whose spirituality had not been completely extinguished and who might be able to rekindle a spark of dedication to gospel work in some of the other members. There were *three* things they might be able to do (vs. 2):
 - a. Be watchful. Perhaps there is a veiled reference here to the history of the city, which had been the victim of carelessness more than once. The advantages conferred upon Sardis by its geographic location had in the past proved useless without the unrelenting diligence of its defenders. Similarly, a careless attitude toward using the spiritual equipment provided for its defense against the assaults of the devil had resulted in the erosion of whatever strength the church once had possessed (1Thes. 5:8; Eph. 6:14-17). Satan never abandons his pursuit of the faithful, so vigilance about his tactics is a necessity, not an option (1Pet. 5:8; 2Cor. 2:11);
 - b. Strengthen what remains. The spiritual vitality that once had characterized the Sardis church was almost gone. However, some good things “remained” among a “few” of its members. They apparently had tried to continue in meaningful works in spite of the willingness of most members just to “keep house” for the Lord. Perhaps renewing their enthusiasm about what they were trying to do would encourage others to renounce their own indifference and become more active again;
 - c. Persevere in what you do. Nothing causes inactivity in a church more surely than allowing planned work to “fizzle out” before goals are reached. Works undertaken at Sardis had been prematurely abandoned because of unmet expectations, distractions, the passing of time, or other factors that diminish the urgency and importance of scriptural works which, given time and opportunity, might bring a rich return.
 7. Continued unconcern in the majority could stifle and “kill” whatever interest remained in the “few” to do things that pleased God instead of things that would only impress casual observers of the congregation’s works (vs. 2).
 8. In view of this church’s true condition, its warning was not unexpected (vs. 3):
 - a. Remember the high standards of righteous living and faithful service that they were taught and that they had gladly embraced in return for salvation in Christ.

- Remember also that the requirements of that salvation and the blessings it provides had not changed;
- b. “Hold fast” to the gospel and change their conduct [repent] in whatever ways they had strayed from their original dedication to follow in the steps of Jesus;
 - c. Those who refused to repent of their inactivity would surely be called into account and made to suffer the consequences of their sin. Further warnings would not be issued; adequate time had passed for changes to be made. Judgment would come as a thief at a time and in a way unanticipated by offenders.
9. Punishment would be selective. The “few” whose spiritual garments were undefiled by lethargy or by immoral behavior would be spared the Lord’s wrath that would punish the guilty. They were “worthy” of better treatment (vs. 4).
- a. They would “walk” with the Lord in recognition of His acceptance of their efforts to gain His favor (Amos 3:3). Other loyal disciples such as Enoch (Gen. 5:24) had received that honor in return for their faithfulness.
 - b. They would walk in “white garments” (vs. 5), signifying the purity of their lives and the steadfastness of their commitment to Christ. White also symbolized their victory over the temptations that had caused so many of their fellow saints at Sardis to stray from the faith.
 - c. The name of each overcomer would remain written in God’s Book of Life (vs. 5). It was common practice for cities and towns of the first century to maintain lists of their citizens and to use those rolls for various purposes. Names were erased upon the death or the moving away of the enrollees. Such a list of “living” [spiritually acceptable] citizens of the Lord’s kingdom is kept [at least, figuratively] in the mind of God (Col. 1:13). Disciples whose name appear currently in God’s Book of Life are expected to give service in the kingdom and to receive the rewards attached to such service (Matt. 25:34-40).
 - d. Indolence or immorality will cause an offender’s name to be removed from the heavenly roll (vs. 5). It *is* possible for a person once saved to be lost again!
 - e. Names of the faithful will be confessed by Christ before His Father (vs. 5). This promise had been made by Jesus many years before (Matt. 10:32), and it likely applies to Christ’s endorsement of His loyal followers both in this world and in the final judgment. The “angels” before whom His holy confession is made are, of course, *heavenly* messengers and not messengers of the churches (1:20).
10. As He had done previously, Christ admonishes all disciples who “have an ear” to receive this warning to the churches “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1Thes. 2:13). *Hear* what the Spirit says (vs. 6)!

B. The letter to the church at Philadelphia [“The Faithful Church”]. 3:7-13.

1. “This city dates back to about 159 B.C. It won its name from Attalus, whose

- loyalty to his brother Eumenes won him the epithet Philadelphus, ‘brother lover’” [Summers]. It became a leading center for promoting Greek culture and Greek language among other cities in its region. It became an important city for trade and commerce and was known for its production of fine wines. Its deity was Dionysus, the god of wine. “However, opposition to the church and Christians stemmed from wealthy Jews who had a beautiful synagogue in the city and who seemed to have flourished there. There is no solid evidence that the saints were openly persecuted by the Jews, but they were opposed by them in every possible way” [Hailey].
2. Christ describes Himself in terms that possibly were intended to contrast His *divine* nature with the *fictitious* nature of their patron god Dionysus (vs. 7).
 - a. **Christ is holy.** One can but imagine the dissolute conduct of those who attended the pagan celebrations designed to honor a “god” of strong drink. Christ’s disciples, on the other hand, are to be “holy” because He is “holy” (1Pet. 1:15, 16). In Philadelphia, the “will of the Gentiles” was in vogue, and it was very difficult for Christians to be holy in their lives. Others thought it strange that they did not “run with them in the same flood of dissipation, and spoke “evil” of them (1Pet. 4:3,4);
 - b. **Christ is true.** Claims made for the divine nature of Christ can be substantiated by honest people. Many men were eyewitnesses of His resurrection from the grave (1Cor. 15:3-8), and their testimony cannot arbitrarily be thrust aside by skeptics without any contrary evidence. Obviously, no man can honestly testify to any concrete action ever taken by a false god to prove its existence or its need for a place in the lives of humans;
 - c. **Christ has the key of David** in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 22:22). A “key” suggests authority to open or close doors. From his literal throne, David as king had used his key of power to open doors of opportunity for loyal subjects and to close them against people he thought unworthy of his favor. Similarly, opportunities for service in the church and for the blessings attached to them are wholly under the control of the Lord. No human power is great enough to interfere with decisions He makes about who will and who won’t be given such opportunities. False gods like Dionysus were totally powerless to intervene in the affairs of men in any way.
 3. God always has work for people who want to work in His behalf (vs. 8). He opens doors for those who seek righteousness, and He allows them to take full advantage of the opportunities they accept. The church at Philadelphia had been given an opportunity to serve the Lord in spite of having just a “little strength” to perform that service. Their power was “little” in the eyes of the world when compared to the extensive resources available to the idolaters of the city in the pursuit of their pagan devotions. But a “little” power from God in the hands of His people

- was greater than all the power that could be mustered from among all those who might try to interfere with heaven's plans for this wicked and idolatrous city.
4. God was confident that the "little strength" of this faithful church was adequate to accomplish the task He had planned for them as they lived among this idolatrous citizenry. Their "track record" was good evidence that they would use their little strength to make the most of a big opportunity to do the work of God.
 - a. They had kept the word of God in spite of the scorn and opposition of those who had taken a strong stand against the gospel and against the church of Christ. The Christians' manner of godly living and devotions of spiritual worship were drastically different from the pagan culture of Philadelphia and adjacent cities and were sources of extensive criticism and opposition from Jews and Gentiles alike. Nevertheless, they had not wavered from strict adherence to what they had been taught in the gospel about life and worship.
 - b. They had not denied the name of the Savior. This fact indicates that opposition was not just in the form of scorn and derision of their activities. Pressure of unspecified kinds had been brought to bear on their convictions about the divinity and the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is likely that the disciples had experienced both economic and societal pressures to compromise their stand for the religion of the Lord. But they had been unmoved by whatever forces of evil had attacked their faith.
 5. Although there is no evidence of any serious Roman persecution at Philadelphia at this time, zealous Jews were active in raising opposition to the Lord's church in every possible way. Their synagogue probably was the place where plans were laid to cause problems for the Christians, which identified it as belonging to Satan rather than to Jehovah as they claimed. Some years earlier, Jesus in the flesh had made a similar accusation about Jews who claimed kinship with Abraham but refused to accept God's truth as Abraham always had done (John 8:39-44).
 6. Future events at Philadelphia would demonstrate to these Judaizers that God's favor had been with the Christians all along (vs. 9). Some of them would "worship at the "feet" of the disciples. This promise may or may not suggest the conversion of some of these Jewish zealots. It might just mean that some opponents of the truth would remain unconverted personally but would cease their active opposition because events [whatever they were] would indicate strong heavenly support for the cause espoused by the saints at Philadelphia.
 7. In addition to things that *would* occur to bring about change on the part of some of their adversaries, a second great blessing to this church would be realized in what would *not* happen (vs. 10). An "hour of trial" would [soon] present problems to disciples in the "whole [Asian] world." Christians at Philadelphia would be spared its full impact and could remain faithful if they chose to do so.

Some identify this “hour of trial” with the sufferings of the Jews in conjunction with Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 A.D. Others believe that a more widespread persecution of Christians would soon take place under the direction of Rome at the end of the first century. Faithful disciples would be sustained by Christ to endure the trials of the persecution, and those who “dwell on the earth” [unbelievers, Rev. 11:10] would be “tested” in how they would behave toward the church during the coming trials.

8. The time was short (1:1) until the tribulation would begin at Philadelphia [perhaps its earliest events had already begun in some places]. Jesus was “coming” soon in judgment against those who had harassed His people (vs. 11).
9. It was imperative that the disciples at Philadelphia “hold fast” what they had while the events of their “hour of trial” played out according to Christ’s plan for His people (vs. 11). Every disciple was promised a crown of victory in return for faithful perseverance. That crown would proclaim his righteousness before God (2Tim. 4:8) and would introduce him into eternal life (Rev. 2:10). Nothing should be allowed to interfere with the possession of his crown.
10. Overcomers would receive blessings in addition to those already specified (vs. 12):
 - a. Each one would become a “pillar” [a permanent fixture] in the heavenly temple. Although there will be no separate temple [place] where the saved can meet with God, the presence of the Father and the Son will be available throughout the heavenly city (Rev. 21:22). While on earth, each overcomer must continue to overcome everything that stands in his way of receiving eternal salvation (2Pet. 1:10,11). However, heaven will be free from anything that “defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” (21:27), and there will be no foreclosures on the mansions prepared for the saints by their Lord (John 14:1-3);
 - b. Three “new” names would be written on each overcomer to validate his right to be in heaven and to partake of eternal fellowship with Father, Son, and Spirit. Each “name tag” would be inscribed with the names of God, Christ, and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10). Christ’s “new name” represents all that He is now in nature and in power as the greatest Overcomer of all.

C. The letter to the church at Laodicea [“The Lukewarm Church”]. 3:14-22.

1. Biblical history gives us no record of the establishment of the church at Laodicea. It may be that Paul and others preached the gospel there during the time of the apostle’s stay in Ephesus. Luke says, “...all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).
2. The city of Laodicea was distinguished by three things, each of which was associated with a spiritual shortcoming in the church there:
 - a. Great wealth. Banking was a principal activity that brought riches to the

- population. Laodicea became so independently wealthy that Rome's offer of assistance following a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60 was refused, and the city bore the expense of rebuilding on its own;
- b. A thriving wool industry. An exceptionally high-quality wool was produced by a special breed of black sheep peculiar to the area. The wool was in great demand by clothing manufacturers and merchants everywhere;
 - c. A renowned school of medicine. Significant income was added to the economy of Laodicea from the sale of an eye salve developed in the medical school. The salve enjoyed a wide distribution throughout Asia and elsewhere.
3. It is often true that the characteristics displayed by the general population of a place will also be found in the membership of a congregation in that place. This was certainly so at Laodicea. The gross materialism of their environment had invaded the thinking of the Lord's disciples. They held themselves in much higher regard than they should have. They were proud of their self-sufficiency and were content with themselves spiritually, despite their lack of zeal and genuine commitment to the work of God in their city.
4. The sinfulness of this worldly attitude is contrasted to the self-description of Jesus (vs. 14):
- a. Christ is the "Amen," which signifies, "Thus, 'Amen' said by God 'it is and shall be so,' and by men, 'so let it be'" (Vine). Man is not in charge of his own destiny. God is in control, and He will determine which paths men will walk (Jer. 10:23);
 - b. Christ is the "Faithful and True Witness." The Laodiceans had developed an inflated opinion of themselves that was totally different from the Lord's assessment of them. The things of which they were so proud were the very things that had proved to be their spiritual downfall. They thought they "needed nothing," but the truth was, they needed a complete spiritual makeover;
 - c. Christ is the Beginning of God's creation. He was *not* created by God, but as God He created all things (Col. 1:15-17). The pride of accomplishment felt by the Laodiceans in their "creation" of fine woolen garments and healthful eye balm faded into insignificance when compared to the magnitude of Christ's creation of all things in the universe. Leaning on His wisdom and direction instead of "going it alone" made a lot of sense.
5. The all-seeing eye of the Lord was fully aware of the "works" of this church (vs. 15). We aren't told what these works were nor do we know the extent of the members' involvement in them. But Jesus knew, and He wasn't at all pleased with what He knew. A basic sin at Laodicea was similar to the glaring error at Ephesus. Both congregations had lost their enthusiasm for serving the Lord. Members at Ephesus had left their first love; members at Laodicea were lukewarm, neither hot nor cold.

6. It is reported by some writers that there were springs of water near Laodicea that were not hot enough for therapeutic uses nor cold enough for drinking. Perhaps Christ's reference to "lukewarmness" came from these waters. Lukewarm church members are as unacceptable to the Lord as tepid water is to a tired and thirsty traveler. Both are disappointing and disgusting.
7. Jesus did not wish *equally* that the Laodiceans would be either cold or hot. His preference, of course, is that all Christians would be "on fire" to do His will. Lukewarm disciples are as lost as those who are "cold" to His cause, but the indifference of "hangers-on" is often far more damaging to the work of Christ than the complete surrender of those who desert to the world.
8. Material prosperity is not a sign of spiritual health (vs. 17). Like Job's friends, many in this affluent congregation equated the favor of God with the accumulation of physical things. They supposed that they were "rich" in the Lord's sight, but they really were "poor." They gloried in their fine spiritual "clothing," but they actually were "naked" before God. Self-assessment is dangerous when conducted in the absence of spiritual wisdom ["seeing things as God sees them"] (2Cor.10:12).
9. The Laodiceans needed to look into the mirror of God's truth and see themselves as heaven saw them (James 1:23-25). Honest observation would convince them that they needed the spiritual counterparts of the material assets possessed by their city:
 - a. Gold refined in the fire. Such gold occupied a vital role in the material prosperity of Laodicea. Pure gold was much more valuable than the same quantity of the unrefined metal, and the investment of time and money required for the refining process was very worth while. Similarly, the spiritual "gold" [worth] of these disciples was greatly diminished by the presence of worldly attitudes and practices. Removing these extraneous elements [dross] from their lives would increase their value to the kingdom;
 - b. White garments. White represents purity and sincerity in people who strive to serve God (Isa. 1:18). The Laodiceans were very proud of the black clothing made from the wool of their sheep. Much of their economic prosperity was invested in black garments, and their material prosperity had corrupted their spiritual honesty and sincerity. Figuratively, they needed a wardrobe change. White [righteousness] was the "color" of choice for God's people. Clothing of white alone could cover [forgive] the shameful nakedness of sin (James 5:20);
 - c. Eye salve. Sin prevents people from seeing things as they really are. A failure to grow in the faith by adding the "Christian graces" to his character will cause a man to become "shortsighted, even to blindness." He will forget that his purging from sin by the gospel obligates him to live on a much higher level than how he lived prior to his conversion (2Pet. 1:9). Laodicea's famous eye salve might

work wonders for tired and painful eyes, but God's "eye salve" [man's total commitment to spiritual excellence] could do more in opening his "eyes of understanding" that he might be able to "see" the real worth of serving God faithfully and wholeheartedly (Eph. 1:18).

10. The appeal of love is always stronger than the threat of force. Christ now seeks to lift up the very spirits He has just brought down with His severe criticism (vs. 19). It was His deep love for these wayward Christians and His genuine concern for their spiritual welfare that had seen fit to condemn the situation as He found it at Laodicea. His rebuke and chastening came out of His deep love for them. Their response should come out of their love for Him. Christ had proved His love for them on the cross. Let them prove their love for Him by renewing their zeal for what is right and repenting of the things in their lives that were wrong.
11. Jesus is anxious to "dine" with His disciples and share the heavenly feast of spiritual blessings made possible by His sacrifice (vs. 20). But He will not force Himself on anyone. Even though spiritually hungry men desperately need to eat the Savior's feast, the table can be spread only when men respond to His knocking and calling by opening the doors of their hearts and inviting Him in.
12. In contrast to the situation at Smyrna (2:9-11), this church's problems came out of their own spiritual deficiencies rather than from hostile adversaries who sought to do them harm. Often, these problems are the kind hardest to overcome. And that may be why Christ offers to "overcomers" among the Laodiceans the grandest prize of all (vs. 21): "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne." There is a sense in which Christians now reign with Christ as overcomers. But in a fuller sense they will reign with Him as eternal overcomers (2Tim. 2:11,12; Rom. 5:17). What an offer! Who wouldn't be willing to suffer as He suffered in order to receive the same reward that He received? Scripture doesn't reveal how these disciples responded to such a gracious offer, and we can only guess whether or not they ever overcame the things that were standing in their way to heaven!

II. All churches and individuals must still "hear what the Spirit says..."

- A. Appropriate responses may not always be easy or pleasant to make.
- B. Eternal destinies are determined by the responses made by churches and individuals.

PHILADELPHIA-- THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE
Revelation 3:7-13

Two groups of people, the church and the Jews, claimed allegiance to Jehovah at Philadelphia, Whose claim was valid? Jesus said, "...for a tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12:33).

The Church

1. Had an open door of opportunity (3:7).
2. Kept the word, confessed Christ (3:8).
3. Had a little power (3:8).
4. To be kept through the "whole world" trial (3:10).
5. Loved by Christ (3:9).
6. Become pillars in God's temple (3:12).
7. God's name written on them (3:12).
8. Destined for New Jerusalem (3:12).

The Jews

1. Their door was shut by Jesus (3:7).
2. Compromised and lied (3:9).
3. Had great [physical] power.
4. Would suffer with "earth dwellers" (3:10).
5. Learn that God loved the church (3:9).
6. No part in God's temple (3:12).
7. Wore Satan's name (3:9).
8. Had no city (Old Jerusalem destroyed)

1. What contradiction existed at Sardis between reputation and reality? (1)
2. What should be done about the works that “remained” at Sardis? (2)
3. What is said about the garments of the faithful at Sardis? (4,5)
4. List the things that opened the door for the church at Philadelphia. (8, 10)
5. What protection was promised faithful saints during coming trials? (9, 10)
6. What blessings were promised the Philadelphians? (12) On what condition? (11)
7. What “unusual” statement was made by Jesus about the church at Laodicea? (15)
8. Why could the Laodiceans be called “lukewarm”? (15,17)
9. List the remedies offered to the church at Laodicea. (18,19)
10. Jesus calls Himself “the door” (John 10:7). What is another figure about a door? (20)
11. Which of the seven churches had nothing bad said of them? Which had nothing good? Which had both good and bad?
12. Give a short phrase describing each church. [Example: Ephesus--“The Loveless Church”]

Lesson Five: Chapters 4:1- 5:14

God on His Throne-- Chapter 4 *The Book and the Lamb-- Chapter 5*

In chapter one, verse 19, John was charged to write (1) the things that he *had* seen [the vision of the risen Christ, the source of the revelation (chapter one)], (2) the things that *are* [the seven letters describing the current spiritual conditions of the churches (chapters two and three)], and, (3) the things that *will take place* [the unfolding of the struggle between Christ and Satan (chapters four through eleven)]. The first part of John's vision [chapter one] would secure the attention of the churches; the second part would convict wayward churches and individuals of needed reformation; the third section would convey assurance that overcomers would ultimately be victorious over every adversary.

Chapter 4-- *God on His Throne*

I. John's "second" vision-- God on His throne. 4:1- 4:11.

A. A door opened into heaven. 4:1.

1. It is uncertain whether chapters 1-3 and chapters 4, 5 record one continuous vision or two separate visions. The events of chapter four are said to be "after these things" of chapters one through three. We can only guess whether an interval occurred between 3:22 and 4:1.
2. It is noted that language similar to what was said in 1:10 also introduces the events of this chapter:
 - a. John was "in the Spirit" in 1:10; he was immediately "in the Spirit" [again?] in 4:2, suggesting perhaps that this was another spiritual experience like the first;
 - b. He heard a loud voice like a trumpet in 1:10; the *first* voice he heard in 4:1 was also a voice like a trumpet.
3. John was invited to "come up" and pass through a door already opened into heaven (vs. 1), suggesting that divine preparation had been made for John to receive the message for the churches.
4. This is the third "door" encountered by John thus far in the vision(s):
 - a. The church at Philadelphia had an open door of opportunity (3:8);
 - b. Jesus was knocking for entrance on the door of hearts at Laodicea (3:20);
 - c. This door introduces John [and us] into the mysteries of God's eternal plan for His creation (4:1).

B. Around the throne of God. 4:2-11.

1. "Behold" [*idou*-- "an interjection addressed either to one or many persons"] suggests awesome things were about to be seen by John.

2. John saw a throne *set* in heaven and a mighty One *sitting* on it (vs. 2). Both words suggest permanency and stability. God has always occupied this place of power, and He always will.
3. Descriptive passages about God and His throne can also be found in Isaiah 6:1-5, Ezekiel 1:26-28, and Daniel 7:9, 10. One can readily detect certain similarities between those passages and the description offered here by John.
4. What John saw in this vision of the heavenly throne (vs. 3-11).
 - a. On the throne (vs. 3): Seated on the throne was the God of heaven and earth. His “appearance” shone as brightly as two precious stones. Of course, God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24) and any description given of Him is necessarily of His essence and not of His person. The jasper stone is thought to be a brilliant white diamond and the sardius a bright red stone. The former might represent to John’s mind the holiness and righteousness of God and the latter the justice of His rule over all things [Hailey, Summers]. Fairness [balance] invariably underlies the Lord’s judgments on both good and bad men.
 - b. Around the throne:
 - (1) A rainbow like a beautiful emerald surrounded the throne of God (vs. 3). Perhaps John’s thoughts went back to the rainbow that the Lord had set in the sky to remind humanity of His faithfulness in honoring His covenants (Gen. 9:13-17). Such faithfulness had not diminished, and man’s complete trust in God to do what He promises cannot be misplaced. Even in tribulation righteous people can expect mercy and the hope of deliverance;
 - (2) Also around God’s great throne were twenty-four lesser thrones [seats] upon which sat twenty-four “elders,” clothed in white garments and wearing golden crowns on their heads (vs. 4). Most scholars identify these as a composite of the twelve patriarchs of physical [Old Testament tribal] Israel and the twelve apostles of spiritual [New Testament] Israel. Together they represented all the saved who had dutifully kept the respective covenants under which they served Almighty God. Their white robes displayed their dedication to the true God, and their golden crowns declared their ultimate victory over sin and their reign with Christ over their spiritual enemies (Luke 22:30);
 - (3) Four living creatures were stationed around the throne (vs. 6). Each had six wings and was full of eyes around and within, probably signifying the ability to see and report everything to the Father (vs. 8). One creature was like a lion, one like a calf [ox], another had a man’s face, and the fourth was like a flying eagle (vs. 7). One writer says, “The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature.” Isaiah called his creatures “seraphim” (Isa. 6:2) and Ezekiel’s living crea-

tures were “cherubim” (Ezek. 1:5 f.; 10:20). There are both likenesses and differences between those creatures and the ones John saw in heaven. The creatures in this throne scene no doubt represent the strong and able powers at the disposal of the Lord to do His will throughout the earth. Their combined attributes [above] made them totally capable of executing whatever might be God’s will in whatever place in the world.

c. From the throne (vs. 5): Proceeding from the throne of God were lightnings, thunderings, and voices. This is reminiscent of the display of authority and power that accompanied the giving of the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai (Exo. 19:16f.). We cannot know what the “voices” were saying, but they surely added to the awesome demonstration of total control exercised by the One who sat on the throne.

d. Before the throne (vs.5):

(1) Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne. Lamps furnish the light necessary for man to see his surroundings in the midst of darkness. Spiritually, lamps and their light represent God’s truths by which men’s lives must be governed. Lamps burned in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple that priests might see to perform their priestly duties. The seven lamps in John’s vision are the “seven spirits of God.” They likely represent the perfect work done by the Spirit in revealing and sustaining the truth by which sinful man can be redeemed. Their presence before God’s throne impresses the lesson that truth prevails in all of Jehovah’s dealings with mankind. Seven is a number of totality in the Revelation. Thus, all who come before His throne for judgment can rest assured that *every* pronouncement from the Great Judge will be wholly according to truth without any prejudice or partiality;

(2) A sea of glass was also located before the throne (vs. 6). Seas *separate* people and things. This sea separated the holy God from men (vs. 4) whose lives had been tainted with unholiness and who now had been forgiven only through the grace and mercy of the sinless One. In the ultimate heaven, there will be no sin with which men must contend, and there will be no more “sea” to separate the holy from the unholy (21:1, 27).

e. Activity at the throne (vs. 8-11):

(1) The four living creatures gave unceasing praise to God on His throne (vs. 8). They never rested nor paused from voicing their adoration of the Almighty. The Lord’s holiness and eternity were extolled. “Holy, holy, holy” gives great emphasis to His excellent nature and to His superiority over humanity. God’s eternal existence spans all time and timelessness-- He was, He is, and He will be;

(2) The living creatures [who evidently are closely involved in God’s eternal

- activities] were in a favored position to know how worthy He is of their praise (vs. 9). They all freely gave God glory, honor, and thanks for His just exercise of power and authority from His throne and for His eternal presence that makes Him always available to intervene in the affairs of His people and to assure them of a just resolution of their problems;
- (3) In concert with the praise of the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders fell in worship before the God of mercy and justice (vs. 10). They too acknowledged His eternity and threw their crowns of victory before him in recognition of the fact that without His boundless grace, overcoming would have been impossible. God gets all the glory for their redemption;
- (4) The elders also spoke [sang] of the glory, honor, and power of the Almighty One on the throne (vs. 11). His power of creation was particularly praised, and this power is especially related to the basic purpose of this entire vision of God on His throne. By His *infinite power* the Lord had made all things, and by *infinite power* He continues to sustain all things. By the *same infinite power* He will resolve all the trials and tribulations of suffering Christians, no matter how severe or how extensive they might be.

Chapter 5-- *The Book and the Lamb*

The main purpose of Christ's revelation to John was to calm the fears of Christians who were suffering or who would suffer persecution at the hands of their religious enemies. The vision begins [chapter one] with the reassurance that Jesus, by the power of God, has overcome His own persecution and is actively monitoring the spiritual condition of His disciples that they may be able to stand amid threatening circumstances. Commendations are extended to faithful saints and directions for improvement are issued to those in unsafe conditions [chapters two and three]. The vision of God on His throne [chapter four] is intended to convince struggling saints that He still controls ongoing events in the world, even though it may sometimes appear that the forces of evil have the upper hand. In chapter five, John's vision begins the unveiling of Jehovah's plan to defeat Satan and his agents and to bestow the ultimate blessing of eternal salvation on disciples who are willing to pay whatever price may be attached to loyalty to their Savior.

II. The vision continued-- The sealed Book. 5:1-14.

A. The sealed Book in the hand of God. 5:1-4.

1. The Book [scroll] was in God's *right* hand, signifying His power to execute its contents according to His wishes (vs. 1).
 - a. The scroll contained writing on both sides, suggesting that every detail of the message had been formulated by the wisdom of Jehovah.

- b. The scroll was sealed tight by *seven* seals, making its message *totally* inaccessible to mortals.
 - c. John apparently concluded immediately that the Book contained the Lord's plan that would allow churches and individuals to overcome in spite of adverse circumstances. Hendriksen says of the scroll: "It represents God's eternal Plan, his decree which is all-comprehensive. It symbolizes God's purpose with respect to the *entire* universe *throughout* history, and concerning *all* creatures in *all* ages and unto all eternity...Hence, it is full of writing on both sides!"
2. A "strong" angel raised an unexpected issue (vs. 2): who would be allowed to open this Book and unveil the Lord's plan by removing the seven seals? Opening the Book not only involved learning its contents but also executing its concepts.
 3. Perhaps, since this heavenly plan would ultimately result in eternal salvation for the righteous, there was no one in heaven or on earth who was "worthy" [able] to accomplish what the plan required (vs. 3):
 - a. Man's salvation depended on more than any man could do to save himself. "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23);
 - b. Imperfect sacrifices were inadequate to cleanse men from their sins. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb.10:4).
 4. John had been promised that he would be shown things yet to happen in God's plan (4:1). When he confronted his own unworthiness (1John 1:8) and that of others, it appeared that the promise would remain unfulfilled. His frustration and disappointment brought him to tears (vs. 4). Hendriksen comments on John's reaction:

When the scroll is opened and the seals are broken, then the universe is governed in the interest of the church. Then, *God's glorious redemptive purpose is being realized*: his plan is being carried out and the contents of the scroll come to pass in the history of the universe. Hence, if the scroll is not opened, then no protection for God's children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance!

B. The worthy Lamb. 5:5-14.

1. There was one exception to John's conclusion (vs. 5). One of the elders called his attention to that exception. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" and the "Root of David" had qualified Himself to do what no other could. Both names, of course, referred to Jesus Christ (Gen. 49:9,10; Rom. 15:12) who had offered His blood to accomplish what nothing else could. His sacrifice had already prevailed against sin and had made salvation possible for obedient sinners (Heb. 9:12). Now, the rest of God's plan for the saints' deliverance could be executed as well.
2. His hope revived, John looked in expectation of seeing this "Lion" who had power enough to open God's Book. Instead, in surprise ["behold"] he saw not a lion but a Lamb standing close to the great throne and among those who had a large

investment in the execution of the eternal purpose of the Lord (vs. 6).

- a. The Lamb displayed the marks of having been slain in sacrifice, yet was standing fully revived and full of life.
 - b. This was no ordinary lamb. He had *seven* horns, signifying full power to accomplish His purpose, and *seven* eyes to see everything that had any bearing on how the great plan would be carried out. In 4:5, seven lamps represented the fulness of the Spirit's work of revelation; now, the Lamb's eyes are the Spirit whom He sends into all the earth to spread the truth regarding the Lamb to people struggling with sin.
3. The Lamb immediately "took charge" with full authority (Matt. 28:18) to reveal and execute God's righteous plan (vs. 7). He took the scroll from the Father's hand with the intent to open the Book and to disclose what lay in store for both earth's faithful and unfaithful inhabitants. Hailey says:
- For ages this mystery had been hidden in God (Eph. 3:9), known only to Him... Christ had now provided the acceptable sacrifice, defeated Satan, conquered sin and death, and fulfilled the purpose of God. Now he was in a position to take the purpose or plan of God out of His hand, send forth the Holy Spirit to reveal this truth, and Himself carry out the purpose to its ultimate consummation. This concept of "the book" is in harmony with the entire New Testament and is confirmed by the remainder of Revelation.
4. The rest of this marvelous chapter consists of three glorious songs [or sayings] of praise for the worthy Lamb. These three songs were sung by three groups of different sizes:
- a. The first song [a new song] was sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, a total of twenty-eight individuals (vs. 8);
 - b. The second song [or saying] was offered by the living creatures, the elders, and many angels. They numbered ten million ["myriads of myriads"--RSV] plus "thousands of thousands" (vs. 11);
 - c. The third group consisted of "every creature" in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea, an innumerable host of worshipers (vs. 13).
5. The first song [saying]. 5:8-10.
- a. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed in admiration and thanksgiving before this Lamb who had made salvation possible. Each one had a *harp* [an instrument of praise common to the culture, especially in Old Testament times] and a *bowl of incense*, representative of "the prayers of the saints" (vs. 8). Praise and prayer are the two most intimate contacts that humanity can have with divinity.
 - b. Some have sought to justify their use of mechanical instruments of music [pianos, organs, horns, etc.] in church worship by their appearance in John's heavenly vision. However, if one chooses to view literally such things as these harps

and to regard them as a pattern for present-day worship, he must also adopt the bowls of incense carried by the twenty-four elders. Furthermore, every worshiper must carry his own bowl and play on his own harp if the pattern is to be applied fully.

- c. The song of these twenty-eight individuals was “new,” i.e., it addressed an entirely new situation that couldn’t exist before the Lamb of God was slain for the transgressions of the world.
 - d. The song that the elders sang in 4:11 was in praise of the Father’s creative power in the making of all things. This song is sung in tribute to the recreative [redemptive] power of the Son in the saving of all that are saved.
 - e. Various blessings secured for the saints were praised in this new song (vs.9,10):
 - (1) Jesus was worthy [able] to unfold God’s plan and make it go forward;
 - (2) His shed blood had redeemed the souls of the disciples;
 - (3) His salvation was offered to all men;
 - (4) The redeemed had been made kings [or, a kingdom] and priests to God;
 - (5) Saved men reign with Christ now on earth and eventually in heaven.
 - f. This “new song” called attention to the worthiness of the Lamb that had resulted from what He had done to bless mankind.
6. The second song [saying]. 5:11,12.
- a. This praise to the Lamb was uttered in the *loud* voice of innumerable worshipers. It apparently greatly surpassed the volume of the first group.
 - b. This song emphasized the worthiness of the Lamb that resulted from *seven* things [a complete number] with which Christ had been blessed by the Father:
 - (1) Power to rule jointly with the Father (Rom. 15:12);
 - (2) Riches so abundant that they are “unsearchable” (Eph. 3:8);
 - (3) Wisdom about all things because He made all things (Col. 2:3);
 - (4) Strength [*ischus*-- “ability”] equal to any needed task (Eph. 1:23);
 - (5) Honor appropriate for the King of kings and Lord of lords (1Tim. 6:15,16);
 - (6) Glory [*doxa*-- “seem”] derived from His *innate* qualities of God (Jn. 14:9);
 - (7) Blessing [*eulogeo*-- “to praise”] rightfully due to His Person (2Cor. 11:31).
7. The third song [saying]. 5:13.
- a. John observed the acclaim of every creature in every place. This grand chorus was far too expansive for the human mind to comprehend. Only in a vision could John have witnessed such a vast gathering and the deafening uproar of praise that rose from its midst.
 - b. This song paid tribute to both Father and Son. The grand plan of salvation was a joint effort of the Godhead in formulation and execution (John 14:10). It was fitting that praises should be raised to honor both the Director and the

Executor of the plan.

- 8. As this awesome scene ends, the focus turns again to the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (vs. 14). It was with them that the outpouring of praise for the Lamb began, and it is from them that the final acclamation is offered.**
 - a. The four living creatures said “Amen” to the mighty chorus of praise that John saw and heard in his vision. They wholeheartedly agreed with every expression of appreciation that had come from the mouths of all other creatures.**
 - b. The twenty-four elders prostrated themselves again in the presence of the Lamb and worshiped the One who was so worthy of their adoration.**
- 9. Ray Summers offers a good assessment of this marvelous concert of adulation for God’s Lamb who had offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world:**

John’s first vision closed with this thrilling scene of the triumphant saints and an adoring universe offering praise and homage to the triumphant Christ. Such a scene was calculated to bring new courage and new hope to the hearts of John’s first readers, the persecuted Christians of Asia; it brings the same cheer to Christian hearts in any age. Believing in the power of God (chap. 4) and the redeeming love of God (chap. 5), there is no enemy or force of evil which Christians need to fear. They can enter the conflict or endure the evil knowing that God is still on his throne; he has not laid aside his scepter; he has not abandoned his throne to any other. He is mightier than all the forces arrayed against his people. Faith in him gives man the proper evaluation of life, of its issues and their outcome.

Chapter FOUR

- 1. What did John first *see* as he looked into heaven? (1)**
- 2. What did he first *hear*? What was the first promise John was given? (1)**
- 3. List the persons and things John beheld as soon as he was “in the Spirit.” (2-6)**
- 4. Describe the persons referred to in verses 2-6.**
- 5. Describe the four living creatures. (7,8)**
- 6. What praise did the four living creatures give to God? (8)**
- 7. What did the elders do and say when the living creatures praised God? (9-11)**
- 8. How do you think this “throne scene” would affect saints soon to be persecuted for their faith?**

Chapter FIVE

- 1. Describe the scroll (book) that John saw in God’s hand. (1)**
- 2. What problem was connected with this scroll? (2-4)**
- 3. How is Jesus described by one of the elders? (5)**

- 4. What was unusual about the Lamb seen by John in his vision? (6)**

- 5. What might be implied by Jesus taking the scroll from God's right hand? (7)**

- 6. The elders and living creatures held what two things as they praised Jesus? (8)**

- 7. What had Jesus done to qualify Him to open God's book? (9,10)**

- 8. How many were around God's throne during the second song? (11)**

- 9. What was the largest group to give praises in this scene? (13)**

- 10. What did the elders and living creatures say and do as this scene closes? (14)**

Lesson Six: Chapter 6:1-17
The Book Unsealed-- The First Six Seals

John's vision revealed to him a door open into heaven. He was invited to come up to see things that would take place afterward. The book containing that revelation, however, was sealed from his view with seven seals. Only Christ, the Lamb of God, was found worthy to open the book and disclose its contents. After appropriate praises had been expressed to the Worthy Lamb, He proceeded to open the seals one by one. Remember-- this book will reveal to those who will receive this Revelation letter what the future holds for the Lord's church in an adversarial world and how God will deal with His people and with those who seek to destroy them from the earth.

I. Opening the first Six Seals. 6:1-16.

A. The First Seal opened. 6:1,2.

1. The Lamb opened the first seal, upon which a living creature exclaimed in a thunderous voice, "Come!" ["and see" is absent from the best manuscripts.]
2. This command appears to be directed toward the first horse and rider rather than to John, who had already responded to such an invitation (4:1).
3. "Behold" [suggests a sight unexpected and startling to John]-- a white horse with a rider wearing a crown and carrying a bow. The rider went out conquering and to conquer.
 - a. White [in a spiritual context] always suggests purity and righteousness. This part of the vision deals with something *good* and *desirable*.
 - b. The bow was a weapon used in military activity.
 - c. The crown was given to be worn in recognition of a victory.
 - d. The conquering seems to be both current and future ["and to conquer"].
4. There are several leading interpretations of the meanings of the seven seals that reflect different views about Revelation's basic message to the early disciples:
 - a. God will deliver His people and punish their opponents in whatever age and place opposition might be raised. The revelation of the sealed book is not necessarily attached to any particular period of history. The ultimate defeat of every spiritual enemy is certain, and the ultimate deliverance of the faithful in heaven is assured through the power of the God who rules the world;
 - b. The overall message of the seals is the same as above, but there is an *immediate* connection to the Roman persecutions, current and future;

- c. The same message is intended, but it is *confined* to the persecutions presently being experienced [c. 93 A.D.] or soon to be initiated against the church by the Roman empire. The factors leading to the defeat and destruction of Roman power are the focus of the revelation to John. Persecution will end with the demise of the Roman persecutors;
 - d. The seals unfold the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans. The great enemy of the church at this time was the Jewish nation, not the Roman empire, and the wrath of God was being directed against Israel for its persecution of His loyal servants through the years, culminating in its vigorous oppression of saints following the establishment of the church;
 - e. Some interpretations include features of two or more of these themes.
5. Because of varied viewpoints and mindsets about the central message of Revelation, the white horse and its rider of the first seal are interpreted in different ways:
- a. The rider on the white horse is Jesus Christ who had won spiritual victories through gospel preaching since Pentecost and who was sure to conquer the forces of evil in all future battles with sin;
 - b. The rider and horse represent the military forces, especially the Parthians, that would eventually bring down the Roman empire in defeat;
 - c. They represent the military development of the Roman empire into a mighty force that God would use in A.D. 70 to punish the Jewish nation for its transgressions;
 - d. They are the “glory days” of the Roman empire from the death of Domitian to the reign of Commodus [96-192 A.D.] when peace and prosperity were at their highest level. These “good [white] years” preceded the gradual decline and fall of earth’s greatest physical kingdom.
- B. The Second Seal opened. 6:3,4.
- 1. The Lamb opened the second seal, and the second living creature commanded, “Come.”
 - 2. A fiery red horse went out. Its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth and cause people to kill [slay] one another. He was given a great sword with which to accomplish his mission. Some possible meanings are:
 - a. Red suggests blood, and blood signifies war. There would be many conflicts ahead in which both saints and sinners would perish. This warfare would immediately involve Rome, but other nations would also fight among themselves before the end of time;
 - b. This horse and rider signify the repressive forces by which the cruel Roman empire wielded its power over its conquests. Its military might would be use-

- ful to God in destroying Jerusalem and its rebellious population;
- c. The blood of obedient Christians would be shed during periods of persecution. Persecution always follows obedience to the gospel (2Tim. 3:12), and that would certainly be true of the years just beyond the writing of this letter and throughout subsequent history until the end of time. The sword here is the *machaira*, used for sacrificing animals. The people were said to *slay* [as in sacrifice] one another, which suggests times of severe oppression. Of course, this interpretation of religious persecution for the second seal depends on Christ being the rider of the first seal;
 - d. This “war” specifically related to the period of civil conflicts in the Roman empire following the emperor Commodus. Between 192-204 A.D., the empire was in constant turmoil and upheaval from numerous military events such as it never saw before or afterward. Much blood was shed during this time.

C. The Third Seal opened. 6:5,6.

1. At the command of the third living creature, a black horse appeared. Its rider held a pair of scales [a balance] in his hand.
2. A voice from among the living creatures proclaimed the high cost of food: a denarius [one day’s wage for a worker] for a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley. The voice also forbade that oil and wine be “harmed.” Commentators have suggested:
 - a. Black represents things unpleasant and foreboding. Scales were the instruments of commerce and trade;
 - b. High prices indicate a scarcity of food that would often follow in the wake of warfare [second seal]. This hardship would most affect the poor, and saints usually were in that category. Scholars judge that a poor man would find it almost impossible to feed himself and his family at such costs for food. On the other hand, oil and wine would remain available to those who could afford to buy them;
 - c. If the seals are interpreted to unfold the prospects for disciples of Jesus, this unwelcome period would bring deprivation and suffering to them as another consequence of their faith. There would be severe discrimination against them by the trade guilds, and Christians might even lose their livelihoods because they dared to confess Christ. Moreover, merchants sometimes were forbidden to trade with disciples of Jesus;
 - d. “Early date” advocates [pre-A.D. 70] see this seal as forecasting the brutal tactics used by the Romans in overcoming their foes. Siege and famine often subdued walled cities when other actions failed. Great suffering was inflicted on Jerusalem in this way prior to its destruction, as secular writers testify;
 - e. Those who relate the seals to specific historical events often connect the inflated costs in this seal with a period of time [early third century] when Roman rulers

“went crazy” in imposing very heavy taxation on their subjects. Gibbon, in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, considers heavy taxation as one of the prime causes of the empire’s decline and fall. The edicts of Caracalla and Galenius were especially threatening to the welfare of the poor;

- f. It is generally thought that the instructions about oil and wine reflected the injustices of this period of time. While the poor scarcely survived, the wealthy continued to afford and to enjoy their luxuries. Some attach a religious use to the oil and wine and assert that God intended for religious rituals to continue even while people struggled under the burden of high costs and severe shortages of essential things. Also, it is said that many farmers “hurt” [damaged or destroyed] their crops to avoid the unreasonable taxation imposed on them.

D. The Fourth Seal opened. 6:7,8.

1. The fourth living creature initiated the appearance of the fourth horse and rider. The horse was a “pale” [*chloros*-- “pale green”] color, and the rider was Death. Following along was Hades [the place of disembodied spirits], whether on horseback or on foot we are not told.
2. Death and Hades received power to kill one-fourth of the earth by means of:
 - a. The sword. This is the *rhomphaia*, a long sword used in warfare rather than the *machaira*, the short sword for sacrificing (vs. 4);
 - b. Hunger [famine--ASV], which often occurs in the aftermath of war;
 - c. Death. Obviously, killing and death are always joined, so an alternate word is needed for better meaning. “Pestilence” is a good choice [and it appears in the RSV], since it is one of these same four punishments foretold for Jerusalem by Jesus (Luke 21:11) and for God’s rebellious nation by Ezekiel (Ezek. 5:16,17);
 - d. Wild beasts.
3. There are varied explanations given about the meanings of these occurrences:
 - a. Most scholars agree that the sword signifies widespread warfare over the earth in the years following the first century. And, of course, history confirms the soundness of this view. The empire was in bloody turmoil during much of its remaining days;
 - b. It is thought that under this seal God used warfare to punish the world for its sins of unbelief and disobedience. At the same time, believers could not entirely escape the effects of a conflict which was designed to punish sinners;
 - c. Hunger or famine would also cause general hardship on the earth’s inhabitants, including the disciples. Roman tactics against Jerusalem illustrate the terrible anguish and suffering caused by this form of punishment;
 - d. Pestilence also is often the companion of war and the cause of much human pain. Barnes cites a period, 248-268 A.D., during which the Romans were beleaguered with numerous invasions by barbaric nations. Within that time

[250-265 A.D.], a plague swept through the empire and decimated the population in many locations. In fact, some early writers estimated [probably with substantial exaggeration] that upwards of one-half of the people perished in some places.

4. It might be noted that the loosing of the first four seals from the book of God discloses to us WHAT the Lord had in store for unbelievers who had opposed Him and had persecuted His special people. When the fifth seal is opened, we also learn WHY these devastating judgments were to be directed against the ungodly of earth.

E. The Fifth Seal opened. 6:9-11.

1. When the fifth seal was loosed by Jesus, John saw another strange and unexpected sight. Under the sacrificial altar were the souls of people who had been slain because of their convictions about God's word and because they had not hidden their testimony about those convictions. They were *under* the altar, as if after being slain *on* the altar, they had been thoughtlessly tossed aside by their persecutors to make way for other victims yet to be slain.
2. With a loud voice these martyrs asked the Lord WHEN retribution would be visited on those who had shed their blood amid the persecutions against the church. It is clear that harsh treatment for the earth-dwellers in return for their awful crimes against the saints would be an entirely just resolution of their oppressive behavior toward the Lord's people.
3. Some of the "early date" persuasion think that these largely were the souls of Old Testament saints who had waited long years for retribution to occur. Others see New Testament martyrs in this number as well. In either case, they had been "resting" [waiting] for a period of time and would need to "rest" [wait patiently] for "a little while longer" until the time was right for payback (vs. 11).
4. White robes were given to these souls [of course, souls don't wear robes, so this is *symbolism*] as signification of God's recognition of their worthy sacrifices of themselves in His behalf. The time would come when their faithfulness would be validated by the infliction of punishment upon the wrongdoers, but meanwhile the white robes would serve the same purpose.
5. The urgent question asked by these souls was answered [by whom?] (vs. 11) with the explanation that there were other "fellow servants" and "brethren" who were yet to be slain for the cause of Christ. When the persecutions and the executions had run their course, the time would be right for retribution to fall on the guilty. Of course, we are not told [nor were they] just how long that might be. Some commentators point to the dissolution of the Roman empire some years after the "conversion" of Constantine and the cessation of Roman assaults on the church.
6. Until that time, many would give themselves in sacrifice for the truth. Many had died in Nero's persecution at Rome [68 A.D.]. Many more would perish in Domi-

tian's campaign against the gospel, which was just getting underway as John wrote these words to the churches of Asia [c. 96 A.D.]. Tribulation under Diocletian, 303-313 A.D., would be the most severe of all. That wicked ruler would set out not only to harm the church but also to "abolish the name of Christ" completely from the earth. It is said that as many as 700,000 disciples died in Egypt alone under his cruel hand, so the total number of the slain might have risen into the millions.

7. Others see enemies other than the Romans in these prophecies, and they expect that there will be persecutions against Christ's disciples in some form or other in every age of the world. They believe that these seals have application to enemies of the gospel who will be active until the end of time.
8. The first five seals have revealed the *WHAT*, the *WHY*, and the *WHEN* of God's wrath upon the wicked and rebellious world. The next seal will show *HOW* His plans will be carried out.

F. The Sixth Seal opened. 6:12-17.

1. The Lamb opened the sixth seal, and John witnessed a series of events as awesome and disturbing as those he had already seen. In Rev. 13:18, the "number" of the great beast that oppressed the disciples is said to be "666," the "number of a man" ["a human number"--RSV]. This number is explained to signify *incompleteness* or *failure* of some sort.
2. It is interesting that under the sixth seal, six punishments are specified to be sent against the wicked world, and six categories of unbelievers are identified as the ones who will receive the punishments. It is uncertain whether such a connection is really intended between these two passages [chapters 6 and 13].
3. The symbolism of this seal is different from that of the first four seals. There, the emphasis seems to be on the hardships and sufferings that the agents of Satan would bring upon the people of the Lord. Here, under the sixth seal, our attention is pointed to the vast phenomena of nature through which God's wrath will be delivered upon the evil world.
4. The power to act and the ability to do harm were clearly given to the fateful riders of the four horses. However, we do not witness the harm actually being inflicted on saints and sinners, although we are certain that it will be done as foretold. Under this sixth seal, the visitations of wrath do in fact occur in our view, and this adds a level of intensity and closure to John's vision.
5. Few commentators take the position that any of these descriptions are intended to portray literal events. Instead, they are broad strokes of the prophetic brush designed to impress us with both the extent and the severity of each kind of chastisement that would be experienced by those who had opposed the church of God.
6. It should be noted that the imagery used in this part of the vision is the same as had been used by the Old Testament prophets when they pronounced doom and

- gloom against the nations upon which the wrath of Jehovah would fall:
- a. **A great earthquake.** Isaiah (29:6) spoke of Jerusalem being “punished by the Lord of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise..”;
 - b. **The sun became black.** Joel said, “the sun shall be turned into darkness...” (Joel 2:31), and Isaiah proclaimed, “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I will make sackcloth their covering” (Isa. 50:3);
 - c. **The moon became like blood.** Joel also prophesied, “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood” (Joel 2:31). Jesus warned that before Jerusalem fell “the moon will not give its light” (Matt. 24:29). Also, Isaiah said, “After many days they [kings of earth] will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed...” (Isa. 24:21-23);
 - d. **The stars of heaven fell.** Stars often represented great leaders (Num. 24:17). Lucifer was the “day star” who would fall from heaven (Isa. 14:12). In Daniel’s prophecy, a “little horn” grew strong until it “cast down some of the host of the stars to the ground, and trampled them” (Dan. 8:10). In this picture, so many rulers were to be overthrown that they would fall like a shower of winter figs [undergrown and unripe] blown loose by a strong wind;
 - e. **The sky was rolled up like a scroll.** Isaiah also used this figure to depict the fate of unruly nations, “...and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and their host shall fade away...” (Isa. 34:4). As the writing on a scroll can no longer be read when the scroll is wound tightly, the great affairs of the nations that oppose God’s plan will disappear as if they had never existed;
 - f. **The mountains and the islands were moved from their places.** “For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you...” was God’s promise to Israel (Isa. 54:10). Also, the islands [coastlands] would “shake” when mighty Tyre was destroyed (Ezek. 26:15).
7. More symbolic action takes place in John’s vision. All classes and levels of men who have taken part in persecuting saints are included in the list: kings, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, and even slaves and free men will feel the terror of the Lord’s wrath. They will seek to hide from heaven’s displeasure in caves and rocks and will prefer to die rather than to face judgment and justice from God and from His Lamb. Of course, there will be no possible escape from the consequences of their wicked behavior toward the gospel and the church.
 8. These symbols all represent great turmoil and upheaval among the nations and institutions of the earth that would occur in conjunction with the Lord’s retribution upon the persecutors of His disciples. And while the *specific* punishments are still undisclosed, the message to guilty men is loud and clear: “Things are going to change! Payback time is surely coming! You soon will regret the evil things you have done against Jesus Christ and His people!!”
 9. The “great day of His wrath” had come upon the earth (vs. 17). It is thought by

some students that the symbols in verses 12-16 are designed to describe events connected with the final day of judgment. Others reject that conclusion and relate them instead to a “lesser” day of wrath, which will be terrible enough in its effects on the wicked, but which also strongly forecasts the indescribable agonies to be experienced by ungodly persons when God is ready to bring everything to an end. The Lord’s coming will be “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1Cor. 15:52), and there will be no time or opportunity for hiding or seeking to escape the sentence of the Great Judge.

10. A study of the commentators provides an interesting view of several opinions about the symbols of verses 12-17:
 - a. These figures depict the severe judgments that will be visited upon all the persecuting powers of all time;
 - b. They are intended to describe the events and reactions that will transpire when Christ returns to judge the world;
 - c. Historically, these symbols relate to the final overthrow of the Roman empire by invading Goths and Vandals, whether in the traditional year of 476 A.D. or at some earlier date when Rome’s power was severely crippled by its enemies;
 - d. These signs foretold events that led to the Roman-Judean wars and especially describe the “tribulation” that was to attend the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Matt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk, 21).
11. Although strong points may be made in favor of each of these views, it would seem that the symbols used within the sixth seal suggest a *general* application to a larger population than was contained within national Israel or even within the confines of the current Roman empire. Especially, the *classes* of persecutors [kings, commanders, mighty men, slaves] appear to better apply to a *wider* range of persons than just to those within Israel or to the movers and shakers in the vast empire governed by Rome.
12. William Hendriksen has some worthwhile comments about these occurrences:

Again, try to visualize what John saw, taking the picture as a whole: heaven itself curling up like a piece of paper, rolling up like a scroll; the sun, its light blotted out so that it resembles a black sack used in mourning; the big, full moon: a huge, awe-inspiring bloody ball; the stars, turned out of their orbits and plunging to the earth in great showers; the earth itself quaking violently so that every house crashes to the ground; and every mountain and island suddenly disappearing! What a picture of dread and despair, of confusion and consternation--for the wicked!

II. A question of desperation. 6:17.

1. A desperate question rings out from the ranks of the doomed when the terrible wrath of the Lord is displayed: “...who is able to stand?” It would appear that *none could survive* the awful visitation of God’s anger against the ungodly.
2. However, that was *not* the case. There *were* some who *could* and who *would* come through every calamity that would befall the earth in the time to come.
3. Their identity will be disclosed to John and to us in chapter seven.

- 1. What was the purpose of the seals in this vision? (1)**
- 2. What were the colors of the horses John saw, and what might be the significance of each color? (2,4,5,8)**
- 3. Who invited John to see the vision of the horses? (1,3,5,7)**
- 4. What did the riders on the horses have the power to do? (2,4,6,8)**
- 5. Each rider had something appropriate to his power. What did each have? (2,4,5,8)**
- 6. What is the significance of the message of the “voice” in verse 6? [Hint: a “denarius” was probably a day’s wages.]**
- 7. By what means did Death and Hades have the power to kill? (8)**
- 8. Who were those “under the altar”? What was their question to the Lord? (9,10)**
- 9. What was the response to their question? (11)**
- 10. List the “physical” phenomena that occurred when the sixth seal was opened. (12-14)**
- 11. What groups of people were affected by these events? (15-17)**

Lesson Seven: Chapter 7:1-17

The Sealed and the Saved

Chapters four and five initiated John into the wonders of the future of God's saints. In the face of severe persecution, it was imperative that Christians understand and appreciate God's unlimited power to control their destiny and that of their enemies. With such knowledge, the faithful would persevere in spite of difficult circumstances.

Chapter six displayed the loosing of six seals from the book of things to come. Severe treatment would be launched by God's enemies against His people, who would grow impatient for His avenging hand to be raised against their adversaries. The sixth seal revealed that when the time was right, the Lord's retribution would devastate His foes.

Chapter six closed with a challenging question about the awesome punishments forecast for God's enemies who had in various ways opposed His eternal plan. God's retribution would be so terrible that all must wonder, "Who is able to stand?" God's *justice* declares that none of earth's wicked persecutors will be able to withstand His wrath, but God's *mercy* should also speak comfortingly to faithful disciples in His church, "Do not fear; none of you who choose to persevere will be hurt by anything that may happen in times to come!"

An Interlude

One seal remained to be opened. One last great series of events to vindicate the righteous and to vanquish the unrighteous was yet to be disclosed to John and to the churches. But so extensive and so frightening were the prophecies of the seventh seal that more reassurances than those already given to the churches would be needed if their confidence in the power of heaven was to remain undiminished. Lest their courage fail when exposed to the awful details of the judgments forecast by the loosing of the sixth seal, a shoring up of the saints' trust in God's care giving was strongly indicated. Accordingly, chapter seven is concerned with providing an *interlude* [pause] in revelation and a *reaffirmation of support* to the wondering hearts of the faithful who desperately need to be told by their Lord, "Never fear! You will be able to stand, no matter what may happen!" This, of course, is the central message of the entire revelation to John.

I. Seals of salvation between seals of destruction. 7:1-8 .

A. A welcome interruption (vs. 1-3).

1. "After these things" apparently refers to John's reception of the things contained under the sixth seal in chapter six. The phrase probably is intended to specify the

order in which the revelations came rather than to indicate any significant passage of time between them.

2. John saw four angels holding ["back"--RSV] the "four winds" [of destruction] that would ravage the earth as just foretold under the sixth seal. We cannot know for sure whether or not these came from among the angels already introduced to us (5:5; 5:11), although we can suppose that they didn't. We would rather conclude that these were four "specialist" angels whose sole task now was to execute the terrible afflictions pronounced upon wicked mankind (vs. 2).
3. The "four winds" and the "four corners of the earth" are word-pictures which accommodate the common perceptions of the age in which Revelation was written. Both terms simply disclose that devastation was planned to encompass the globe from all directions and that none would escape. The "wind" would "blow" on every "sea" and every "tree" (vs. 1).
4. A fifth angel next appears from the "east" ["sunrising"--ASV--from where the *light* of the sun comes], bearing God's *seal* (vs. 2). This was not a seal like the seven that had closed up the revelation of things shortly to come to pass, and its purpose was different from that of the seven. This seal would provide: (1) proof of ownership between the Lord and His people and (2) protection from harm for those identified by the seal as belonging to the Father and the Son rather than to Satan. It was designed to *disclose*, not to *conceal*, information. A seal of this kind is mentioned in John 3:33, "He that hath received his witness has set his seal to this, that God is true."
5. It became evident that God's timetable of destruction was different from what John could rightly have expected. The angels of *destruction* were ordered by the angel of *preservation* to *delay* their awful work *until* God's servants had been *sealed* on their foreheads (vs. 3).
6. This order reminds us of the Lord's special messenger of vengeance being told to put a mark on the foreheads of the faithful to protect them from the killing that would "recompense" the abominable deeds of Israel and Judah (Ezekiel 9).
7. We are also reminded of Paul's declaration of Christ's unfailing watchcare over His disciples, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).
8. God's day of accounting for the "earth dwellers" would not be executed until *after* His children had been made secure against spiritual harm (vs. 3).
9. God was not *changing* His purpose to punish His adversaries. He was *only delaying* what He *still* intended to do.

B. The sealing of the saints. 7:4-8.

1. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to the sealing of God's saints against the perilous times to come when the "four winds" of destruction are unleashed against the foes of truth. The ultimate blessing of their sealing will also be shown.
2. This part of John's vision is intended to strengthen the confidence of the churches in the Father's purpose for their preservation amid otherwise universal destruction. The vision will consist of two phases:
 - a. First (vs. 4-8), those disciples who were then living in the world, who would both sooner and later suffer many hardships because of their faith, would be comforted to know that the threats of *physical* violence and deprivation that would be leveled against them by the agents of the devil might cause them *physical* harm, but in no way could they interfere with their secure *spiritual* relationship with a caring Father;
 - b. Second (vs. 9-17), and more important, the vision would allow them to comprehend the *extent* of the security promised by heaven. Not only would they be sealed against the destruction to be wrought by the forces of evil in *this* world but also they could be confident that their sealing now would result eventually in their eternal sealing and salvation in heaven.
3. John heard how many were sealed on earth (vs. 4). The source of his information is not disclosed to us. Neither are we told why he didn't see the sealing take place. Christians are sealed [identified] as God's own at the time of their obedience to the gospel. Paul declared, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you *were* sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).
4. A large NUMBER of individuals were sealed. Both their *number* [one hundred and forty-four thousand] and their *nature* [from all the "tribes of the children of Israel"] were specified (vs. 4).
 - a. Some choose to make this a literal and fixed *number* of sealed persons.
 - (1) A *literal* 144,000 sealed persons is advocated by those who support the doctrine of unconditional election. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith says about the saved that "...angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number cannot be either increased or diminished" (page 15). This position, of course, opposes Bible teaching that man's free choice is the ultimate determinant of his spiritual destiny (Acts 10:34,35; Ro. 2:11; 2Pe. 3:9; etc.). Additionally, it is unlikely that *exactly* the same number [12,000] of persons would be saved [sealed] from *every* tribe;
 - (2) Another position holds that 144,000, although not literal, is a "set, fixed and unchangeable" number of Jews who had been faithful to God's covenant with Israel prior to Pentecost. 144,00 is thought to be a *figurative* number that represents Jews saved under the Law. Whatever the *actual* number, it can't be changed, we are told, because Old Law "salvation"

- ended at the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14; Gal. 5:4). However, the idea of a *fixed* number of Jews [only] seems to ignore the fact that these saved persons came from the four corners of the earth (vs. 1) and were sealed against calamities that would befall the *whole* world, not just the Palestinian world.
- b. Others insist that the number of sealed persons should be understood as a figurative number intended to represent the aggregate body of faithful disciples, both Jews and Gentiles.
- (1) 144,000 is the product of multiplying twelve by twelve by one thousand. The number twelve obviously has religious connotations in both Old and New Testaments [adapted from Hailey]:
- aa. In the Old Testament there were twelve: Patriarchs; tribes; jewels in the high priest's breastplate; cakes of shewbread; princes who dedicated the altar; platters, bowls, and spoons brought in dedication; bulls, rams, lambs, and goats sacrificed at the dedication; oxen under the brazen sea of the temple; images of lions on the steps of the king's throne, etc;
- bb. In the New Testament there were twelve: apostles; thrones on which they sat; baskets of fragments after 5,000 were fed; legions of angels; scattered tribes; etc;
- cc. In Revelation there are twelve: stars in a crown; gates of the eternal city; angels at the gates; names on the walls; foundations of the city; names of the apostles on the foundations; thousand furlongs in the city's measurements; cubits multiplied by twelve cubits [144 cubits] in the walls' height, etc.
- (2) Twelve multiplied by twelve would signify a *deeply religious* number. When multiplied again by 1,000 [a number of largeness and completeness in Scripture], the resulting 144,000 suggests a *large, comprehensive, religious* group.
- (3) Many commentators affirm that 144,000 thus represents the whole number of Christians on earth (vs. 2,3) at any given time since Pentecost who were sealed against the destructive forces of evil.
5. The *NATURE* of the 144,000 is also specified. It is composed of "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (vs. 4). Again, disagreement exists between a literal and a figurative interpretation of this description of the sealed individuals.
- a. One position maintains that the national origin of the 144,000 is confined to physical Jews and excludes all Gentile Christians:
- (1) The tribulations of this vision are to be limited to those associated with the "abomination of desolation" from which Jewish disciples would flee when the Roman army set siege to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Matt. 24:15,16). However, it should be remembered that these 144,000 persons were sealed against tribulations that originated throughout the *whole world* and not

only in Palestine (vs. 1,3). Moreover, the destruction of Jerusalem and the tribulations preceding it were fueled by *political*, not *religious*, activities. The assault against the holy city was not directed against Jewish Christians as such but as citizens of a rebellious nation. Christians only shared in the hardships peculiar to the *nation*, not the *church*. John states clearly that the souls under the altar had suffered for the “word of God” and for their “testimony” (6:9);

- (2) It is also asserted that the naming of the *actual* tribes of Israel indicates that this description is to be understood literally. Furthermore, if the tribes were still identifiable when Revelation was written, the book must have been composed prior to the ravaging of Jerusalem. Yet, there are several problems attached to this position:
 - aa. The tribal identity of the ten houses of physical Israel had been either lost or severely compromised long before the fall of the holy city;
 - bb. The sealed were from all the tribes [or, “every tribe”] of Israel (vs. 4). In the listing of the tribes in the passage that follows, not “all” tribes appear as one would expect. Dan and Ephraim are missing. Joseph, which was not really a tribe at all, is included;
 - cc. The “servants of our God” were to be sealed for their protection (vs. 3). There is no real textual reason to conclude that *only* Jewish servants were included in this plan.
- b. There are several reasons to believe that the tribes of this vision were to be seen as figurative representations instead of actual physical divisions of literal Israelites:
 - (1) New Testament Scriptures often apply the *physical* name of “Israel” to the *spiritual* people of God (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16; Rom. 2:28,29; esp. Rom. 11:26). In this context, “Israel” and the Lord’s church are one and the same;
 - (2) William Milligan [quoted by Hailey] contends, “It is the custom of the Seer [John--RG] to heighten and spiritualize all Jewish names. The temple, the Tabernacle, the Altar, Mount Zion, and Jerusalem are to him the embodiments of ideas deeper than those literally conveyed by them”;
 - (3) There is a strong emphasis throughout the New Testament on the oneness of God’s saved [sealed] people (Eph. 4:4; 1Cor. 1:10; Gal. 3:28; etc.). It was the highest hope of Jesus that all the redeemed [sealed] might be one in the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:21);
 - (4) Another throng, 144,000 in number, will be seen in chapter fourteen (14:1). These individuals will be singing a “new song” before the throne of God in heaven (14:2,3). It is reasonable to conclude, since the number is exactly the same, that these are the *same* persons who comprise the 144,000 in our present chapter. Clearly, it is logical to include Jews and Gentiles in this blood-washed congregation both on earth and in heaven.

5. The symbolism intended by the separate listing of each tribe is apparent. God has been very *careful* and *thorough* not to overlook a single faithful soul when the time is right for sealing His children with His “mark.” We should remember that His sealing is basically for protection against *spiritual destruction* rather than against *physical harm*. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Tim. 3:12).
6. When properly understood, these sealed tribes likely represent the entirety of the Lord’s redeemed at any given moment while they face the tribulations of living the Christian life on earth. Some scholars designate these tribes as the “militant church” in this present world. In the next passage, they will be seen as the “triumphant church” in the world to come.
7. Some commentators have drawn from these verses some very strange and unbiblical conclusions.
 - a. For example, one writer makes a stretch to see in this passage some conclusions that support his preconceived religious mindset:
 - (1) The dividing of the twelve tribes reflects a similar division of the whole church of God into the several denominations;
 - (2) Salvation would not be confined to any one denomination. Rather, it would be freely and equally available in any one of the many churches;
 - (3) No denomination would gain more favor with God than any other because of differences in size, wealth, facilities, location, and other such qualities;
 - (4) Large numbers from *every* denomination will be sealed by the Lord.
 - b. Premillennialists such as Hal Lindsey place the sealing of the saints during the tribulations against the evil world. That is in reverse order of the facts of this passage. Teachers of this persuasion also want to make God’s seal a literal mark of some kind that will readily distinguish the saved from the unsaved. Of course, this seal is as figurative as the number and the national composition of those who are sealed.

II. The saving of the saints. 7:9-17.

- A. Again, it was “after these things” [in verses 1-8] that John witnessed another progression in his vision. Having seen the impending threat of destruction in the hands of four mighty angels of God, he had heard the number, 144,000, who were “sealed” for protection from disastrous events that would follow.
 1. The first part of the vision [7:1-8] would reassure John and other Christians of God’s never-ending determination to preserve the faithful on earth. Now, the second part will demonstrate the *extent* of the Father’s intentions for their well- being.
 2. The first part [1-8] displayed the fact that the *sealing* was accomplished to *preserve*

every faithful child of God from spiritual destruction. The second part [9-17] will reveal a prospect even more welcome than preservation on earth. Their *sealing* would become a *saving*! It would eventually transport them into heaven to commune directly with both the Father and the Son!

- B. John beholds another multitude, much more extensive in number than the 144,000 that were numbered on earth (vs. 9). This gathering was so large that no one could count it [except God, of course, who “knows those who are His” (2Tim. 2:19)].
1. This was a multitude no longer facing threats of harm; danger was past. They stood before God’s throne holding palm branches that signified the joy of *victory* over the tribulations of earth (vs. 9).
 2. This was a multitude that proclaimed their enduring *purity* by continuing to wear the white robes that had been given to them (6:11) when they had demonstrated their loyalty to Christ on earth (vs. 9).
 3. This was a multitude that included every single soul that had ever committed to serve Jesus. It consisted of all the redeemed of all:
 - a. Nations. These were individuals who had been made disciples and who had been baptized when the gospel was preached to “all the nations” under the Great Commission of the Lord (Matt. 28:18-20);
 - b. Tribes. Even those in remote and obscure locations had been given the opportunity to receive God’s grace (Col. 1:23);
 - c. Peoples. Obedience to the truth had been prescribed for every individual. The redeemed had been justified one by one, not by groups, as each person gave his heart and his life to the service of his Master (Mark. 16:15,16);
 - d. Tongues. No stone had been left unturned by God to make certain that there was *no discrimination* allowed to discourage lost men and women. Even the barrier of different languages had been removed with the provision of tongue-speaking (Acts 2:11).
- C. With volume and enthusiasm those in the multitude (vs. 10) shouted, “Salvation [which now also belonged to them] belongs to God and the Lamb!” They acknowledged the source from which their ultimate and complete redemption had come: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift of God*” (Eph. 2:8).
1. God was on the throne (vs. 9)! His unsearchable wisdom, power, and love had been wonderfully demonstrated in His treatment of every creature willing to bow to His pre-eminence. Angels, elders, living creatures, and saved human beings had all experienced the absolute grace of His character.
 2. A swelling anthem of thanksgiving broke forth from this vast throng, as in concert they fell in humble worship of their Great Benefactor (vs.11,12). This outpouring of praise was similar to those expressions offered in chapter five (5:12,13) to both Father and Son.

3. An elder [See 5:5.] “answered” John (vs. 13), who apparently had asked some question(s), either verbally or mentally. What he asked we are not told, but it brought a response about the identity of the multitude of praise-givers. This elder likely was repeating the questions that John had in his own mind. It was vital to the purpose of the vision that John and the churches understand clearly that God would finally save the faithful in heaven if they would only persevere. Identifying the persons in this multitude as to (1) who they were and (2) where they had come from would serve that purpose.
4. Respectfully, John said, “Sir, you know [please tell me].”

D. These were persons who:

1. Came [ASV] out of the great tribulation (vs. 14). This verb form [*erchomai*] suggests a continuous, not completed, action. It indicates a transition from one place to another. Thus, the picture intended is not one of a multitude of completed size but of one whose number continues to grow as saints continue to overcome the rigors of the tribulation and are ushered into the heavenly gathering;
2. Wear robes washed in the Lamb’s blood (vs. 14). This figure, of course, seems strange on first thought. Items are not usually made white by washing them in blood. Nevertheless, the image is logical when we remember that the whiteness of these robes merely represents the religious purity of those who wear them. Throughout the Scriptures, blood, first of animals and then of the slain Christ, has been associated with spiritual cleansing. The blood of Jesus:
 - a. Was the price He paid for our eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12);
 - b. Gives us boldness to enter the Holiest [heaven] (Heb.10:19);
 - c. Purges our conscience from dead works to serve God (Heb. 9:14);
 - d. Sanctifies us as the people of God (Heb. 13:12);
 - e. Redeems us and forgives our sins (Col. 1:14).

[Jesus Himself is pictured in Revelation 19:13 as a conquering warrior wearing a robe dipped in (His own) blood to magnify the brightness of His personal purity and righteousness.]
3. Are [continually] before God’s throne (vs. 15). Consequently, He dwells *among* them. There is a closeness and warmth to their relationship that could be possible nowhere else. The children have come home to live with their Father, and He is glad;
4. Serve God day and night in His temple (vs. 15). Service is not unknown to this multitude of saints. They served him well on earth; they will serve Him better in heaven. As good children, they have no greater joy than to do whatever pleases their Father. Heaven is all about *Him*, not them;
5. Hunger and thirst no more (vs. 16). No doubt, they had suffered much from

the lack of food and water [both literally and figuratively], among other things, during the great tribulation. Now, however, every need [spiritual, of course] is supplied in abundance. They are even shaded from the heat of the sun [representative of harsh conditions under which they had lived on earth];

6. Drink living water provided by the Good Shepherd (vs. 17). The waters of earth, when available, satisfy only for a while. Heaven's waters satisfy eternally (John 4:13,14);
 7. Are comforted by a loving Father (vs. 17). Tears had flowed freely and often amid the great tribulation through which they had suffered. Sorrows had often overwhelmed the hearts of the persecuted saints. But now, a sympathetic Father enfolds redeemed souls in His loving arms, and with tender hands He gently wipes away their tears and makes everything all right again!
- E. Albert Barnes, eloquent as always, muses about this consolation promised to the saints who reach heaven:

Philosophers have sought a brief definition of man, and have sought in vain. Would there be any better description of him, as representing the reality of his condition here, than to say that he is *one who weeps*. Who is there of the human family who has not shed a tear? Who that has not wept over the grave of a friend; over his own losses and cares; over his disappointments; over the treatment he has received from others; over his sins; over the follies, vices, and woes of his fellow-men? And what a change would it make in our world if it could be said that henceforth not another tear would be shed; not another head would ever be bowed again in grief! Yet this is to be the condition of heaven. In that world there is to be no pain, no disappointment, no bereavement. No friend is to lie in agony on a sick bed; no grave is to be opened to receive a parent, a wife, a child; no gloomy prospect of death is to draw tears of sorrow from the eyes. To that blessed world, when our eyes run down with tears, are we permitted to look forward; and the prospect of such a world should contribute to wipe away our tears here-- for all our sorrows will soon be over. As already remarked, there was a beautiful propriety, at a time when such calamities impended over the church and the world-- when there was such a certainty of persecution and sorrow-- in permitting the mind to rest on the contemplation of these happy scenes in heaven, where all the redeemed, in white robes, and with palms of victory in their hands, would be gathered before the throne. To us also now, amidst the trials of the present life-- when friends leave us; when sickness comes; when our hopes are blasted; when calumnies and reproaches come upon us; when, standing on the verge of the grave, and looking down into the cold tomb, the eyes pour forth floods of tears-- it is a blessed privilege to be permitted to look forward to that brighter scene in heaven, where not a pang shall ever be felt, and not a tear shall ever be shed.

- F. What greater incentive for faithful endurance could possibly be offered to disciples whose spiritual mettle would soon be tested in the worst way? Along with the church members at Smyrna, every other struggling Christian should open his heart to Jesus' steadfast promise, "Be faithful until [unto--ASV] death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).
- G. Barnes also has worthwhile comments on the intended effect of this vision on

Christians in the churches who needed encouragement as they faced the trials of the future:

The throne is there represented as set up in heaven, and the vision here is a vision of what will occur in heaven. It is designed to carry the thoughts beyond *all* the scenes of conflict, strife, and persecution on earth, to the time when the church shall be triumphant in glory-- when all storms shall have passed by; when all persecutions shall have ceased; when all revolutions shall have occurred; when all the elect-- not only the hundred and forty-four thousand of the sealed, but of all nations and times-- shall have been gathered in. There was a beautiful propriety in this vision. John saw the tempests stayed, as by the might of angels. He saw a new influence and power that would seal the true servants of God. But those tempests were stayed only for a time, and there were awful visions in reserve than any which had been exhibited-- visions of woe and sorrow, of persecution and of death. It was appropriate, therefore, just at this moment of calm suspense-- of delayed judgments-- to suffer the mind to rest on the triumphant close of the whole in heaven, when a countless host would be gathered there with palms in their hands, uniting with angels in the worship of God. The mind, by the contemplation of this beautiful vision, would be refreshed and strengthened for the disclosure of the awful scenes which were to occur on the sounding of the trumpets under the seventh seal. The simple idea is, that, amidst the storms and tempests of life-- scenes of existing or impending trouble and wrath-- it is well to let the eye rest on the scene of the final triumph, when innumerable hosts of the redeemed shall stand before God, and when sorrow shall be known no more.

Lesson Eight: Chapter 8:1-13
Opening the Seventh Seal: Four Trumpets

The opening of the first six seals of the book containing the revelation of the church's future in a world bent on its destruction disclosed frightful times ahead. The *fundamental* message of the revelation was clear: God would not allow His people to be destroyed by their enemies, nor would He sit idly by and watch His eternal plan for saving believers suffer at the hands of unbelievers who refused to acknowledge His right to rule the lives of all men. Furthermore, those who dared to rise in opposition to His divine will would pay, and pay dearly, for their rebellious actions against the loyal followers of His Son Jesus.

While the revelation of the six seals is easily understood even by casual readers, the details of the imagery may be more difficult to grasp. The seals portray: horses and riders, an altar with souls under it, an earthquake, a black sun and a bloody moon, falling stars, dislodged mountains and islands, and men crying out for relief from their punishment. Whatever those things signified, they were definitely associated with the wrath of God toward a wicked world, and men cried out in desperation, "*Who is able to stand?*"

That question is answered immediately by John's vision of the sealing of the saved in chapter seven. God is in complete control of earth's destiny, and He will protect His people this side of the judgment and will forever redeem them in heaven after the judgment has occurred. And with that assurance given, the time has come to execute His plan for the future of both the righteous and the unrighteous. The opening of the seventh seal in this chapter will disclose the fate of each group.

Silence in Heaven

I. Removing the seventh seal. 8:1-12

A. Silence in heaven. 8:1-6.

1. One delay in the execution of God's plan has already been imposed by order of a heavenly messenger (7:3). Retribution must wait until the Lord's people were assured that they would be able to "stand" throughout the awful events ahead. That having been done, John probably expected to see action on the plan go forward immediately, once the last seal was removed from God's book. Strangely though, that was not to be the case.
2. Instead of action, John witnessed another delay. Instead of a further unfolding of future developments, there was *silence* in heaven for about half an hour (vs. 1). Why this silence? We can, of course, only guess, but three logical reasons quickly come to mind:

- a. God was only following the pattern that was set long before when Old Testament prophets announced impending doom or blessing on the earth's inhabitants:
 - (1) Prior to God's punishing Judah and Jerusalem because of their idolatry, Zephaniah declared, "Be silent in the presence of the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is at hand" (Zeph.1:7);
 - (2) Silence was appropriate before Israel's oppressors received God's wrath and His people received God's blessings. "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation" (Zech. 2:13);
 - (3) God's Nature is so awesome and His decisions so unchangeable that man can offer neither challenge nor objection to what He does in guiding earth's destiny. Humanity's only response to divinity's actions is to be silent and pray for mercy. Habakkuk said, "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20);
 - b. God was reluctant to inflict well-deserved punishment on wicked men who had behaved badly. He has always preferred to offer ample opportunities for sinners to repent rather than summarily to pour out His vengeance upon them. Even now, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2Pet. 3:9);
 - c. God wanted to emphasize the enormity and the terror of the events that were to come by imposing on those who were threatened time to contemplate their fate. Waiting on "a trip to the woodshed" is sometimes almost as hard to endure as the punishment itself. The "dramatic effect" on John and on readers in the churches would certainly be greatly increased by the silence and the delay that John reports.
3. The silence lasted for about half an hour. An "hour" in Scripture often signifies a rather long and complete period of time. For example, Jesus said to the woman in Samaria, "...the *hour* is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21). That "hour" referred to the entire final dispensation. "One-half hour" would seem to be neither a very short time nor a very lengthy period. So, this delay would not include only a *few* days, but neither would it allow *much* time before the "day of His wrath" began.
 4. Imagine the spiritual tension that built in John's mind as he endured the awful silence and the waiting for something to happen in his vision. *Finally*, something did. Seven angels appeared (vs. 2). These were angels whose role was to "stand" before God's throne and to carry out missions that were assigned to them. Their purpose now would be to take seven trumpets [from God?] and to sound them in sequence to reveal the awesome details of the retribution had been promised by the Lord to evil men when the sixth seal was opened.

5. But before those angels could perform their task, another angel came near the golden altar [of incense] and received much incense in a golden censer [dish] to mingle with the prayers of the saints and to offer to God both prayers and incense upon the golden altar (vs. 3). Some identify the incense with the mediation of Jesus that made the prayers effective.
6. Obviously, there is here strong imagery taken from the tabernacle and temple worship of Old Testament Jews. Incense was regularly offered by Jewish priests while the people prayed (Luke 1:10). The “priest” of John’s vision was the angel who offered the incense in this “sacrifice of praise” to the Lord. Some contend that these Old Law images suggest that the temple and its worship were still operative when these lines were composed by John, but this conclusion does not seem necessary.
7. The sweet odor of incense rose up with the saints’ prayers as [figurative] smoke to God’s throne of power and judgment. Perhaps the delay of punishment and the prayers of the saints were related. Maybe the saints’ prayers were intended to influence in some way God’s actions either toward themselves or toward unbelievers, and it was important that time and opportunity should be made available for offering those prayers (vs. 4).
8. Some argue that “all” the saints offering their prayers to God strengthens the position that these approaching calamities were much more far-reaching than those which engulfed Palestine prior to Jerusalem’s fall in A.D. 70. Others assert that this “all” refers to all believers principally in and around the holy city.
9. After the prayers had ascended to Almighty God, who would exercise complete control of everything that would take place for both the saved and the unsaved, the angel of incense [mercy] became the angel of retribution. He next took fire from the altar [of burnt offering/sacrifice, Lev. 6:13] and *threw* it violently upon the earth (vs. 5). Perhaps this is the same altar under which John had seen the souls of the martyrs in chapter six (6:9). [See Lev. 16:12,13.] If so, God’s justice would be eloquently displayed in the symbolism of avenging fire being taken from the very altar upon which the martyrs had been slain for their faith. This action of utilizing fire against wrongdoers is similar to one recorded in Ezekiel 10:2, when fire was scattered over the Jews’ holy city to warn of God’s displeasure for their sins.
10. The time for waiting and for probation was over. The time for accounting and for punishment had arrived. Accordingly, John heard noises and thunderings and saw lightnings and an earthquake, all symbols of violent upheavals and destructive occurrences in the world.
11. The seven trumpets held by the seven angels were intended both to *announce* and to *warn* about the punishments appointed by heaven to be suffered by all wicked opposers of the truth and oppressors of the faithful. They would serve much the

same purposes as those appointed by Moses for Israel's use in Numbers 10. Each of these trumpets would proclaim the heavy hand of God's wrath that would be manifested in different and frightful ways as the Lord's plan was executed one step at a time (vs. 6).

B. A cautionary note about interpretation. 8:7-12.

1. Other than the disagreements between early-daters and late-daters, commentators are in substantial accord about many things included in Revelation to this point of the book. However, beginning with the sounding of the seven trumpets, the explanations offered for the symbolism in the rest of Revelation become much more widely divergent.
2. The student seeking to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of the message of the book should be very careful not to jump to unwarranted conclusions derived from scholars who take adamant positions in interpreting the book's symbolism.
3. We should strive to avoid two serious mistakes about understanding Revelation:
 - a. The interpretation is so clear and easy in allowing us to find *one* framework of meaning within which we can satisfactorily explain all the symbols that we should discount all other possible or reasonable explanations;
 - b. The interpretation is so obscure and difficult that we should despair to achieve even a *general* comprehension of this message from God. Revelation has been called the "turn-around book" whose vague meaning causes Bible classes to turn around before completing their study of the New Testament.
4. Perhaps the words of Adam Clarke, the eminent Bible scholar and commentator, will find some sympathy when *we* survey the whole book with its multiplicity of strange and mysterious symbols and disturbing word pictures:

My readers will naturally expect that I should either give a decided preference to some one of the opinions stated above, or produce one of my own; I can do neither, nor can I pretend to explain the book; I do not understand it; and in the things which concern so sublime and awful a subject, I dare not, as my predecessors, indulge in *conjectures*. I have read elaborate works on the subject, and each seemed right till another was examined. I am satisfied that no *certain* mode of interpreting the prophecies of this book has yet been found out, and I will not add another monument to the littleness or folly of the human mind by endeavoring to strike out a new course. I repeat it, I do not understand the book; and I am satisfied that not one who has written on the subject knows anything more of it than myself.

5. A third attitude about this revelation is to be preferred. The book obviously had some meaning for early Christians or it would not have been written to them. It must also maintain some value in our time, or else it would not have been preserved along with other Bible books which, it is agreed, *are* profitable for modern study and application (2Tim. 3:16).
6. Unquestionably, even the casual reader of Revelation can comprehend its central

message: Faithful people will survive all obstacles in this world and will be saved in heaven through the help of God; those responsible for those obstacles will be punished eternally for their actions.

7. Clarke adds these words of reason to his previous comments:

A conjecture concerning the *design* of the book may be safely indulged; thus then it has struck me, that *the book of the Apocalypse may be considered as a PROPHET continued in the Church of God, uttering predictions relative to all times, which have their successive fulfilment as ages roll on; and thus it stands in the Christian Church in the place of the SUCCESSION of PROPHETS in the Jewish Church; and by this especial economy PROPHECY is STILL CONTINUED, is ALWAYS SPEAKING; and yet a succession of prophets rendered unnecessary.*

8. Any serious effort to acquire even a general impression of Revelation's meaning virtually demands that the student must first understand that any approach to the book will likely be heavily influenced by one [or more] of several common positions advocated about the visions, such as:

- a. The visions John received were intended to inform early Christians prior to Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 that their great enemy was the unbelieving nation of Israel and that they would suffer many persecutions at its hands. However, God's wrath would rest upon that rebellious people, and He would soon destroy the nation through the agency of the Roman Empire. Judgment against the Jews culminated in the fall of their holy city at the hands of a ruthless Roman army. This position contends that the symbols of Revelation are best interpreted in the light of events occurring before and during the Roman attacks on the city. Some teachers are also proposing what is called "Realized Eschatology," or the "70 A.D. theory," which maintains that *all* unfulfilled Bible prophecy was fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed. Also, the second coming and the resurrection of saints proposed by Scripture were accomplished at the same time. Most "early-daters" do not subscribe to these extreme doctrines;
- b. The revelation was designed to bolster the trust of Christians that God would preserve them through present or soon-to-happen persecutions and through all future oppositions of every kind. The great enemy was Satan, who would work through various agents to defeat God's purpose for His church. The message is revealed within the current context of the tribulations imposed by the wicked Roman emperor Domitian and his evil successors. But its *overall* theme has a more extensive focus on *all* oppressions of *all* saints until time ends and God's judgment seals the eternal destiny of both good and bad men. The symbols of Revelation should be applied not only to Roman persecutions but also to all other assaults on the church of God and should not be exclusively connected with particular historical events or religious movements;
- c. Early disciples were to understand that they were soon to face difficult times

at the hands of the Roman government. Rome stood as the great enemy of the Lord's people, and its leaders would make every effort to annihilate the body of Christ from the earth. The symbols relate largely to particular historical events or to religious movements during the Roman period, and the specific associations between the symbols and the events can readily be seen.

C. Removing the seal and sounding the trumpets: Preliminary Features. 8:7-12.

1. "Seven" trumpets suggest the *fulness* of God's retribution to be visited upon the earth. This was the same concept of completeness that characterized the *seven* churches, (1:4, 20), stars (1:20), seals (5:1), Spirits of God (5:6), and angels who would sound the seven trumpets (8:2).
2. The trumpets are divided into two units, four trumpets and three trumpets, much as were the seven seals in chapter six. The first four trumpets focus on things in the physical or natural world, and the next three involve the physical and spiritual well-being of people.
3. Punishments connected with the first six trumpets symbolize judgments on the wicked world. Five of the six are sent against one-third of the targeted population, probably suggesting "a large portion."
4. The partial judgments likely are intended to serve as warnings to survivors that subsequent and more severe calamities will follow. For this reason, the trumpets may be seen not only as agents of retribution but also as demands for surviving sinners to repent before the final blow is delivered against them (Joel 2:1).
5. Also, saints are called by these trumpets to more diligent adherence to the will of God in order to escape from the fate to be suffered by unbelievers (Joel 2:15).
6. The first four trumpets incorporate images involving the four classifications from the natural world as understood by men of that time: (a) land; (2) sea; (3) fresh waters; (4) heavenly bodies [Summers].
7. The student must decide whether the images presented by the trumpets are to be regarded as *literal* or *figurative*. A wide divide exists on this issue between the "traditional" scholars and the current premillennial writers who for some time have been able to stir the imagination of a gullible public. Two statements bring this question into focus:

Any explanation of these phenomena which follow the trumpets is generally unsatisfactory, even to the one who interprets. To interpret them literally and apply them to certain places and definite periods in history is impossible; to allegorize them leads into severe difficulties, although it is clearly evident that there was symbolical significance to the consequences which followed the trumpets. To view these evils as physical calamities which occurred throughout the Roman Empire is likewise not satisfactory. It can, however, be concluded with certainty that these trumpets represent warnings of a supernatural judgment from the Almighty [Hailey].

Are the trumpets literal? If so, we are still awaiting their sound, for the world has not witnessed such actual events. If the trumpets are figurative, does each trumpet correspond to a specific historical event? An examination of first century history during the Roman Empire reveals events that seem to parallel some of the trumpet descriptions. Armed invasions were always a threat to Rome, especially from the Parthians on their northern border. Locust swarms, descending like dark clouds on the greenery of a countryside, caused widespread destruction. Natural disasters touched the Roman Empire. Hailstorms afflicted crops and structures. Historical accounts chronicle erupting volcanoes, such as Mount Vesuvius, which buried residents of Rome and Pompeii alive. Yet, such an explanation fails to find a one-to-one correspondence between the description of each trumpet and an actual event represented in the natural world [Matt Qualls].

8. Perhaps the student of Revelation will profit from surveying the differences of interpretation offered by several scholars of the book. Of course, each person must arrive at his own conclusions about the trumpets and their attending events and determine which meaning(s) provides him with the most satisfactory understanding. The figures that describe *what happened* when each trumpet sounded are mostly fairly easy to grasp; *what they mean*, however, is a different matter.
9. As noted on page 74, *three main lines of reasoning* usually are applied to uncover the mysteries in chapters eight through twenty-two of the book. Strong support for all three positions may be found in the literature:
 - a. The “early date” interpretation which largely explains the symbols within the context of events occurring before, during, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70;
 - b. The “late date” interpretation which associates the symbols more generally with *both* the Roman persecutions of the church *and* with subsequent oppression of the truth by its enemies in all future time until the final judgment;
 - c. The “historical” interpretation which attempts to relate the symbols with real events and developments in the histories of the Roman empire and the Lord’s church.
10. Many advocates of these ideas about Revelation’s meaning also hold to an “eclectic” view which promotes a *basic* position but also embraces explanations usually found in the *other* categories of interpretation. It is both difficult and unfair to place the label of any *one* position on these scholars. Even among those who have the same fundamental view of the book, there are wide differences in the emphasis given to that primary mindset in various parts of the revelation.
11. Numerous scholars and writers have subscribed to one or more of these positions over time. Their voices should be heard, and their reasoning should be carefully considered as we seek our own “comfort zone” of understanding. Among those whose works are available, the writings of Homer Hailey, William Hendricksen, Arthur Ogden, Ray Summers, Albert Barnes, Jim McGuiggan, John T. Hinds, B.W. Johnson, and Adam Clarke offer worthwhile thoughts to be digested as the student looks for answers from among a multitude of questions about Revelation’s meaning. We will rely on them for some of the comments that follow in our study.

Four Trumpets Sound

D. The First Trumpet of Destruction. 8:7.

1. **What happened:** *“The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”*
2. **What it means:**
 - a. These images remind us immediately of the plague of hail and fire that fell on Egypt as punishment for Pharaoh’s obstinate resistance to the will of Jehovah (Exo. 9:24). But now the destruction is intensified with the addition of **blood** to the mix. Awful things were planned to occur against the earth because of the sins committed against the Lord’s people;
 - b. One-third [not *all*, but a large part] of the world’s economy would be used as God’s tool in bringing judgment upon His enemies.
3. **Thoughts from the scholars.**
 - a. Hailey [“late date”]: “All this seems to point to judgment upon the heathen as their blood is brought upon their heads.”
 - b. Hendricksen [“late date,” cycles of visions]: “In all probability this first trumpet indicates that throughout the period extending from the first to the second coming, our Lord...will afflict the persecutors of the church with various disasters...on *earth*, that is, on the *land*.”
 - c. Ogden [“early date”]: “Hail symbolized the implements of war (cf. Ezek. 13:11-16). Vespasian’s army using engines for throwing arrows, darts and stones invaded Galilee and the results were ‘fire mingled with blood.’”
 - d. Barnes [historical approach]: “The particulars of that invasion [in 410 A.D. by Alaric, king of the Goths--RG], the consternation, the siege of Rome, and the capture and pillage of the imperial city, would confirm the propriety of this application to the symbol of the first trumpet.”
 - e. Summers: “All these [four trumpets--RG] are pictures of natural calamity as an agent of destruction against Rome...One of the main things that led to the breaking down of the Roman Empire was a series of natural calamities causing disaster over the empire: earthquake, volcanic eruption, floods, etc.”

E. The Second Trumpet of Destruction. 8:8, 9.

1. **What happened:** *“Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third part of the living creatures in the sea died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.”*
2. **What it means:**
 - a. To Babylon the prophet proclaimed, “Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain...says the Lord” (Jer. 51:25). Previous physical “mountains” of political and military power had been brought low by Almighty God because of

their excesses, and Rome soon would suffer the fate of all the others. Only God's spiritual mountain [the church] can prevail into eternity (Isa. 2:2; Dan. 2:44);

- b. The many nations of the world are often compared in the O.T. to the waters of the sea [e.g., Ezek. 26:3; Isa. 17:12). No matter how mighty any earthly kingdom might become, its ultimate destiny is to fall in fiery disgrace into the great panoramic sea of human history and to be forever extinguished as an active participant in the scheme of worldly things. Each kingdom's demise, however, must be attended by the "blood" of human suffering and deprivation. Commerce ["ships"] must be hurt; all seafaring activities must be disrupted.

3. From the scholars.

- a. Hendricksen: "Not only does our ascended Lord use calamities on *land* as an instrument to punish and warn the wicked; he also employs the *sea* as a tool against them. We are to interpret *all* the disasters that take place on the sea in that light."
- b. Ogden: "There were only four prominent seas in Bible times: the sea of Galilee, the Mediterranean Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Red Sea. Only two of these were of any great consequence in the Roman-Jewish war: the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Sea battles were fought in both."
- c. Clarke: "Therefore, great commotions in kingdoms and among their inhabitants may be here intended, but to *whom, where, and when* these happened, or are to happen, we know not."
- d. Hinds: "...it is very probable that the vision of the second trumpet was fulfilled in the invasion of the Vandals under Genseric...The significant thing here is that the attack upon the western part of the empire was from the sea." [This military operation took place in 458 A.D. Barnes makes a lengthy defense of this same application-- RG.]

F. The Third Trumpet of Destruction. 8:10,11.

- 1. What happened: "*Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters; and the name of the star is Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.*"

2. What it means:

- a. Sometimes, a "star" is used in Scripture to represent a strong human ruler. For example, the king of Babylon was spoken of in this way (Isa. 14:12). Some suppose that John's vision here focuses on the Roman emperors who received the adulation of their people for having provided the infrastructure of inland water travel and the movement of irrigation and drinking water by the great aqueducts. Many human comforts depended on such benefits that

came from governmental leaders. Roman emperors, in turn, were revered by the people, first as leaders and later as gods. Emperor worship became a burning issue between the empire and the church;

- b. "Wormwood" was a bitter and sometimes noxious plant [The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible] which came to be associated with idolatry (Deut. 29:18; Jer. 9:15). There may be here a warning about the destiny of those who willingly bowed in homage to whichever ruler was sitting on the Roman throne. Many [one-third] would be guilty of this error, and many would die spiritually for their sin.

3. From the commentators.

- a. Ogden: "Did such a star fall and, if so, in what way did his fall cause bitterness among the people? Let Josephus explain it, for he, as the general of all the Jewish forces in Galilee, was defeated by the Roman Armies, after which he surrendered to the Romans and became an informant to them. He was a falling star."
- b. Hailey: "In the overall vision of the trumpets, the first affects vegetation, the second the sea with its marine life and ships, and this, the third, involves the inland waters and springs. All these trumpets appear to have a broader significance than describing simple natural calamities within the Roman Empire; in fact, the Roman Empire has not been specifically introduced."
- c. McGuiggen: "Two things come to mind in this trumpet blast. God has interfered with the water supply. This he did in Egypt under the first plague. And again, Israel came across bitter water in their march to freedom and God cast into it a tree which healed the waters. For the people of God, the waters are healed-- for the enemy, the water is polluted."
- d. Hendricksen: "Remember, moreover, that this huge star blazing like a torch is *dropped out of the sky*, in other words, these judgments upon the land-waters are the acts of *God!* That is usually forgotten: the newspapers tell you all about floods and about epidemics originating in the marshes, etc., but they fail to point out that these judgments are God's warning-voices!"
- e. Barnes: "Among expositors there has been a considerable degree of unanimity in supposing that Attila, the king of the Huns, is referred to...As a matter of fact, the principal operations of Attila were in the regions of the Alps, and on the portion of the empire whence the rivers flow down into Italy."

G. The Fourth Trumpet of Destruction. 8:12.

- 1. What happened: "*Then the fourth angel sounded: 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 were darkened; and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.*"

2. What it means:

- a. As was the case with the first trumpet, the images of the fourth strongly suggest an affinity with the plagues visited upon the Egyptians in Exodus. There, the ninth plague withdrew the light of the sun, moon, and stars and left the Egyptians in “thick darkness” for three days. In this picture, John sees the light of all heavenly bodies darkened by one-third of their usual brightness;
- b. Symbolically, the O.T. Scriptures frequently used the sun, moon, and stars to represent God’s blessings of salvation and good fortune upon the obedient, and their removal signified the display of His wrath upon the disobedient. [See Joel 2:10,11; Isa. 13:10 ff.] Thus, Ezekiel lamented over the fall of the Pharaoh, “When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark: I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness to your land...”(Ezek. 32:7.8);
- c. Obviously, light and darkness and obedience and disobedience are involved in these images, whatever else they might mean. The dimming of the heavenly bodies no doubt is to be understood as another of Jehovah’s judgments upon men because of their wickedness;
- d. A *particular* kind of disobedience perhaps is intended by these shadowy images. David said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). When men refuse to depend on God’s wisdom and depend instead on their own resources, their hearts and minds will be filled with darkness rather than light (Eph. 1:17,18). Some writers conclude that such a darkening of spiritual understanding among the movers and shakers of this world is the subject of this trumpet’s message. When godly knowledge decreases, of course, ungodly behavior increases;
- e. Certain writers choose to assign the darkness of this trumpet to a particular time and/or event in history as, for example, the time following the Roman conquest of Galilee in their war with the Jews or the events that surrounded the ultimate decline and fall of the empire to invading barbarian nations.

3. What the writers say.

- a. McGuiggan: “Now the heavenly bodies are smitten. This is customary prophetic speech...None of this was intended to be literally fulfilled...It is a description of the Almighty’s attack on the world of the ungodly. Because of sin, the whole creation came under a curse-- that which was to be man’s home and man’s servant is cursed.”
- b. Hendricksen: “The effect of the sun, moon, and stars upon life can hardly be overestimated. All evils that are due to the abnormal functioning of the

heavenly bodies throughout this entire age are here indicated. Thus the entire universe, including even the sun, moon, and stars, is used by our Lord as a warning for those who do not serve him and who persecute his children."

- c. Hailey: "No specific people or time is indicated in this vision, making general its application as were the first three. Before total darkness engulfs any society, God sounds a trumpet of warning to that society. He sends minor judgments which mark the beginning of the society's destruction unless repentance turns the course of its destiny. The four trumpets call for the reformation, not the destruction of mankind."
- d. Barnes: "If the previous symbols referred to Alaric, to Genseric, and to Attila, there can be no difficulty in applying this to Odoacer, and to his reign in which, in fact, the Roman dominion in the west came to an end, and passed into the hands of this barbarian...about A.D. 476 to 479 A.D..."
- e. Hinds: "In 476 the soldiers under Odoacer mutinied and ousted Augustulus, the young emperor, from the throne, and offered submission to Zeno, emperor at Constantinople. The former glory of both emperor and senate was gone, and Odoacer by authority of the Eastern emperor ruled Italy as patrician for fourteen years...So ended the Western Empire; the rulers lost their power, yet enough was left to show the light had not been completely extinguished; or, if so, it would be restored by another and different kind [religious-RG] of ruler in the city of Rome."
- f. Barnes: "It was a 'third part' of it which was put out; and it was still true that some forms of the ancient constitution were observed-- that the light still lingered before it wholly passed away."
- g. Ogden: "In symbolic tones, then, this trumpeting angel pictures the state of Israel following the end of the Galilean campaign. The mopping up operations placed the Romans in full control of Galilee. One third of the nation of Israel was conquered. The sun, moon and stars were reduced in light by one third, symbolic of God's light upon Israel going out."

II. An Angel [Eagle] of Woes. 8:13.

- A. Perhaps there was another pause after the fourth trumpet had sounded.
 - 1. That would have contributed even more to the drama and tension of the scene.
- B. John *saw* a messenger of dread despair flying in the midst of heaven.
 - 1. The "angel" of KJV and NKJV is the "eagle" in ASV, RSV, and Confraternity versions and is to be preferred, although the function of both is the same.
 - 2. The sudden change from scenes of great destruction to the picture of a single bird flying boldly in its strength and majesty must have added drama to an already electric atmosphere.

3. The eagle, a bird of prey, is also said to have been in the superstition of John's day an omen of bad fortune. It was indeed an appropriate messenger to bear the dire warnings from heaven to an evil world.
- C. John heard the terrifying message of the mighty eagle.
1. Three "woes" were soon to come upon the earth's *people*.
 - a. Of course, each of the first four trumpet soundings was also attended by its own "woe," or punishment.
 - b. The first four woes had been inflicted upon the people's *earth*.
 2. These woes would follow the sounding of the final three trumpets.
 3. Evidently, each of these "woes" would be realized in its respective calamity that would be suffered by wicked humanity.
 - a. The last three woes of retribution apparently would be more severe than the first four.

- 1. What first occurred when the seventh seal was opened? (1)**

- 2. What was given to the seven angels? To the eighth angel? (2,3)**

- 3. What did the angel do with the incense he was given? (3) With the censer? What happened then? (5)**

- 4. Describe the events that followed the sounding of the first trumpet. (7)**

- 5. Describe what happened when the second trumpet sounded. (8,9)**

- 6. What took place when the third trumpet sounded? (10,11)**

- 7. When the fourth trumpet sounded, what awesome thing followed? (12)**

- 8. What fearful warning was given by the angel [eagle] after the first four trumpets had sounded? (13)**

Lesson Nine: Chapter 9:1-21

Two More Trumpets

The opening of each of the first six seals of God's book was accompanied by the unveiling of a single scene expressing the terror of God's wrath against ungodly men. The seventh seal, however, was different as it presented *seven* trumpets, each of which, except for the fifth, was designed to reveal specific details of the calamities that lay ahead and which would both punish unbelievers for their wickedness and vindicate believers for their faithfulness to the Lord. The first four trumpets sounded severe warnings about actions to be taken by Jehovah against natural phenomena of the earth: the land, the sea, the inland waters, and the heavenly bodies. Men, of course, would suffer indirectly when *nature* was assailed by such calamitous occurrences. The next three trumpets would announce awful things that would directly inflict harm on *persons*. The awesome blasts of two of these trumpets will be heard in this chapter.

The remarks made in chapter eight about interpreting the symbols in these visions must also be applied to this chapter, and, indeed, they are appropriate to the rest of the Revelation letter. The student should remember that many possible explanations have been offered by Biblical scholarship, and any adamant interpretation that refuses to consider alternatives probably is risky and unwise. Before studying chapter nine, it might be helpful to review remarks about the three basic approaches to interpretation. [See number 9, page 76.]

The Fifth Trumpet

I. The Sounding of the Fifth Trumpet. 9:1-11.

A. A star in the bottomless pit. 9:1,2.

1. A "star" [already] fallen from heaven to earth next appeared in John's vision.
 - a. He was given the key [authority-- e.g., Matt. 16:19] to open the miseries of the bottomless pit.
 - b. A "star" sometimes represents a powerful leader [e.g., Isa. 14:12].
 - c. This "star" was Satan, the god of this world (2Cor. 4:4).
 - (1) He *had fallen* from his place in heaven (Lk. 10:18).
 - (2) He had been disgraced and expelled from heaven (2Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) because of prideful rebellion against God (1Tim. 3:6).
2. Satan opened the "bottomless pit" to execute God's plan for retribution.
 - a. This pit was not hell but the domain of personified wickedness at the present time. No occupant can emerge from eternal hell [*geenna*] (Rev. 20:1,10).

- b. This star brought darkness instead of light out of the pit.
 - (1) The “smoke” of ignorance of the truth allows Satan to ply his trade.
- B. Locusts swarmed out from the smoke [ignorance] to smite disobedient men. 9:3-11.
 - 1. Locusts were familiar assailants of earth’s inhabitants.
 - a. The Egyptians had been targeted by their destructive power (Exo. 10:4ff.).
 - b. Israel was punished for disobedience by swarms of locusts (Joel 1,2).
 - 2. The locusts were *commissioned* to inflict serious harm. 9:3-6.
 - a. They were kept from damaging the earth like real locusts would (Joel 1:7).
 - b. Only unsealed men would suffer harm from their onslaught. [See 7:3.]
 - c. The afflicted would be seriously hurt but not killed by their attacks.
 - (1) The stings of real scorpions are painful [“torment”] but seldom fatal.
 - (a) For some, death would be a welcome relief from intense suffering.
 - (2) The plague against sinners would last five months-- a definite period.
 - 3. The *symbolism* of this picture is explained in different ways.
 - a. The vision is a general, but vivid, presentation of the horrors that could be expected over time by all unrepentant sinners. God’s final and eternal judgment will be kept in reserve until His plan has been fully executed on earth, but hurtful judgments meanwhile will be visited upon the unsaved.
 - b. The vision of the locusts is specific to the period of the conquest of Palestine and Jerusalem by the Romans. The devil’s influence [smoke] would drive the conduct of the Roman-Jewish war, which would severely damage but not destroy Israel. The locusts were the traitorous Jews who turned against their countrymen during the final stages of the war with Rome.
 - c. This plague of locusts represents some of the historical events in the unfolding revelation of the civil and religious destinies of the Lord’s people until time ends at the coming of Christ. In this viewpoint, the immediate enemy is not Satan but a Satan-inspired “prophet” Muhammad, the king of the locusts. The vision supposedly depicts the vast conquests of Islam against people judged to be “unsealed” as Allah’s servants. Islam and its partners serve God as a lethal weapon in the ultimate destruction of the Roman Empire. A rather intricate application of the figures in this vision to Muslim conquests is offered by several commentators and makes interesting reading.
 - d. The symbols of locusts tormenting unsealed men is intended to stress the great displeasure of God for the extreme corruption of the Roman Empire. History records the internal rottenness of the empire which ate away its moral fiber and finally destroyed the nation. Various calamities [locusts] would severely harm the wicked [unsealed] as God judged them for their actions against His people. Christians, of course, would also suffer in these [natural] disasters, but for them their problems would be *trials*, not judgments. “The

vision is given as a means of reassurance to the Christians to help them see that Rome will never triumph over Christianity” (Summers).

4. The locusts were *described* in attention-getting and frightful details. 9:7-11.
 - a. Their shapes [“appearance”--RSV] were like horses ready for battle;
 - b. They had crowns like gold on their heads;
 - c. Their faces were like faces of men;
 - d. Their hair was like the hair of women;
 - e. They had teeth like lions’ teeth;
 - f. They wore breastplates like breastplates of iron;
 - g. Their wings sounded like chariots and horses going into battle;
 - h. They had tails like scorpions and had the power to sting and hurt men.
5. “Like” confirms that each characteristic was symbolic, not literal.
6. Joel also described the locusts in his prophecy with similar symbols:
 - a. Their appearance was like that of horses (Joel 2:4);
 - b. Their sound was like chariots leaping and fire raging (Joel 2:5).
7. Each feature of the scorpions contributed to their image of *potential destruction*.
 - a. Horses had a prominent role in Old Testament history. Their effective use in warfare struck terror in human warriors (Job 39:19-35), and conquering armies often disabled the horses of their vanquished enemies to discourage any future military capability (1Chron. 18:4). Some writers have claimed an actual resemblance between locusts and horses, especially their heads, and assert that the Italians at one time called locusts “little horses.”
 - b. The *stephanos*, or golden victory crown, usually is associated in Revelation with Jesus and His disciples (e.g., Rev. 14:14; 2:10). Its assignment here to these swarming locust-horses [or to their riders-- if there were riders] is limited to something that was like gold, suggesting that their conquests only *seemed* to be victories and would prove to be shallow and temporary when compared to the final triumph of Jesus Christ, the truly victorious one, over the forces of evil.
 - c. Perhaps the reference to the *faces* of the locusts is intended to remind John [and us] that these were really symbols of *men* that were being described and that they would serve Satan’s designs against the saints of God. Some writers suggest that these faces were bearded to give them the appearance of men and to make their countenances more fierce and warlike.
 - d. “Nature” [custom] among the Greeks taught that a woman’s hair ought to be long and a man’s short (1Cor. 11:14,15). Men in some other cultures were known to let their hair grow long like women’s [e.g., the Arabians]. At any rate, this description adds to the bizarre image of these locusts and increases the mystery surrounding their identity and the foreboding of their presence in John’s vision.

- e. The damage done to their crops by the teeth of locust swarms was well known and dreaded by the farmers of the east. But real locust teeth were not nearly as destructive as these long and sharp teeth that were like the teeth of lions. And, these teeth were to be used to attack *men*, not vegetation!
 - f. These warring locusts were well equipped for their mission. They wore breast-plates strong as iron, and there was little prospect for their victims to turn them back with weapons capable of resisting their onslaught. Success of the locusts in dispensing God's retribution among His foes was assured.
 - g. In addition to the awful appearance presented by this great *symbolic* horde of locusts, the sounds of chariots and horses, generated by their wings as they flew to accomplish their task, only magnified the horror of the reign of terror they soon would initiate against the ungodly. Joel similarly portrayed the noise that *literal* locusts made while devastating the countryside as the sounds of chariots and fire coming from "a strong people set in battle array" (Joel 2:5).
 - h. The last detail of the locusts' description was perhaps the most fearful of all. In their scorpion-like tails they carried the capacity to hurt men for five months. The harm done by an actual scorpion sting is painful but rather temporary. The suffering inflicted by these locusts would not only be intense but also would not soon subside. "Five months" suggests a definite but limited period of time when Satan's agents would suffer from this particular form of retribution for their persecution of godly people.
8. This menacing horde of locusts was led and motivated in their work of devastation by a "king." He is identified as the "angel of the bottomless pit" whose name is Destruction [Hebrew-- *Abaddon*] or Destroyer [Greek-- *Apollyon*]. Many believe that this leader is Satan, an angel once cast out of heaven (2Pet. 2:4); others consider him to be some other angel possessing authority and influence among the evil spirits and workers of wickedness. *Whoever* he is, he is well named as he pursues his purpose to wreak havoc among the people of the Lord, and his spirit of depravity pervades these locusts of retribution who appear in this passage. His kingship over the locusts attests to the fact that God sometimes employs the forces of evil to accomplish His own purposes in the world. This was a somewhat usual occurrence in the Old Testament when kings such as Nebuchadnezzar carried out the will of the Lord in His retribution against the Jewish nation (2Kings 25:11).
- C. The locust symbols explained by Bible scholars.

1. Hailey:

As the first woe fell upon mankind, clouds of smoke from the abyss contaminated the moral and spiritual atmosphere of earth, corrupting and debasing the minds of men. Out of this moral atmosphere came locusts to torment (but not to kill) as decay and corruption set in upon mankind.

2. Hendricksen:

Hence, these locusts, unbelievably terrible in their destructive power, are a fit symbol

of the far more terrible and destructive *hellish* locusts which the apostle is about to picture. Under the symbolism of a locust-plague John describes the powers and influences of hell operating in the hearts and lives of wicked men...Here are the demons, robbing men of all *light*, that is, of all true righteousness and holiness; joy and peace; wisdom and understanding.

3. Barnes:

But here (ch. ix) a new power appears. The scenery is all Oriental, and clearly has reference to events that were to spring up in the East. With surprising unanimity, commentators have agreed in regarding this as referring to the empire of the Saracens, or to the rise and progress of the religion and the empire set up by Mahomet [Muhammad-RG].

4. Hinds:

To say the least, the Mahometan effort to subvert the whole world to the worship of the prophet *may* be the thing represented. This false religion came into existence at the right time, swept the nations like a raging forest fire, and forced hundreds of thousands into submission. It would be remarkably strange if it were not included in a book of prophetic symbols touching the welfare of the church.

5. Summers:

The best interpretation in the light of the historical background seems to be that of...symbolizing the hellish spirit which penetrates the earth...or the forces of decay...which God has in his hand for retribution upon defiant Rome...It symbolizes the hellish rottenness, the internal decadence in the Roman Empire. One thing which brought about Rome's downfall was a series of corrupt rulers and leaders. Such a spirit of internal rottenness is pictured here as coming from *within* the empire, (out of the earth) to work toward her destruction.

6. Ogden:

In the fifth trumpeting angel, we have observed the development of the wrath of God against Israel as it moved from Galilee to Judah and Jerusalem. This trumpet established the development of the influence that molded and formed one side of the conflict which resulted in the end of the nation. It was the course traveled by the rebellious Jews in the war from which there was no turning back.

II. A transition between trumpets. 9:12.

A. An eagle had proclaimed the coming of *three* woes upon the inhabitants of the earth (8:13).

- 1. John brings closure to the plague of the spiritual locusts with the statement that the first woe is "past."**
- 2. If this symbolism foretells events not yet executed as John writes about them, his meaning must be that the *prophecy* of their occurrence is finished.**

B. John's readers are reminded that, as awful as this first woe is portrayed, there are two more [as bad or worse] that will follow it.

- 1. This reminder adds to the drama and to the dread of the vision.**

*The Sixth Trumpet***III. The Sounding of the Sixth Trumpet. 9:13-19.**

- A. A voice of unspecified origin came from the golden altar [of incense-- 8:3,4] and initiated the action of the sixth woe of the Lord's vengeance against a wicked world.
1. The voice came from the four horns of the altar.
 2. Horns often signified power and strength (Dan. 8:7,20).
 - a. "Four" horns perhaps emphasized the *totality* of God's ability to hear the prayers of the saints and to intercede in their behalf (8:3,4).
 - b. Jehovah's actions *continue* to respond to the saints' prayers for relief.
- B. The *sixth* angel [*seven* angels had been revealed with *seven* trumpets of warning] had the power not only to sound his warning but also to take action that would set into motion the tribulations attached to his warning.
1. *Four* angels [introduced for the first time] had been "bound" at [near] the Euphrates River. They were to be "released" at once.
 2. This *symbolic* Euphrates river seems to have offered a barrier against the awesome retribution against His enemies that the Lord had been holding back until later.
 3. The *four* bound angels had been "prepared" [*hetoimazo*-- "made ready"] to accomplish their assigned tasks as executors of God's vengeance. God had specific plans not only for what they would do when called into action but also for when their work would begin at a *symbolic* but precise moment of time. Now they are allowed to do what they had previously been restrained from doing.
 4. Their frightful mission was revealed-- kill a third of mankind!
 5. A vast army of horsemen suddenly appeared to John's eyes. These were to serve as the instruments through whom vengeance would be exercised against persecutors of the righteous.
 - a. John heard the number of the horsemen, although he saw their figures and those of their horses. Probably, the number was too great for his eyes to count but not too many for his mind to comprehend when told of the sum.
 - b. This army included two hundred million cavalymen with their mounts. This was, as Barnes observes, "a larger army than was ever assembled, and it cannot be supposed that it is to be taken literally." Summers estimates that "in regular formation this would make a troop of cavalry one mile wide and eighty-five miles long."
 - c. A brief description of horses and riders is recited.
 - (1) The horsemen wore breastplates colored *fiery* red, *hyacinth* blue, and *sulphur* yellow [brimstone-- ASV]. Fiery red perhaps signified the violence and suffering about to be inflicted upon sinners (1Pet. 4:12); hyacinth blue the heavenly origin of the punishment [it was one of the colors

of the stones in the Jewish high priest's breastplate-- called jacinth in Exo. 28:19]; and sulfur yellow the Sodom-like devastation that would attend the actions of the Lord's cavalry (Gen. 19:24; 2Pet. 2:6).

- (2) The horses in the vision had lion-like heads and breathed out terrible fire, smoke, and brimstone. Their appearance greatly intensified the threat already posed by the description of the horsemen. The unified purpose of horses and horsemen to destroy their doomed foes was evident since they displayed the *same* colors as they readied for battle.
- d. The fire, smoke, and brimstone coming from the horses' mouths were called "plagues" [*plege*-- "a stripe, a wound," used metaphorically of a calamity-- W. E. Vine] and became the means by which one-third of earth's sinners would be destroyed.
- e. The locusts of the previous trumpet-warning had tails like scorpions (9:10). These horses had tails like serpents with an even deadlier bite. And what was even more unusual, their *symbolic tails* had *symbolic heads*! That would allow them to direct their lethal venom of suffering with deadly accuracy.

C. More explanations from the commentators.

1. Hailey:

In the second woe, at the sounding of the sixth trumpet, destruction comes from without as the armies of the earth, symbolically portrayed by one huge army, march across the pages of history. Though inspired by the very spirit of Satan and of hell, these armies are used by God to accomplish His purpose. We are not to think of one physical army at a given point in history, but of God's death-dealing judgments as he uses the armies of time to execute His wrath; here one-third of mankind is killed as a result of God's judgment against idolatry and its fruit...God uses the wickedness and brutality of men to destroy the wicked and to achieve His purpose. His use of these forces affords an excellent basis on which to understand Revelation 9:13-21.

2. Hendricksen:

The sixth trumpet describes war; not one particular war is indicated but *all* wars, past, present and future...Throughout this entire period, extending from the first to the second coming, our exalted Lord Jesus Christ, who rules all things in accordance with the scroll of God's decree, will again and again punish the persecutors of the church by inflicting on them disasters in every sphere of life, both physical and spiritual.

3. Barnes:

The introduction of this power was *necessary*, in order to complete the survey of the downfall of the Roman empire-- the great object kept in view all along in these symbols. In the first four of these trumpets, under the seventh seal, we found the decline and fall of the *Western* empire; in the first of the remaining three-- the fifth in order-- we found the rise of the Saracens, materially affecting the condition of the *Eastern* portion of the Roman world; and the notice of the Turks, under whom the empire fell to rise no more, seemed to be demanded in order to the completion of the picture.

4. Summers:

This completes the *three instruments*. Running like a thread through the entire work by Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, is the truth that three great

things combined to overthrow the Roman Empire. They were partly working in John's day. The three were natural calamity, internal rotteness, and external invasion. All these are symbolized in Revelation as instruments ready for God's use to rescue his people...[they] combined to overthrow what appeared to be so invincible.

5. McGuigan:

What have we seen then in chapter 9? We have seen two of the instruments of punishment used by the Lord. Internal corruption and external invasion. These have been used against the oppressor -- those who have not the name of the Father written on their foreheads. They were used against him to call him to repentance, but they didn't accomplish that task. How are they to be stopped? That'd be the question in the minds of the awe-stricken saints.

6. Ogden:

The river Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire and the only thing that separated it from the hostile Parthians on the other side...The Roman army was prepared for the very task they were to accomplish-- the destruction of Jerusalem and the avenging of the saints...The forces represented by the sixth trumpeting angel were to be responsible for the death of the third part of men. This applied only to the men involved in the conflict. Josephus relates that 1,100,000 died at Jerusalem. He also relates that approximately 3,000,000 Jews were in the city when it was besieged. Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the world for the feast of passover...the number 1,100,000 slain at Jerusalem is enormous compared to the total population of Israel at that time. As the vision revealed, this represented one third of the nation. These were all destroyed in the outpouring of divine wrath as pictured in the fire, smoke and brimstone.

IV. The trumpet warnings ignored. 9:20,21.

- A. The first six trumpets were sounded as a last warning to ungodly men to repent of their ungodliness before God's bowls of wrath were poured out upon them.**
- 1. Even the most dissolute of men should have detected the displeasure of a higher power in the calamities that assaulted their peace and security in the world (Rom. 11:22).**
 - 2. The warnings hurled out by the first six trumpets were of such nature that offenders should have been moved to change their behavior while opportunity was available to them.**
 - 3. However, the "rest of mankind" [excluding Christians] not killed by the Lord's vengeance refused to repent of their wicked lifestyles ["works of their hands"].**
 - a. They continued to worship demons [*daimonion*]. Vine comments on the term as it appears in this passage: "Demons' are the spiritual agents acting in all idolatry. The idol itself is nothing, but every idol has a 'demon' associated with it who induces idolatry, with its worship and sacrifices...[etc.]."**
 - (1) The Jews had abandoned the practice of *actual* idolatry following their captivity in Babylon. But they continued to practice *representative* idolatry in various forms [putting other things before Jehovah, e.g., Col. 3:5].**

- (2) The Gentile culture was steeped in the worship of demons and idols (Acts 17:22, 23). In the Roman world, even emperor worship had become a principal source of trouble for Christians by the time of this revelation (Rev. 2:13).
- (3) Some commentators apply these remarks about idolatrous religious practices to the activities of Roman Catholicism during the time that changes were being made in the apostolic patterns of worship and doctrine. Edward Gibbon, in his celebrated work, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, makes these remarks:

By a slow, though inevitable progression...the devout Christian prayed before the image of a saint, and the Pagan rites of genuflection, luminaries, and incense again stole into the Catholic Church...*The use, and even the worship of images, was firmly established before the end of the sixth century; they were fondly cherished by the warm imagination of the Greeks and Asiatics; the Pantheon and the Vatican were adorned with the emblems of a new superstition; but this semblance of idolatry was more coldly entertained by the rude barbarians and the Arian clergy of the West....Before the end of the sixth century, these images...were the objects of worship, and the instruments of miracles, and in the hour of danger or tumult their venerable presence could revive the hope, rekindle the courage, or repress the fury of the Roman legions.* [vol. iii. pp. 324,325, quoted in Barnes.].

Gibbon is quoted further as stating that in the second council of Nice, it was “unanimously pronounced that the worship of images is agreeable to Scripture and reason, to the fathers and councils of the church.”

- (4) The foolishness of worshiping idols should be obvious to objective observers.
- aa. The first commandment of the Law strictly forbade any devotion to “other gods” (Exo. 20:3-6).
- bb. Isaiah ridiculed mindless dedication to lifeless objects (Isa. 44);
- cc. Paul attributed the worship of images to ignorance (Acts 17:29,30).
- (5) John contrasts the *impotence* of idols with the *ability* of Jesus Christ to:
- aa. See [know] the works of His disciples (Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, etc.);
- bb. Hear the prayers of His disciples in need of assistance (Rev. 8:3,4);
- cc. Walk among His disciples to reward faithful service and to punish unfaithfulness (Rev. 1:13; 2:1).
- b. They persisted in immoral practices.
- (1) Murders. These could include both the sin of abortion in our time and the executions committed during the Inquisition of the Middle Ages.
- (2) Sorceries [*pharmakia*-- “the use of medicine, drugs, spells”]. Vine makes this observation:

In ‘sorcery,’ the use of drugs, whether simple or potent, was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms, amulets, etc., professedly designed to keep the applicant or patient from

the attention and power of demons, but actually to impress the applicant with the mysterious resources and powers of the sorcerer.

- (3) **Sexual immorality [fornication--ASV].** Sexual sins have from man's distant past played a leading role in his violation of God's standard of conduct. They are usually placed at or near the top of listings of sinful behavior in the Scriptures. There is no doubt that adultery, fornication, lasciviousness, and other sex-related practices constitute a broad category of the most common sins of our society. Apparently, from the numerous references made in the Scriptures to such activities, the *same* can be said of the moral environment of the first century and later.
- (4) **Thefts.** Both Old and New Testaments condemn the unwarranted taking of another's possessions. The moral codes of the Gentiles also prohibited this transgression of man's right to hold property. Disregard of this right can occur either *within* or *without* the civil law, but such behavior is always called "theft" by a God who demands justice and respect for every individual.

- 1. What was given to the “star” when the fifth trumpet sounded? (1)**
- 2. What came out of the bottomless pit? (2,3)**
- 3. To whom did the locusts pose a danger? What kind of danger? (4,5)**
- 4. What effect would the torment of the locusts have on their victims? (6)**
- 5. Describe the locusts that John saw in the vision. (7-10)**
- 6. Who was king of the locusts? What is [are] his name[s]? What do these names mean? [Look them up in a reference work or in the footnotes in your Bible.] (11)**
- 7. What order was given when the sixth angel sounded his trumpet? (13,14)**
- 8. What was the mission of the four angels who had been prepared for “this time”? (15)**
- 9. By what means were the four angels to accomplish their task? (16)**
- 10. Describe the horsemen and their horses as they appear in the vision. (17-19)**
- 11. What impact did these terrible events have on those who were not killed? (20,21)**

Lesson Ten: Chapter 10:1-11
The Little Book

John's vision has moved rapidly since he first saw Christ among the seven lampstands. After receiving letters to be delivered to seven local churches about their good and bad qualities, he was carried by the Spirit to see elders and living creatures paying homage to God as He sat on His throne. Then, his attention was directed to a sealed book containing revelations about the Lord's future plans for His people. These plans were unfolded to John when Jesus, the worthy Lamb slain for the sins of the world, opened the book's seven seals one by one. The pictures were painted in John's vision with *bold* symbols to convey a *bold* message: despite vicious assaults upon the church by its enemies, faithful Christians would overcome every obstacle and would ultimately be rewarded in heaven for their faithfulness. Also, their seemingly invincible foes would ultimately reap the consequences of their oppressions by suffering an eternal death in hell. That message was delivered in chapters 6-9 as the following events and images appeared when the seals were loosed:

First Seal----- A white horse appeared with its conquering rider (6:2);

Second Seal-- A red horse appeared with its warring rider (6:4);

Third Seal---- A black horse appeared with its rider who carried scales (6:5);

Fourth Seal-- A pale horse appeared, ridden by Death and followed by Hades (6:8);

Fifth Seal----- Slain saints were seen under an altar; relief of suffering promised (6:9,11);

Sixth Seal---- Heavenly bodies afflicted; wicked men reacted in despair (6:12f.);

An Interlude-- 144,000 saints were sealed against calamities (7:3,4);

Seventh Seal-- Seven angels appeared with seven trumpets of warning (8:2);

First Trumpet-- Hail and fire destroyed earth's vegetation (8:7);

Second Trumpet-- A burning mountain caused harm to the sea (8:8,9);

Third Trumpet-- A falling star corrupted the inland waters (8:8,10,11);

Fourth Trumpet-- The heavenly bodies were darkened (8:12);

Another Interlude -- An eagle announced more harmful woes on men (8:13);

Fifth Trumpet-- Locusts emerged from a bottomless pit ready to hurt men (9:2-11);

Sixth Trumpet-- Four angels released a great cavalry to assault the wicked (9:13-19);

Just Ahead:

A Third Interlude-- To precede sounding of the Seventh Trumpet (10:1-11:14);

Seven thunders and a little book (10:1-11);

Christ's two witnesses (11:1-14);

Seventh Trumpet-- The opening of the heavenly temple (11:15-19).

I. Another interlude. 10:1-7.

A. Interludes interrupt the execution of God's wrath on evil men.

1. They give encouragement to the church prior to the deliverance of wrathful events upon the earth.
2. The first interlude occurred in chapter seven after retribution was announced but before it began to be exacted upon the earth (7:1-17).
 - a. Calamities were delayed until the saved could be sealed against harm.
3. The third interlude follows the awesome events accompanying the sounding of God's first six trumpets of warning (8:7-9:19).
 - a. The pouring out of God's bowls of wrath will be postponed until He has reassured the saints that truth and its devotees will survive the assaults of error, no matter how severe they may become.
 - b. The earth will be an even more dangerous place when the punishments yet to occur are inflicted upon it.

B. A mighty angel descended from heaven to deliver encouragement to the church.

1. He was "still another" angel who has not appeared previously in John's vision.
 - a. He was not Jesus, as some suppose; Jesus is *not* an angel (Heb. 1:4-8).
2. His personal description suggested the importance of his message.
 - a. He was a mighty angel, probably filling an exalted role as a messenger from heaven. Other angels had special functions.
 - (1) Michael was an "archangel" of God (1Thes. 4:16; Jude 9). "Arch" [*arche*] means "principal, chief" [See Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21, etc.].
 - (2) Gabriel was chosen to deliver God's most important announcement to men (Luke 1:26-38).
 - b. He was clothed with a cloud.
 - (1) Clouds often attended the presence of divine persons.
 - (a) A cloud often signified the presence of Jehovah as He led the Jews in the wilderness (Exo. 13:21), as He gave them the Law (Exo. 24:15,16), and as He appeared to their high priest in the tabernacle (Lev. 16:2).
 - (b) A cloud received Jesus from the apostles' sight when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9); He will come with clouds when He returns (Rev. 1:7).
 - (2) Clouds sometimes were associated with significant messages, good and bad.
 - (a) The Father commended the Son out of a cloud (Matt. 17:5).
 - (b) Clouds portended the devastation of God's unfaithful people (Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15).
 - c. He wore a rainbow on [over--RSV] his head, a sign of God's beneficence to man.
 - (1) The rainbow was heaven's pledge against an earth-destroying flood (Gen.9: 12-17).
 - (2) A rainbow surrounded God's throne of grace in John's vision (Rev. 4:3).

- d. His *face* was like the sun, indicating his close relationship with the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2).
 - e. His *feet* were like pillars of fire. Fire will attend God's vengeance on His foes (2Thes. 1:8). This angel's message would be twofold:
 - (1) The sunshine of God's face (Rev. 22:4) would deliver the saints from harm;
 - (2) The fire of God's feet would bring swift destruction to the wicked.
- C. The angel prepared to present a message to John.
- 1. He disclosed a little book in his hand, which obviously contained a message.
 - a. It was a little book [scroll] compared to the [larger] book with seven seals that God had held in the "throne scene" (Rev. 5:1).
 - (1) It probably was smaller in its size [appearance] than the book of seals.
 - (2) Its message was smaller in scope than the revelation of the "bigger" book.
 - b. It was open in the angel's hand.
 - (1) Its openness suggested that its words could be read and understood by John and by the churches that needed encouragement.
 - (2) If it had ever been sealed, it now was open for inspection.
 - 2. He stood both on land and sea as he set himself to reveal his tidings.
 - a. His message would impact the entire earth, not just part.
 - b. His feet were set, showing a firm purpose and an unwillingness to compromise any of the things contained in the "little book."
 - 3. He cried out for attention in the loud voice of a lion.
 - a. This surely added to the urgency of giving heed to the angel's revelation.
- D. Seven thunders [thunderings] responded to the angel's demand for attention.
- 1. Evidently, they had a message of their own, heard by John but undisclosed to us.
 - 2. John proceeded to write what they had uttered, since he had been instructed to do so when his vision began (1:11).
 - 3. Recording the words of the seven thunders was prohibited by a voice [God's?] from heaven. We can only wonder what the message was and why it must remain forever "sealed up" and unwritten.
- E. The angel strengthened the message of the "little book" with a solemn oath.
- 1. He lifted his hand to heaven [he had come down from heaven (vs. 1)] to signify that God and the Lamb were supportive of his proclamation.
 - 2. He swore that the infinite power of God who had *created* all things in the earth could also be exerted to *execute* the promises made thus far in heaven's revelation. The Creator who had made the world could also use the world as a tool in avenging the wrongs done to His children by wicked and rebellious men.
 - 3. Additionally, he swore that not only *could* God fulfill His warnings but also that He *would* do so. Moreover, there would be no further delay in initiating His actions against those to whom His warnings had been given under the seals and trumpets.

The final trumpet would both warn and declare that retribution had begun.

4. The angel made a solemn and significant promise in God's behalf.
 - a. The "mystery" [plan] of God's dealings with the good and the bad would be finished without any change.
 - b. God's plan would be accomplished during the punishments of the seventh trumpet without any further delay [*chronos*, "time"].
 - c. Two opinions prevail about this proclamation:
 - (1) Time will end when the seventh trumpet sounds. All things that relate to time's end will take place *immediately* when the trumpet is heard ["when he is about to sound"];
 - (2) Delay in fulfilling God's eternal plan for preserving the church *throughout* all the calamities that would befall the earth would end, and that plan would proceed at once.
 - d. Additional events were to follow the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The *third woe* would come quickly (11:14) but would not necessarily end quickly. Its execution seems to occupy a considerable period of time (12:1f.).
 - (1) Human experience also testifies that the end of time has not yet come after nearly 2,000 years.
 - (2) The meaning apparently is that it was *delay* and not *time* that would end with the fulfillment of this promise.
 - d. The trumpets were sounded as a last *warning* to ungodly men and nations.
 - e. The bowls of wrath would *deliver* what the seventh trumpet *warned* about.
 - (1) When the seventh angel is "about to sound" (NKJV; ASV).
 - (2) "In the days of the trumpet call to be sounded" (R.S.V).
 - (3) "When he begins to sound the trumpet" (Confraternity).
 - (4) Numbers (2) and (3) seem to be preferred if compared with 12:1ff.
5. The angel promised that the preservation of the saints and their salvation [the "mystery" plan] would finish the promises made to "the prophets."
 - a. Some scholars apply this fulfillment to God's New Testament "mystery." His plan was to give both Jews and Gentiles the inheritance of eternal life in Christ (Eph. 3:4-6) despite the numerous obstacles they would face (Rom. 8:37-39). This plan had been revealed by N. T. "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5).
 - b. Others suppose that only Old Testament "prophets" were referenced here and that their "mystery" focused on the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation. Everything involved in the Lord's planned retribution against a thankless people would be "finished" when Rome leveled their city and demolished their nationalistic aspirations.
 - c. Writers who choose to relate the *symbolic* events and figures of Revelation to definite and identifiable *historical* events and figures, attribute the "mystery"

to the “mystery of lawlessness” that would lead to a great departure from the faith (2Thes. 2:7). The “prophets” were men like Paul who reassured the church that the “man of sin” and his corrupt religious system would be destroyed by the coming of the Lord (2Thes. 2:3-12).

II. John and the little book. 10:8-11.

A. A voice from heaven instructed John about the little book.

1. This was the voice that had forbidden John to record the utterances of the seven thunders (10:4).
2. His directions for action would be as strange to John as his instructions for non-action about the thunders.

B. What John could see about the little book.

1. It was *open*, suggesting that its contents were accessible to him, unlike the original status of the message of the “big” revelation now being unfolded (Rev. 5:2-4).
2. It was held by an angel [messenger] whose message was *universal* in scope, as signified by his feet being solidly planted on sea and land. [See also, 10:2,5.]

C. What John was to do about the little book.

1. He was to “take” the little book from the angel.
 - a. He asked the angel to “give” him the book but was refused.
 - b. The little book must be taken by John before its purpose could be completed.
 - (1) This little book apparently contained a revelation from God.
 - (2) It represented *more* of God’s truth, but was more limited in scope [“little”] than heaven’s eternity-to-eternity [“big”] plan for dealing with humanity.
 - (3) The implication might be that none of God’s truth can be received by man without effort on his part (Prov. 23:23; Acts 17:11; 2Tim. 2:15--KJV).
2. He was to “eat” [*kataphago*-- “eat up”; elsewhere, “devour”] the little book.
 - a. “Eating” the book would involve a strong conviction of the righteousness of its message and of making its message one’s own.
 - b. These orders obviously were related [at least in similarity] to those given long before to Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:9-3:4). There were also some dissimilarities.
 - c. The message of the little book would taste “sweet” in John’s mouth, but it would become “bitter” in his stomach.
 - d. When John ate the little book, the angel’s prediction proved to be accurate. It was at first sweet, then bitter.
3. He must declare [prophesy] the little book’s revelation about [the destiny of] many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.
 - a. These eventualities would be disclosed when the seventh trumpet sounded and the third woe began (11:15).
 - b. Peoples [individuals] would be punished for their disobedient behavior.
 - c. Nations [governments] would be overcome for their harassment of the saved.

- d. Tongues [races and nationalities] of all kinds would be included in God's avenging actions.
- e. Kings [officials] responsible for leading official conduct against righteous men and women would be especially targeted for retribution from the Lord.

D. What was the message of the little book?

1. Opinions vary widely among Bible scholars.
2. Most views are consistent with the *basic* views they take of the entire Revelation. These are four of many available opinions:
 - a. The little book is the gospel of Christ that must be preached throughout the time remaining to earth's inhabitants. It will be the measure by which the righteous and unrighteous will survive or perish during retribution to come. This view requires the "little book" to be *distinct* from the "big book" described in chapters five through nine, and its message must somehow to be more limited than the overall message of the sealed book;
 - b. The little book's contents concerned prophecy more *specific* in nature than the earlier proclamations of the sealed book. These additional predictions will be unfolded in chapters eleven through twenty [or twenty-two]. This "book within a book" will deal with the *same* punishments, or with the *same kinds*, that have already been disclosed in John's revelation, but the rationale from which God's vengeance is viewed in the vision will be different;
 - c. The little book is the complete New Testament revelation, which requires that Revelation's date of writing must be prior to the devastation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Of course, Revelation for "early-daters" would meet that criterion, while "late-daters" would insist that the time of the Revelation [96 A.D.] would disqualify the little book as the complete New Testament;
 - d. The little book represents the process of placing the Bible into the hands of the common people following its capture and removal from the masses during the falling away of the church into Catholic apostasy. This process included translations for better understanding of the Bible, the invention of the printing press to promote its mass distribution, and a new mindset of the Protestant Reformation to reject human traditions and follow Scripture only.

E. Different effects of "eating" the little book.

1. It would be a message both sweet as honey in John's mouth and bitter in his stomach.
 - a. The promises of relief and the assurances of protection for the saved would certainly be a "sweet" message for John and other saints.
 - b. The prophecies of destruction and desolation for the lost would be a "bitter pill" for such a godly man as John to swallow. No righteous person enjoys the prospect of eternal suffering by the lost of earth.
2. It would be a message that would first offer joy to the heart of those who accepted

it, but it would later bring trials and tribulations to its followers. Participation in God's eternal plan will give believers "sweet" joy in Christ (Matt. 13:44; 1Pe. 1:8), but it will also be assailed by the "bitter" opposition of Satan and his agents in the world (2Tim. 3:12; 1Pe. 1:7).

- 1. Describe the “mighty angel” that John saw in the vision. (1)**

- 2. What was in the angel’s hand? (2) How did this book differ from the first book that John had seen? (5:1)**

- 3. Where did the angel stand? (2) What did his voice sound like? (3)**

- 4. What was John forbidden to write? (4)**

- 5. What would happen after the seventh angel sounded his trumpet? (5-7)**

- 6. What was John told to do with the “little book”? (8,9)**

- 7. What effect would this action have on John? (9,10)**

- 8. What charge was then given to John by the angel? (11)**

Lesson Eleven: Chapter 11:1-19

The Two Witnesses

In this chapter, John's vision is approaching its culmination. He had been exposed to numerous strange and startling symbols as God revealed to him things that would "shortly take place" (1:1) in the lives of members of His church. The vision was intended to provide Christians with comfort and encouragement about the difficult circumstances in which they were then living or in which they would soon be living. The Lord's basic message to His people was that persecution was inevitable for them, but they would be shielded from spiritual harm despite many fiery trials of their faith. Moreover, every foe responsible for their suffering would ultimately be punished eternally.

John's vision has been lately concerned with a series of prophetic warnings preceded by the sounds of heavenly trumpets. To this point in the revelation, six trumpets have been heard with their attendant predictions of retribution. Prior to the sounding of the last trumpet (11:15), the action of the vision is interrupted by an episode of additional encouragement to calm the hearts of fearful disciples. This interlude of reassurance began at chapter ten, verse one, and continues into chapter eleven.

I. The interlude continued. 11:1-14.

A. An overview of bad and good things to come.

1. Some bad things would happen as time moved forward:

- a. There would be forty-two months of oppression of the "holy city";**
- b. God's witnesses would testify while clothed in sackcloth;**
- c. A beast from the bottomless pit would kill these witnesses;**
- d. The foes of truth would rejoice over their apparent victories.**

2. Some good things would counter the bad things:

- a. Through God's power, the witnesses would teach the truth despite opposition;**
- b. Their testimony condemning the wicked would be completed as planned;**
- c. God would resurrect His witnesses to continue their work among evil men;**
- d. Their labors would be vindicated in the presence of their enemies;**
- e. Great unrest and retribution would visit the "great city."**

B. Interpreting this interlude. The symbols included in this difficult part of John's vision are usually explained by the commentators, as one would expect, in keeping with one of the basic approaches to the Revelation letter.

- 1. The historical background [generalist] approach sees encouragement *broadly* given to the church. While addressing current problems of first-century Christians [e.g., at Smyrna, 2:10; Philadelphia, 3:10; Thyatira, 2:25,26], Revelation also**

looks far ahead to all future oppression of the truth and offers the same reassurances to persecuted saints both present and future. Individuals and churches like the seven in Asia should correct their deficiencies to ensure that God would protect them when their time came to be tested by Satan and his angels.

2. The preterist approach views almost everything in the revelation as pertaining to God's vengeance upon the Jewish nation and upon its holy city. Retribution for national rebellion and ungodliness culminated in the terrible suffering inflicted on the Jews when the Roman army destroyed their capital and its temple in A.D. 70. The wrongs committed by Jewish zealots against Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles were finally and firmly avenged in the events that took place at Jerusalem.
 3. The historical approach attempts to assign the symbols of John's vision to particular historical events. The meaning of each part of the revelation is attached to some development[s] of historical significance that impacted the destiny of the Lord's church. This context to understanding the vision gives special attention to relationships between the church and the Roman civil government and, later, to relationships with various religious movements that corrupted the simplicity that it enjoyed originally in its relationship with Jesus Christ.
- C. The symbols and their meanings.
1. John was given a reed like a measuring rod. 11:1,2.
 - a. With this rod John was to measure (1) the temple, (2) the altar [of incense], and (3) the temple worshipers.
 - b. The temple obviously represented the church (1Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:21). Here, "temple" is *naos* ["sanctuary"] which can be a figurative reference to either the earlier tabernacle with its one court (Exo. 27:9) or the later temple that utilized several courts (2Ki. 23:12; 2Chron. 4:9, etc.). W.E. Vine asserts that *hieron*, the other word for "temple," is never used metaphorically. This is evidence that the building to be "measured" was not the literal, still-standing temple in Jerusalem, but rather an edifice *symbolic* of the Lord's church.
 - c. The altar of incense [mentioned in 8:8] symbolized the worship [prayers] of the saints. It also reminded that worship and service to Jehovah were intended to conform strictly to the regulations given to the worshipers. Nadab and Abihu learned the hard way that God's appointments *must* be "measured" and respected (Lev. 10:1,2).
 - d. Worshipers also must be measured for their conformity to the Lord's standards. It must be with clean hands and pure hearts that men worship Almighty God (Jas. 4:8). Figurative measuring of the temple and Jerusalem also took place in Ezekiel 42:20 and Zechariah 2:1,2.
 - e. The measure [quality] of the saints would determine whether they would be included in the number to be protected through the tribulations ahead. These worshipers had been "sealed" and numbered in chapter seven. This was not

- another sealing but simply a restatement of the Lord's purpose to keep those who are truly his, regardless of how severe their persecutions might become.
- f. The court [singular] outside the temple was not to be measured [protected from harm]. Since this area around the tabernacle was used by ordinary priests in offering sacrifices and in washing themselves before entering the tabernacle, this poses a question about why the court was denied protection by the Lord. It had been "given to the Gentiles," suggesting that it was not really any longer God's property that deserved safekeeping. Maybe these were people who once had been "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1) [on the "altar of burnt offering"] and who had been baptized [in the "laver"] but were not now faithful to their commitment. Their fate had been turned over to the "Gentiles," who would serve as the Lord's instrument of vengeance against the disloyal. If so, we can understand why they were not to be measured [protected] (Rev. 3:16, etc.).
 - g. Commentators who believe that these directions concerned a literal, still-standing temple regard the rod given to John as a means of measuring a structure deserving of *destruction* instead of *preservation*. They contend that the *temple proper* was destroyed by seditious Jews [according to Josephus] and that only the *court* [and everything else] was ravaged by the Romans [Gentiles].
 - h. Writers of the historical-view persuasion tend to regard this measuring as something made necessary by the corruption introduced into the church over a period of time. The measuring was to be done with the New Testament [rod], and the process actually began with the inauguration of the Reformation led by Martin Luther and others in the sixteenth century or earlier.
2. Gentiles would oppress the holy city for forty-two months. 11:2.
- a. The "Gentiles," of course, represented unbelievers who would act in opposition to the Lord's cause in the world. They would mount persecutions whenever possible in efforts to "tread under foot" the "holy city," which was also a figure for the church, [cf., Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22.] The immediate oppression would come from the Roman empire and its emperors. Later, other powers would become the enemies of righteousness and harass the righteous.
 - b. Severe hurt would be inflicted on the Lord's disciples for "forty-two months." That number is also called "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (11:3), "a time and times and half a time" (12:14), and [again] "forty-two months" (13:5). It also seems to correspond to the time referenced in Daniel (7:25 and 12:7). To most scholars [generalists], it simply signifies a rather long time during which numerous instances of persecution would occur.
 - (1) Within the historical interpretation, however, forty-two months is an exact and crucial period. Using the day-year theory [which many scholars adopt], this is 1,260 days (verse 3) or 1,260 *years*. The time calculated from when the Roman pope acquired total supremacy until either: (1) the start

- of the Reformation in Germany, or (2) the beginning of national atheism following the French Revolution [dating varies for the “breaking” of the papal power] is declared to be exactly 1,260 years. Other calculations start and end with different historical events and different dates but arrive at virtually the same conclusions about the “forty-two months” of repression of the saints by the “Gentiles.”
- (2) Preterists [early date] scholars advocate forty-two months as the *actual* time consumed by the Romans in conquering Palestine prior to the final overrunning of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
3. Two witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, would testify for God for 1,260 days. 11:3-6.
- a. The prophecy that the “temple” [church] of God would be severely oppressed for forty-two months would be distressing news to its faithful members. Did that mean that the preaching of the word of God would be stifled during that time? If so, much of the church’s mission and purpose in the world would be thwarted:
- (1) Jesus had commissioned His disciples to continue the work of preaching done by the apostles following His ascension (Matt. 28:18-20);
 - (2) Sinners couldn’t be born again without hearing the word (1Pe. 1:23);
 - (3) Only through the implanted word could souls be saved (Jas. 1:21);
 - (4) Churches couldn’t exist without people receiving the gospel (1Thes. 2:13).
- b. Prophecy was added quickly to assure that preaching *would continue* even in the most difficult times.
- (1) The source of this promise is unclear; the ASV says, “...one said.” This was more likely the Lord rather than the angel. He also promised, “I will give power to my two witnesses.”
 - (2) Two witnesses would continue to spread the gospel throughout the world.
 - (a) A minimum of *two* witnesses always established validity.
 - aa. The death penalty was exacted in the Old Testament only on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6);
 - bb. Truth was verified under the Law by two men (John 8:17);
 - cc. Personal disputes in the church were to be resolved on the word of two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:16).
 - (b) Twelve hundred and sixty days of preaching would correspond to the time involved in the persecution of the church [forty-two months].
 - (c) Power would accompany the testimony of the two witnesses:
 - aa. Fire would proceed out of their mouths;
 - bb. Enemies would be devoured [killed] by this fire;
 - cc. The witnesses could prevent rain upon the earth;
 - dd. They could turn the waters into blood;
 - ee. Plagues could be inflicted by them as often as desired.

- (d) The witnesses would testify while clothed in sackcloth, a material associated with sadness and mourning (e.g., Jonah 3:6,8).
- (3) Identifying the *two witnesses*.
 - (a) Perhaps this symbol is as hard to explain as any found in Revelation.
 - (b) Numerous suggestions have been put forward by scholars in keeping with their overall views of Revelation's interpretation:
 - aa. Some "futurists" make these two actual persons who will testify immediately prior to the end of time. Moses and Elijah are two popular choices;
 - bb. Hailey says that, if literal, they must be the Holy Spirit and the apostles. If figurative, the Holy Spirit, apostles, *and* the saints;
 - cc. Jenkins believes that they represent bold preachers like Moses [who sent plagues upon Egypt] and Elijah [who sent fire upon men and also withheld rain from the earth];
 - dd. Johnson and Hinds both propose the Old and New Testaments;
 - ee. Hendricksen identifies them as "the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments";
 - ff. Ogden affirms that the witnesses are the Law and the prophets, both fulfilled in Jerusalem's destruction and then "killed" along with the temple and the city of Jerusalem;
 - gg. Summers prefers the "militant spirit of true Christians and their testimony"; McGuiggan opts for "the church of God";
 - hh. Finally, Barnes believes that one witness is the preaching done by saints; the other is the testimony offered by their martyrdom. Interestingly, Vine comments on *martur* [witness]: "(whence Eng., 'martyr,' one who bears 'witness' by his death)."
 - (c) Regardless of the true identity of the two witnesses, it is apparent that whoever or whatever they were, they represented preaching adequate to sustain God's plans for the gospel during the grievous times of persecution and hardship soon to be borne by Christians.
- (4) Additional functions of the two witnesses. 11:4.
 - (a) They were to be two olive trees and two lampstands.
 - aa. This figure is similar to Zechariah's vision (Zech. 4) of a lampstand and two olive trees, possibly signifying men by whom Jehovah had blessed Israel [Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest].
 - bb. One witness [Holy Spirit] would furnish the oil [message] to be preached and the apostles and the saints would spread the word among the lost, thus accomplishing God's purpose of evangelism with His full approval ["standing before the God of the earth"].
 - cc. The power of the gospel would be capable of "killing" even the strongest opposition with the Lord's "fire" power. [cf., Jer. 5:14.]

4. The witnesses would be killed by a beast out of the bottomless pit [abyss]. 11:7.
 - a. Their mission would first be completed; their mission was to:
 - (1) Continue teaching throughout whatever persecutions might arise until the truth was preached to “every creature under heaven” (Col. 1:23) [generalist approach];
 - (2) Persist in condemning Jewish corruptions of the Law and the prophets until God’s final retribution in A.D. 70 [preterist approach];
 - (3) Extend the cause of the Protestant Reformation until its message of religious freedom had been made available to the world [historical approach].
 - b. The beast was a great satanic world power originating from the same source [bottomless pit; abyss-- ASV] that spawned *all* such evil attacks upon the people of God. [cf., Rev. 9:1; 13:1; 17: 17:3,7,8; Dan. 7:7-25; etc.]
 - c. “Killing” the Lord’s witnesses would consist of stopping or drastically hindering their efforts to proclaim the gospel in the world. Physical violence and death to the teachers might be involved in hindering their witnessing from time to time.
 - (1) Ogden believes that this killing would actually be the termination of the Law and the prophets. He says, “When the daily sacrifice ceased in 70 A.D., the Law and the Prophets were dead.”
 - (2) Johnson and Hinds are convinced that the killing of the witnesses was realized when the French National Convention in 1793 declared human liberty and human reason to be the nation’s only gods. God-centered religion was outlawed by formal legislation.
 - (3) Barnes relates a long line of persecutions of pre-Reformation dissenters by the corrupt Catholic church, claiming that “no fewer than nine hundred thousand Protestants were put to death by the Papists in different countries in Europe.” He further asserts that the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the pope’s power was virtually unchallenged by such dissenters, marked the time when the witnesses could properly be declared “dead.” This was just prior to Luther’s 1517 work of reformation.
 - (4) Summers concludes that there was a time when the Roman empire was temporarily successful in stopping the saints’ witnessing for the Lord. He offers no specific event or time that signaled the witnesses’ “death.”
 - (5) Hailey chooses not to identify specifically the beast out of the abyss, except as “a great imperial world power standing in opposition to the kingdom of God.” The beast could not “kill” the witnesses until the gospel was proclaimed, confirmed, and recorded for future generations.
5. The witnesses’ bodies would be left to decay in the street of the great city. 11:8.
 - a. Presumably, their murders had taken place in that same “city.”

- b. The “great city” was the evil world, rather than a particular location [cf., Isa. 25:2,3.]. It was vulnerable, in contrast to God’s people who were a “strong city” (Isa. 26:1). In Revelation, Babylon is called the “great city,” sometimes representing the absolute and corrupted power of Rome.
 - c. The witness of God’s dead servants was further dishonored by the despicable treatment of their unburied bodies. This figurative behavior may have some basis in reports that Rome frequently forbade the burial of Christians who had been martyred. Advocates of the historical approach to understanding Revelation sometimes note that the Catholic church of the Middle Ages was infamous for refusing “Christian burial rites” to dissenters.
 - d. The “great city” of religious oppression was *spiritually* similar to Egypt, where the Lord’s people had been cast into bondage. It also was like Sodom, which is forever remembered for its lustful character. In its worst moments of opposing the truth, the whole world bears a spiritual image strikingly similar to the physical excesses of the Biblical locations named.
 - e. The language of verse eight allows for Jesus’ crucifixion in either of the three cities mentioned. The most natural construction would place it at the “great city” [the wicked world of sin and irreligion]. Some contend that the crucifixion reference demands that the “great city” is Jerusalem where the actual event occurred. We must remember, however, that this is a *vision* in which the *figurative* replaces the *actual*. Figuratively, Jesus obviously had been “crucified” in the “great city” of the wicked world. [See Heb. 6:6.]
6. The wickedness of the evil earthlings was further displayed by their deliberate refusal to *allow* a dignified burial of the dead witnesses. 11:9. Additionally, God’s enemies also “showed their colors” by:
- a. Rejoicing that the witnesses were now dead and helpless to preach;
 - b. Sending congratulatory gifts as expressions of the magnitude of their joy;
 - c. Reacting with violence to the gospel’s “torment.” *Basanizo* [“tormented”] is akin to *basanos*, “a touchstone,” which is a stone used to test the purity of precious metals. These murderers had been “tried” by the witnesses’ message [touchstone] of righteousness and had been shown to be worthless. As always, when one can’t cope with the message, he can kill the messenger!
7. A great crowd representing humanity from all levels and backgrounds had participated in the glorious tribute to the power and mercy of God in chapter seven, verse nine. Here, another host comprised of a similar variety of humans is observed, but it is engaged instead in the vilest of conduct. 11:9,10.
8. The witnesses were resurrected after three and a half days. 11:11.
- a. Three and a half days is a much shorter time than the 1,260 days devoted to the teaching of the gospel by the two witnesses. Some call it a “broken” or imper-

fect number, i.e., half of seven, the “perfect” number. Hence, it represents a time of turmoil, confusion, and work left undone. Such conditions prevailed while the witnesses were “dead” and their witnessing was sharply curtailed.

- b. The decline in witnessing was not to be permanent. After the specified interval, the “breath of life” from God revived the witnesses, and they resumed their work. Jehovah had much earlier breathed life into the physical body of Adam (Gen. 2:7). Jesus had “breathed” on the apostles in connection with their receiving the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). He also declared that it is the Spirit that gives life (John 6:63). These facts suggest the Holy Spirit’s operation in this marvelous scene of resurrection. As usual, there are different ideas about what was happening.
 - (1) Generalists usually refrain from choosing any specific time or event to mark this resumption of the witnesses’ labors.
 - (2) Historical advocates often see either:
 - aa. The *new* work of reform by Luther and others during the Reformation, beginning in 1517 in Germany, as a “resurrection” of the earlier work of reformation done by the Waldenses, Hussites, and others;
 - bb. The rescinding of anti-religion legislation by the French Convention three and a half years after it had outlawed all religious activities.
 - (3) Preterists define the time between the death and the revival of the witnesses [three and a half days] as a period adequate to convince Jews and others that the Law and the prophets were really “dead” as a valid system and that their prophecies of doom for Israel had been truly fulfilled,
 - (4) Some scholars identify this period with a time just prior to the second coming and the end of the world when the gospel will enjoy a wide reception.
9. Understandably, those responsible for the heinous crimes against the Lord and His disciples were visibly shaken when they saw heaven’s power at work and their own wicked efforts defeated. But their reason for concern was just beginning!
10. The vindication of the witnesses was completed. 11:12,13.
 - a. The witnesses were taken up into heaven in a cloud, just as Jesus had been.
 - (1) Enemies of truth clearly saw this unquestionable miracle take place. The impact on them was not filtered and diluted through reports by others.
 - b. A great earthquake shook the foundations of the “great city” that had been responsible for the murders of God’s witnesses.
 - (1) *Complete* vengeance would ultimately be exacted for their evil deeds.
 - (2) For now, a “sample” of God’s feelings toward His enemies could be seen in the destruction of *one-tenth* of their city and in the death of *seven thousand* of its inhabitants.
 - (3) Witnesses to this devastation were “afraid” and “glorified” God, but they apparently remained as unrepentant as others had been (Rev. 9:20,21).

11. Three woes had been promised by the great eagle (8:13). The awful events that were to accompany the second woe have now transpired. An interlude has preceded the afflictions of the third woe to accentuate its ominous approach. The sentence of spiritual death has been punctuated by the great earthquake and its attendant afflictions on earth's disobedient. The second woe is past. The interlude is over. Get ready for the third woe!

II. The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet. 11:14-19.

- A. Six trumpets had already sounded, bringing severe suffering to God's enemies.
 1. The sealed saints had been promised spiritual preservation, although not all could be shielded from physical harm.
 2. The seventh trumpet would signal the end of effective opposition to God's plan and the ultimate triumph of His righteous forces.
- B. Heaven's victory cry was shouted by loud voices [of angels or living creatures?]: "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" 11:15.
 1. Although battles must still be fought, their outcome is clear: God is in complete control in the affairs of men.
 2. Satan's advantage among the world's kingdoms will be short-lived. Final and total victory will belong to the Father and to His Son! Their reign will last for all eternity (1Cor. 15:24,28).
 3. Two events validated the certainty of what the loud voices proclaimed:
 - a. The twenty-four elders were seen still enthroned in God's presence [See Rev. 4:4.] as they worshiped and reaffirmed His complete control of earth's destiny;
 - b. Their song of praise was one of tasks and goals already accomplished:
 - (1) God's power *had been* exercised on the "angry nations"; [cf., Psa. 2.]
 - (2) The events necessary to the judgment, reward, and punishment of the good and the bad of earth had been executed;
 - (3) The world now stood in readiness for whatever fate the Lord held for it within the great plan which now had been upheld by His power displayed in the first six trumpets.
- C. An awesome revelation of reassurance. 11:19a.
 1. A vision of God's temple was opened to John's sight. Within, John could see the ark of the Covenant which had always served to remind His people of His constancy and of His fidelity to His promises.
 - a. No greater proof could have been offered to reaffirm that God would also honor His promises of retribution and reward made in this revelation.
 - b. Every pledge made to His people while they served under the Law had been faithfully carried out (Heb. 2:1-3).
 - c. The ark of the Covenant in the temple testified that the Lord was present with

His people in good times and bad. Its appearance now gave the same assurance that He also was with His disciples in the *new temple*, His N.T. church!

2. The ark signified a *covenant* between God and His people. His law was stored within the ark, which asserted that God would be faithful to keep *His* promises if the people would keep *theirs*. The same terms are now implied by this appearance of the ark in John's vision. All things will ultimately be resolved, and all things eventually will end, but God will preserve those who are faithful and keep their commitment to Him. However, He is not obligated to any who choose to live in opposition to His plans and wishes for the world.

D. A final look into the future. 11:19b.

1. The tribulations associated with the seventh trumpet are not described in the same detail as had been the case with the earlier trumpets. Instead, the vision seems to jump ahead to those final afflictions only in general terms.
2. Lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail all appear to portend further calamities to be visited upon wicked men before the final judgment. We are not informed of their intensity or of the effects they would have on the objects of their destruction. Nor are we told how long this last period of waiting will be until the Lord returns and earth's affairs are forever concluded.
3. Some writers insist that this verse [nineteen] should be attached to chapter twelve instead of chapter eleven. They view its words as the opening of the second main section of Revelation rather than the closing words of the first part. However, its present placement seems most agreeable with the overall arrangement of the book, providing a logical break between the two basic divisions of John's wonderful vision of things to come for people of faith.

- 1. What things were to be measured by the angel? (1)**
- 2. What was not to be measured? Why? (2)**
- 3. By what two figures were the two witnesses described? (3,4)**
- 4. What “powers” were given to the witnesses? (5,6)**
- 5. What would happen to the witnesses? (7,8)**
- 6. How would the world react when this happened? (9,10)**
- 7. What unexpected events occurred after “three and a half days”? (11-14)**
- 8. What was said about the “kingdoms” of earth when the seventh angel sounded? (15)**
- 9. For what things did the twenty-four elders thank God? (17,18)**
- 10. When the temple opened in heaven, what did John see there? (19)**
- 11. What calamities still lay ahead for the wicked of earth? (19)**

Revelation--

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN FOR SAVING THE SAINTS

Revelation 6-11

THE PLAN REVEALED THROUGH THE OPENING OF SEVEN SEALS:

- I. **First seal**: rider on white horse (Christ's cause to be pressed on earth) [6:1,2]
(or, military might will increase on earth)
- II. **Second seal**: rider on red horse (Saints to be persecuted by enemies) [6:3,4]
(or, widespread war will be inevitable)
- III. **Third seal**: rider on black horse (Disciples to suffer hardship, discrimination) [6:5,6]
(or, poor to suffer war's aftermath; also saints)
- IV. **Fourth seal**: death on pale horse (Various things will kill some Christians along with many in the world) [6:7,8]
- V. **Fifth seal**: martyrs under the altar (Martyrs call for judgment against evil) [6:9-11]
- VI. **Sixth seal**: various signs of God's impending action against evil [6:12-17]

"Sealing" of the saints for their protection [7:1-17]

VII. Seventh seal: Appearance of seven angels with trumpets to warn:

- (1) *First trumpet*: hail, fire, and blood-- 1/3 of earth hurt [8:7]
- (2) *Second trumpet*: a mountain destroyed-- 1/3 of sea hurt [8:8,9]
- (3) *Third trumpet*: a star fell-- 1/3 of inland waters hurt [8:10,11]
- (4) *Fourth trumpet*: 1/3 of heavenly bodies hurt [8:12]

Three "woes" on the earth to follow--

- (5) *Fifth trumpet/ first "woe"*-- smoke and locusts-- men "hurt" [9:1-11]
- (6) *Sixth trumpet/ second "woe"*-- 200 million horsemen-- 1/3 men "killed" [9:13-19]

Repentance not achieved in the world [9:20,21]

Impending doom for evildoers announced [10:1-7]

Remainder of God's plan revealed in a "little book" [10:8-11]

Protection for the saints despite severe opposition [11:1-13]

- (7) *Seventh trumpet/ third "woe"*-- Other retributions against church's enemies resulting in ultimate overthrow of worldly kingdoms and triumph of God's kingdom (e.g., natural calamities, internal corruption, external attacks: Gibbon, Decline and Fall of Roman Empire) [11:15-19]
(113-A)

Lesson Twelve: Chapter 12:1-17

The Beautiful Woman and the Red Dragon

A basic principle which impacts the lives of Christians is, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2Timothy 3:12). This concept is difficult for some believers to reconcile with assurances such as "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1Peter 5:7). While there are doubtless many reasons for the tribulations endured by faithful disciples, *two* are easily seen:

1. Persecution against God's people allows the *dual* nature of God to be displayed in an impressive way. He is a God of great goodness toward submissive individuals, but He is also a God of great severity toward the disobedient (Romans 11:22). In this fundamental fact there is both *comfort* for the persecuted and *admonition* for persecutors;
2. Persecution against believers provides them a unique opportunity to increase their dependence on God's strength. Our own inadequacies are manifested in the hardships of troubled times, and our need of "outside" help becomes clear (1Peter 1:6,7).

Nowhere else are these two truths better illustrated than in this revelation to John. In dramatic statements and startling occurrences, both the Lord's *wrath* against His enemies and His *protection* of His faithful disciples are emphasized repeatedly. The book's theme throughout is: "God will preserve those who are His and destroy those who are not."

As indicated in the Outline of Revelation [page 11], the book is often divided into two main parts: Earthly Conflict (chapters 1-11) and Spiritual Meanings (chapters 12-22). The first section unfolds the severity of future attacks upon Christ's church by ungodly persons or organizations. It promises retribution to be visited upon the attackers by the offended Almighty God. Doubtless, there were many oppressed disciples who were wondering why their oppression was both inevitable and necessary to the development of their faith. The second section of John's vision revealed to them that their troubles with worldly people were only a manifestation of an ongoing spiritual struggle between heavenly and devilish forces that had long been competing for the souls of earthlings. "*The world against the church*" was actually just a phase of another, more profound conflict, "*Satan against the Christ*." Chapters 12-20 will explain why the things in chapters 1-11 had to be. It is evident as we read these chapters that they provide the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to mankind: "And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). [See the CHART, "Revelation 12-20-- The Heavenly Story"--page 221.]

I. The appearance of two signs in heaven. 12:1-4.

- A. One was a great sign: a beautifully adorned woman.**

1. She was magnificently adorned with the sun, moon, and twelve stars.
 - a. Hendricksen says that “all that heaven can contribute of glory and splendor is lavished upon her.” The sun glorifies and exalts her; the moon is subjected under her feet; and the stars proclaim victory for her.
 - b. Hailey gives a more specific significance to her appearance. Her adornments, he says, suggest the “divinely-revealed light of the three dispensations”:
 - (1) The “starlight” period of revelation when truth was delivered to the patriarchs in veiled and limited communications (Heb. 1:1);
 - (2) The “moonlight” age during which Moses’ Law revealed much of God’s nature and will for man (Eph. 3:6);
 - (3) The “sunlight” era of clear and complete disclosure of God’s mind to mankind (1Cor. 2:11-13);
 - (4) This woman’s role is related to the *totality* of revealed truth.
 - c. Other writers connect the twelve stars to the twelve tribes of Israel or to the twelve apostles and their respective functions in bringing salvation to the earth.
2. The woman is identified in various ways:
 - a. Some believe she represents national Israel. However, although Jesus was born physically of the Jews, the nation rejected him (John 1:11). Moreover, the “rest of her offspring” were *not* keepers of God’s commandments and the testimony of Jesus (12:17);
 - b. A popular opinion is that she was the church of Christ, but this would reverse the true relationship between Jesus and His spiritual body. The church did not bring Christ into the world; the Lamb of God brought the church into being through His sacrifice on the cross (Matt. 16:18);
 - c. Literalists understand this woman to be Mary, who actually gave birth to the Savior, just as this radiant woman gave birth to her man-child. But this interpretation violates Bible history. Scripture records no instance of Mary being persecuted in retribution for bearing Jesus, unlike the prophecies of Revelation and other Biblical reports of severe attacks upon the church by Satan’s agents;
 - d. Although she later appears representing the Lord’s church, in this part of John’s vision she should simply be identified with God’s chosen of the ages, the elect and faithful servants during time prior to the virgin birth of Jesus. She was a composite of saints among the patriarchs (Genesis 12:3; Hebrews 11) and saints among the followers of Moses’ Law (Luke 1:5; 2:25,38). Only through the obedience of godly people [from Abraham’s day onward] was the advent of the Savior made possible in keeping with the Father’s promise.
3. The beautiful woman was ready to give birth to a Child.
 - a. The first of *the three most important events* in the world’s history was about to take place: the birth of a unique Child.
 - b. The immediacy of the event was signaled by her cries of labor pain.

- c. Her pain in labor would quickly change into great joy over the birth of God's Son, which would make salvation possible (Luke 2:10,11). However, John's vision disclosed that her labor pain soon would be exchanged for pain of a different kind that would not soon disappear.
- B. The other was a fearful sign: a great fiery red dragon.
 1. He had seven heads and ten horns [both numbers symbolized completeness].
 - a. "Heads" were suggestive of intelligence, worldly wisdom, and cunning.
 - b. "Horns" represented power, strength, and skill.
 2. His heads were crowned with seven diadems.
 - a. These were not the *stephanos* [crown], for the dragon has never really been the victor in his battles with heavenly forces.
 - b. These were diadems [crowns] bestowed upon royalty to designate the possession of authority. They were conferred whether they were deserved [as in the case of Jesus (Rev. 19:12)] or undeserved [as here in the case of Satan].
 3. His size and power were seen in his casting down a third of heaven's stars.
 - a. Some link this action to Satan's evil leadership over many other angels when he was cast out of heaven (Luke 10:18).
 - b. Others compare the dragon's behavior to Daniel's prophecy about a ruthless king [thought to be Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian ruler who enraged the Jews by his attacks on their religious practices]. He too, Daniel said, "grew up to the host of heaven; and it [he] cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them" (Dan. 8:10).
 - c. One line of thought connects the stars cast down to earth with one-third of the Roman empire that reputedly fell under the influence of pagan religion [including emperor worship] and which became a prime oppressor of the church. It is also pointed out that the dragon in many locations replaced the eagle as the military emblem [standard] of the Roman legions.
 - d. A more conservative view is that the dragon's symbolic conduct against the stars of heaven was merely intended to impress John with Satan's tremendous might and with the almost limitless extent of his evil operations.
 4. He had the most depraved motive possible in any creature.
 - a. He purposed to devour the woman's Child following its birth.
 - b. He "stood" ready to accomplish his despicable plan; preparations had been made for the success of his mission.
 5. A *real crisis* was imminent: God's eternal scheme of salvation was in *jeopardy of failure* if Satan's plan was successful!
 - a. He was uncompromising in his determination to defeat the Lord's purpose to redeem lost men. He would destroy the Child "as soon as it was born."
 - b. The devil utilized the wicked plan of Herod (Matt. 3:8), the offers of compromise made to Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), the cruel decisions of the

Jewish leadership (John 11:51-53), etc., in an effort to destroy the Messiah before His appointment with death on the cross could be kept. Of course, he failed in everything he tried, just as he had failed in his untiring efforts in the Old Testament to thwart the birth of the Savior.

- c. This determination still is reflected in Satan's unchanging campaign to condemn as many souls to hell as possible (1Pet. 5:8).

II. Satan's plan was frustrated. 12:5,6.

A. The Father's "Plan A" was accomplished without alteration.

1. The male Child was born on heaven's schedule (Matt. 1:20,23; Lk. 2:11).
2. The Child's destiny was twofold:
 - a. He would save His own *spiritual* nation [people] from their sins;
 - b. He would rule *worldly* nations with an "iron rod" of retribution.
 - (1) David had prophesied this role many years before (Psa. 110:1,2).
 - (2) The Lamb would become the Lion of Judah and the Father's agent for dispensing the vengeance promised in this vision to wicked men and nations.
 - (3) Some understand this rod [*rhabdos*] to be a "staff" for shepherding rather than an instrument for punishing. This meaning would stress the Lord's work as the leader and protector of His sheep.
3. The Child's destiny was shielded from Satan's "Plan A" to destroy the Child.
 - a. The Child was "caught up to God's throne" to exercise His dominion as Lord and Christ over the earth (Acts 2:30-36).
 - b. This verse [vs. 5] by implication summarizes Jesus' successful accomplishment of every task, from His birth to His ascension, that made salvation possible for men. It also implies the completeness of Satan's failures to defeat any of those tasks.

B. Satan then resorted to *his* "Plan B" to destroy the mother of the Child instead.

1. He could accomplish his basic goal as the *satanas* ["adversary"] of mankind by destroying *either* the Child or the mother [now symbolic of the church].
2. The woman [church] fled to a place that was safe from the devil's designs.
 - a. God intervened by providing safety from extinction for the woman [church].
 - b. Others had fled from danger so that God's plan could proceed [e.g., Moses fled from Egypt; Elijah from Jezebel; Mary and Joseph from Herod; etc.].
- c. Protection for the woman [church] continued for 1,260 days.
 - (1) This was the same time during which the "holy city" would be trodden under foot by the Gentiles (11:2) and when God's two witnesses would prophesy in sackcloth (11:3).
 - (2) This was a period of time when truth suffered at the hands of error and when the preaching of the gospel was severely hampered by persecution.

- aa. Some interpret these days as the period of papal ascendancy prior to the Reformation when error severely suppressed truth and when tradition and superstition were preferred to Scriptural facts.
 - bb. Others conclude that the 1,260 days [forty-two months] was the actual time during which the Roman-Jewish war lasted. The woman [“holy seed of Israel”] fled to the mountains as directed by Jesus prior to the fall of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15,16).
 - cc. Generalists identify this as an unspecified time(s) when both the church and gospel truth would need special assistance from the Lord’s providence to avoid annihilation from the onslaughts of their enemies. The “wilderness” was a condition of security, not a literal location.
- (3) The Father and the Child [“they”] would “feed” [sustain] the woman until more favorable times for preaching the real truth should come. This revelation to John and the churches would be part of the “feeding.”

III. An overview of the heavenly war. 12:7-12.

- A. “And war broke out in heaven.” There are two leading ideas about this conflict,
1. It was an actual series of events that had taken place in the literal heaven long before the time of John’s vision.
 - a. Satan, a rebellious angel, had led a challenge to God’s authority and had been repulsed in his efforts and cast out of heaven for his disobedience [cf., 2Pet. 2:4; Jude 6.].
 - b. Michael [probably the “archangel” (Jude 9)] and other loyal angels had fought God’s battle and had prevailed against Satan [the dragon] and his followers.
 - c. Sin and sinners cannot exist in heaven (Rev. 21:8, 27). There was consequently no longer any place in heaven for these great offenders, and they were cast out.
 - d. There was no place other than earth for them to continue their hurtful efforts to undermine the autonomy and the power of Almighty God.
 - e. Satan was allowed to test the loyalties of *earthly* creatures just as he had tried to lead *heavenly* beings away from God. Good choices by man’s free will would validate God’s wisdom in having made earthly creatures who were designed to glorify Him with their praises to His name and with their obedience to His will.
 - (1) Job had been such a “test case” (Job 1:8; 2:3).
 - (2) Joseph, Daniel, and others had persevered in spite of Satan’s temptations.
 2. This “war” was not intended to depict *actual* places or events, but these occurrences were symbols in a vision and should be regarded as such.
 - a. John was witness to images unfolding as if there were a war in heaven between the forces of good and evil, as if the named characters were participating in the conflict, and as if the outcome had turned in favor of the armies of the Lord over the enemies of righteousness.

- b. This passage, verses 7-12, constitutes another interruption in the ongoing vision of “things which must shortly take place” (1:1).
 - c. Its insertion into John’s vision at this point is likely for the same purpose as the sealing and salvation scene introduced in chapter seven. Both interludes offer great encouragement and support in the face of warnings about the terrible tribulations soon to be suffered by disciples of Jesus.
 - d. These images would allow saints whose faith was soon to be tried to look beyond the events of the physical persecutions in their future and to see themselves as participants in a *limited expression* of a *vast and eternal* struggle between right and wrong that had begun long before they had arrived on the scene and that would continue long after their battle for the faith had been either won or lost.
 - e. This perspective of a “bigger picture” would emphasize the great importance of their persevering through difficult times. More than deliverance from their own troubles was dependent on their steadfastness. They were an important part of a much more extensive and inclusive conflict than they might suppose. Their response to opposition might have serious consequences not only to themselves but also to multitudes yet unborn.
- B. The particulars of the visionary war in heaven.
- 1. The combatants: Michael [prince (administrator) of angels] and the “good” angels against the dragon [Satan] and the “bad” angels. [cf., Daniel 12:1.]
 - 2. The troops of ungodliness were led by the most evil of leaders.
 - a. “The great dragon” [*drakon*], a mythical monster...so called because of its keen power of sight (from a root *derk--*, signifying "to see") [W.E. Vine].
 - b. “That serpent [*ophis*] of old.” “The characteristics of the ‘serpent’ as alluded to in Scripture are mostly evil...” [ibid.]. [See Gen. 3:1.]
 - c. “The Devil” [*diabolos*] is “an accuser, a slanderer” [ibid.].
 - d. “Satan” [*satanas*] is the “adversary of God and Christ, His people, and all of mankind” [ibid.].
 - e. The deceiver of the whole world (2Cor. 11:14; Rev. 20:3; 1Tim. 2:14).
 - 3. The evil forces lost the battle and were cast out of heaven down to the earth.
- C. The consequences of the war in heaven.
- 1. Salvation, [spiritual] strength, God’s kingdom [church], and Christ’s power to forgive sins are now realities with which faithful people can be blessed.
 - 2. The “accuser” no longer has any legitimate cause to accuse saints because their sins have now been cleansed by Jesus’ blood (1John 3:8).
 - 3. Satan has been *overcome* by believers (Heb. 2:14) because of:
 - a. The blood of the Lamb;
 - b. The testimony of the overcomers;
 - c. The willingness for martyrdom by committed saints.

D. The impact of the war in heaven.

1. There was much cause for *rejoicing* by those in heaven and on earth who possess heavenly interests, for the Savior's goals would be accomplished as planned.
2. There was great cause for *concern* about the inhabitants of the earth whose priorities are contrary to those of the Father and the Son and who dwell in the symbolic sea of a restless, confused, and spiritually unconcerned human society.
3. The devil changed his focus from heaven, where he had failed miserably, to the earth, where he yet had hope for success against heaven's salvation plan.
 - a. His wrath was greatly increased because of his previous frustration.
 - b. His frustration was increased because of the limited time available to him to pursue his quest for men's souls. [cf., Rev. 6:11; 11:7-10.]
 - c. His wrath could not actually harm the faithful, but it could devastate those who surrender control to him. They would suffer eternal destruction (2Thes. 1:8,9).

IV. The dragon's campaign against the beautiful woman. 12:13.

- A. The dragon had been forced to change *his* original plan for disrupting *God's* plan.
 1. He failed to "devour" the divine Child "as soon as He was born" (Matt. 2:7-21),
 2. He also failed to foil the plan for Jesus' death to forgive sin (Luke 9:33).
 3. He was unable to prevent the establishment of the church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47).
- B. He was now powerless to act against Christ who sat on heaven's throne (Heb. 2:14).
 1. His activity now was only *by permission* and was *confined* to earth (John 19:11).
 2. The church on earth was now the only target available for venting his wrath (1Pet. 5:8).
- C. His *alternate* plan was to do harm to the woman [church] and her work.
 1. He wished to hinder the preaching of truth that saves the lost (Acts 16:31,32).
 2. He wanted to prevent edification which would save the saints (Acts 20:32).
 3. He aimed to diminish benevolence among Christians and increase their suffering in various misfortunes (Acts 4:32-35).

V. The woman [church] was given heavenly protection from the dragon's wrath. 12:14.

- A. A great eagle's wings allowed her to fly to safety in the wilderness.
 1. She either was given two eagle's wings by which to fly away, or she was given the use of a great eagle by whose two powerful wings she was carried from harm.
 2. If it was the latter, this might be the same eagle that had pronounced woe upon the earth prior to the sounding of the final three trumpets. [See 8:13.]
 - a. If so, this eagle possibly represented God's powerful instrument(s) by which He works, whether to send messages or to provide protection to His own.
 3. Verse fourteen is another version of the *same* action that was described earlier in

verse six of this chapter. Notice these parallel statements:

Verse 12:6

Verse 12:14

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The woman <i>fled</i> into the wilderness; b. She fled to a <i>prepared</i> place; c. She was <i>fed</i> [for survival]; d. She remained <i>1,260 days</i>; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The woman <i>flew</i> into the wilderness; b. She flew to <i>her</i> place; c. She was <i>nourished</i> [for survival]; d. She remained <i>three and a half times</i>. |
|---|--|
4. The “wilderness” was a *condition* of security enjoyed by the woman [church] from the presence [severe persecution] of the serpent rather than an actual *location*.
- a. It symbolized God’s protection for His people and reminds Bible students about the shield provided to the Jews from Egypt and other pagan nations when they crossed the wilderness of Sinai.
- B. The “time and times and half a time” when the woman would be nourished in the wilderness is the same period during which the witnesses would prophesy in sack-cloth [1,260 days--11:3], when the holy city would be trodden under foot [forty-two months--11:2], and when the woman would be fed in the wilderness [1,260 days--12:6]. This “time and times and half a time” also appears in Daniel’s vision as a period when God’s people would be dominated by a fourth vicious beast [kingdom] (Dan. 7:25). Each reference signifies a time of danger and repression that the church would experience at the hands of its enemies.
- a. Generalists usually attach no particular historical chronology to this period. It alludes rather to all of the *long* and intermittent seasons of persecution raised by Satan’s agents, beginning with Rome and ending at the judgment.
 - b. Those disposed to assign Revelation’s images to historical events conclude that these were the days of “hiding” [“lost to view as a visible organization”--Hinds] by true Christians while the corruptions of the fully-developed papacy were blinding the eyes of the masses to the real gospel. This time would last until the emergence of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. The 1,260 days are viewed in terms of *years* [a day for a year].
 - c. Some interpret the “time, times and half a time” as beginning “at the moment of Christ’s *first coming*-- birth, ministry, cross, coronation-- and extending to a point of time very near to his *second coming unto judgment*” (Hendricksen).
 - d. Those who defend the “early date” interpretation of Revelation view this interval as the actual three and a half years of the Roman conquest of Palestine which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jesus had warned his disciples to “flee” into the mountains when the Roman armies arrived (Lk. 21:20; Matt. 24:16-18).

VI. The dragon takes his “best shot” at the beautiful woman. 12:15-17.

- A. New information about the dragon’s tactics is disclosed.
 - 1. These details were not included in the persecution cited in verse six of this chapter.
 - 2. He attempted to drown the woman in a flood [of falsehoods and deceptive deeds].

- a. This flood came from the dragon's *mouth*.
- b. Paul had warned the churches about this danger to their faith (2Thes. 2:8-12; 1Tim. 4:1-3, etc.).
- c. Peter had likewise cautioned saints about destructive heresies (2Pet. 2:1-3).
3. Over time, multitudes *have been* overwhelmed in floods of error and sin.
 - a. The idolatry of the Roman world made many stumble (1Cor. 8:7; 1Jn. 5:21).
 - b. The religious errors of papal councils obliterated truth from most minds for a very long period of time (2Thes. 2:11,12).
- B. The woman was rescued from death by the *mouth* of the "earth."
 1. The "earth" would swallow up the flood that threatened the woman [church].
 2. We can only speculate about how or when the "earth" provided this aid.
 3. Perhaps this indicates that enough preaching would be done by human teachers at critical moments to prevent the *total* abandonment of saving truth.
 - a. This could occur, of course, intermittently over many years.
 - b. Some scholars apply these images to the resumption of Bible teaching that was seen during the Reformation and afterward.
 4. When his plan for causing great harm to the beautiful woman was defeated, at least temporarily, the dragon became more enraged than ever at the woman. He was not quickly discouraged from pursuing his evil purpose.
 5. He perceived the futility of attempting to destroy the woman [church] *per se*.
 - a. He thought that he might be more successful against "the rest of her offspring."
 - b. He thenceforth would devote his energies to a "war" with them.
 6. This "war" would also be figurative, as was the "war" in heaven (vs. 7).
 - a. It would symbolize the continuing battle between good and evil, godliness and ungodliness, and Christ and Satan.
 7. The details of this image are somewhat confusing.
 - a. If the woman is the church, then her first "offspring" was Jesus [in her role as the faithful of Israel-- see page 115, 2. d.]. Her "other offspring" would be her members [as she transcends into the N.T. church] But the church is its members (1Cor. 12:27). How, then, could the dragon at the same time *not* persecute the woman [the church] while persecuting her members [herself]?
 - b. This quandary is resolved if we view the *woman* in this verse as the *corporate body*, an entity or unit of the whole, and her *offspring* as individual members within that body.
 - c. Finally understanding that the church *as a body* could not be destroyed even by his most strenuous efforts (Heb. 12:28), Satan opted for individual attacks upon particular members of the body.
 - (1) Membership in the body does not unconditionally prevent apostasy by individual members (1Cor. 10:12; Rom. 11:22).
 - (2) Satan enjoys success in seducing Christians, even though previously they "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

- 1. Describe the woman John saw when the first sign appeared. (11,2)**

- 2. Describe the dragon that appeared as the second sign. (3,4)**

- 3. What was the plan of the dragon, and why did it not succeed? (4,5)**

- 4. How was the woman protected from the dragon? (6)**

- 5. Describe the “war” in heaven and its outcome. (7-9)**

- 6. What spiritual consequences came about from the heavenly war? (10-12)**

- 7. Why was a woe pronounced on the earth’s people? (12)**

- 8. Who became the object of the dragon’s wrath on earth? (13)**

- 9. Why did Satan fail to accomplish his goal? (14)**

- 10. How did the earth help to defeat the devil’s evil plan? (15,16)**

- 11. Against whom did Satan next direct his wrath? (17)**

Lesson Thirteen: Chapter 13:1-18

Beasts from the Sea and the Land

Chapter twelve ended with the dragon's [Satan's] failure to destroy the beautiful woman [the Lord's church]. His next initiative was to launch a vicious war with "the rest of her offspring" [faithful Christians]. Chapter thirteen will disclose some of the tactics he would employ in that war.

I. The beast from the sea. 13:1-10.

A. This beast was *one* of *two* principal agents of Satan in the war against God's church.

B. The beast emerged from the *sea* rather than from the land.

1. [John] stood on the seaside as he observed this new phase of his vision.

2. Some versions say that "he" or "it" stood on the sand of the sea.

a. This might suggest that the dragon was present to call the beast up from the depths of the waters.

b. The turbulent "sea" often symbolizes the turmoil of the human family and/or the raging and frenzied conduct of human governments:

(1) Isaiah made this application to both pagan nations and wicked individuals (Isa. 17:12,13; 57:20);

(2) Daniel's beasts [four kingdoms] came from the sea (Dan. 7:2,4);

(3) Most political governments have originated from the consequences of wars between nations or from some other unsettled human condition.

C. The beast "rose up" out of the sea.

1. Perhaps this indicates that some passing of time was required for the full development of the beast's monstrous nature.

2. Hendricksen describes the *sequence* of things John saw as the beast "rose up":

a. First, its seven heads and ten horns were seen as it broke the surface of the sea;

b. Crowns and a blasphemous name were observed adorning the heads;

c. The beast's leopard-like body was seen next as it emerged from the water;

d. Details of its feet, its mouth, and its wounded head were noted only after the beast had fully revealed itself to John.

D. The beast had an awesome and frightful appearance.

1. It had seven heads and ten horns, each of which [horns] wore a crown.

a. "Heads" are symbolic of intelligence and authority. "Seven" is a number of completeness [cf., Rev. 1:11,12,20, etc.]. This beast was destined to exercise full control of the nations coming under its influence.

- b. “Horns” often represent power and strength. [See Dan. 8:3-12.]
 - (1) Each horn had a crown [diadem] on it.
 - (2) These ten horns with their crowns likely symbolize the authority conferred by the beast upon subordinate worldly rulers who acted on the beast’s behalf. The dragon’s diadems were on his heads (12:3), suggesting that his power was *primary*, while the authority of the beast with the horns was *secondary* and subject to the dragon’s control.
- c. The heads of the beast bore a blasphemous name.
 - (1) The name is unspecified, but it doubtless was similar to the words of blasphemy spoken by the beast (vs. 6).
 - (2) The blasphemy probably consisted of wearing titles that should be worn only by the Almighty God. Thus, bogus claims to deity might be involved.
- d. The beast looked like a leopard and had parts of other animals:
 - (1) The leopard represented its strength, cruelty, and swiftness;
 - (2) It had feet like a bear to suggest its power to maul and crush its victims;
 - (3) It had a mouth like a lion with which to rip and tear its victims.
- e. One of its seven heads had been severely wounded.
 - (1) This wound was massive enough to have been [“as if”] a mortal blow.
 - (2) Remarkably, the deadly wound had been healed in spite of its severity.
 - (3) Hailey cites three likely meanings for this image of the wounded beast:
 - (a) The resurrection, ascension, and coronation of Christ had dealt a sharp blow to the pretensions of supreme authority by Rome;
 - (b) The death-dealing attacks of northern pagan nations that almost brought about the ultimate demise of the empire;
 - (c) The death of Nero, the first emperor to persecute the church and who committed suicide in 68 A.D., caused widespread turmoil and confusion and seriously threatened the continuation of the empire.
- f. There are two leading ideas about the healing of the wounded head, both of which spring from the view that the wounded beast represents the Roman empire:
 - (1) If the wound represented Rome’s weakening by northern pagan nations, its resurgence [“healing”] occurred when it was joined to the power of the papacy when pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor of the “Holy Roman Empire” in 800 A.D. The German king Otto I was affirmed by the Catholic pope John XII in 962 to be the “supreme temporal ruler.” This enabled the papacy to strengthen its claim of “supreme spiritual ruler” over the world. The “Holy Roman Empire” allowed the vestiges of Roman civil government to survive for several centuries, in spite of being dominated by the heavy-handed influence of the Vatican.

- (2) If the wound of the beast corresponds to the death of Nero, most writers explain its healing by the revival of his cruel spirit and perverted character in the person of Domitian, another emperor who resumed the oppression of Christians near the end of the first century. Many believed that Domitian actually was the reincarnation of Nero, while many others recognized him as the incorporation of his evil predecessor's image.
 - (3) The second view may be preferred, since Roman civil power was extremely limited by the Papacy within the reign of the Holy Roman Empire. However, if the union between the civil and religious powers are considered *on one* entity, the empire's might can readily be viewed as thereby "healed."
 - (4) Regardless of which view of "healing" is taken, it is clear that the recovery had a strong impact on the world. "And all the world marveled and followed the beast." The same fact is repeated in verse eight.
 - (5) John wished to stress the truth that any homage paid to this sea beast of anti-God government was really devotion given to Satan, who was responsible for whatever power the beast possessed. Irreligious people failed to see that connection, however, and paid their tribute to the visible civil powers under which they lived. They dutifully and ignorantly praised the awesome military and governmental character of the empire and pledged their complete devotion to its administration [at least, in appearance]. Of course, believers knew that "...there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are appointed by God" (Rom. 13:1).
- E. The sea beast exhibited extreme behavior that was both atheistic and irrational.
1. It was given [allowed] to speak "great things" about its own might.
 - a. These boasts were embodied both in Rome's governmental legislation and in its oftentimes cruel enforcement of those laws and regulations.
 - b. Papal edicts and inquisitions against believers became common as the corruptions of Catholicism increased in an errant church.
 2. It was allowed to hurl blasphemies against the convictions of Christians about the supremacy of God's power over the power of *any* worldly government.
 - a. Nearly all Roman emperors made claims of divinity. Emperor worship, especially under Domitian, became a great challenge to the faith and courage of first-century saints.
 - b. The "divine right of kings" played a significant role in controlling nations during the rule of the Holy Roman Empire from the tenth century onward.
 - c. Its blasphemies were extensive, being aimed at everything holy: God, His name [character], His tabernacle [church], and all Christians ["heaven dwellers"-- Col. 3:20].
- F. The sea beast achieved substantial success in its mission against the church.

1. It waged a [seemingly] victorious war against the church for forty-two months.
 - a. This is the same period mentioned several times earlier in the book. It is the period during which Satan is permitted to oppress Christians and to repress their preaching to a considerable extent. [See Rev. 11:2, 7.]
 - b. Different viewpoints assign different dates or limits, some chronological and some figurative, to this period when Satan's opposition to God's plan was at its strongest.
 2. The beast [seemingly] overcame the saints and extended its control over every tribe, tongue, and nation [some versions add, "and people"]. This all-inclusive list embraces the whole empire from border to border.
 3. The only exceptions to Rome's [or other governments'] total domination over its subjects and over those who in turn heaped their adulation upon the ruling power were people whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. [See Rev. 20: 15.] Their loyalty was to God and offered no room for compromise with Satan.
 4. There are differences of opinion about the wording of verse *eight*.
 - a. The RSV and the ASV have, "...every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain." This reading has been applied to the *unconditional* election of the saved. Of course, election *did occur* for the saved as a class but *not* as individuals. God's election was a heavenly decree that respected the free choice of every man. [See Eph. 1:4.]
 - b. Other versions state that it was the slaying of the Lamb that took place [was planned] even before the earth's beginning. [See Eph. 3:11; 1Pet. 1:20.]
- G. The fate of the sea beast was certain.
1. "If anyone ['he who'] has an ear, let him hear," serves both as a stern warning to the Asian churches about self-examination and correction [chapters 2 and 3] and as an invitation to all Christians to receive a comforting promise at a time when they are confronted with the prospect of world domination by an oppressive government.
 2. The invitation is extended in verse *nine*, and the promise offered is declared in verse *ten*. "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity, etc..." Two meanings are possible:
 - a. Those who live by the sword will perish by the sword (Matt. 26:52). Those who used force against the Lord's people would have force used against them. In the case of Rome, the mighty empire finally succumbed to the violent onslaughts of pagan hordes that brought it to its knees in A.D. 476;
 - b. A more personal application of the promise would remind Christians that they should not resist force with force. Vengeance belongs to the Lord (Heb. 10:30), no matter how unbearable persecution of His people may become;
 - c. Either meaning provided much comfort to struggling Christians who could rest

assured that eventually there would be a favorable outcome to their suffering.

H. Further thoughts on the *identity* of the beast from the *sea*.

- a. The imagery of John's vision of the beast is unquestionably related to the vision of the four beasts recorded in Daniel 7. There, Daniel saw four beasts which in succession represented four great world kingdoms. Three bore the likenesses of the same animals incorporated into the sea beast of John's vision. The fourth beast had ten horns and another had eyes "like the eyes of a man." John's sea beast was not altogether like the beasts that Daniel saw.
- b. It is agreed by most scholars that Daniel's fourth beast represented the mighty Roman empire. The striking similarities in John's sea beast strongly indicate that it, too, symbolizes the same potent force.
- c. Since the beast was to "make war" and "overcome the saints" (vs. 7), it is often associated with the numerous persecutions undertaken against the church by the secular powers of the Roman authorities.
- d. Many writers also connect the seven heads of the beast with the seven mountains mentioned in Rev. 17:9. The harlot Babylon is said to "sit" on them. We are reminded that the city of Rome was founded on seven hills [mountains], and we might conclude that this fact further identifies the beast with Rome and its mighty legions.
- e. Summers confines his identification of the sea beast to a particular ruler, the Roman emperor Domitian, who persecuted Christians toward the end of the first century. He cites specific characteristics of Domitian which he relates to the specific details revealed to John about the beast's appearance and behavior.
- f. Hendricksen observes that the sea beast is a composite creature and, as such, it cannot represent just *one* kingdom. He concludes that the sea beast is the combined images of "all antichristian governments."
- g. Johnson is convinced that the symbol of the sea beast should remind us of the combined oppressions of God's people by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the *temporal* arm of the Papacy.

II. The beast from the *land*. 13:11-18.

- A. This beast was the *second* of *two* principal agents used by Satan against the church.
- B. It appeared out of the *land* rather than from the *sea*.
 1. This suggests a more subtle, less violent ascension into power than the sea beast, just as the land is usually more stable than the sea.
 2. Also, it was significant to people who were vulnerable to deception to know that this beast did *NOT* come from heaven, nor did it enjoy the approval of heaven.
 3. This beast was a *religious* character; he was later called "the false prophet" (Rev. 19:20).
- C. The land beast's appearance was far less threatening than the image of the sea beast.

1. It had two horns like a lamb.
 - a. Perhaps the image of a docile-looking lamb is intended to draw a stark contrast between the deceptiveness of the false lamb and his bogus religion and the genuineness of the true Lamb and His authentic religion.
 - b. *Two* horns might symbolize a *seemingly* diminished amount of power when compared to the civil might of the first beast's ten horns. However, as the description of the beast is developed in the rest of the chapter, any impression of limited power is only illusory. The land beast actually is capable of exercising extensive influence over many nations.
 - c. *Two* horns also might signify that this lamb could wield both spiritual and temporal control over the earth's inhabitants, a condition that is important to the proper identification of the lamb.
2. It spoke with the voice of a [the] dragon [Satan].
 - a. Jesus described the things spoken by the voice of the dragon (John 8:44).
 - b. Paul also warned about the dragon's dangerous deception (2Thes. 2:8-12).
 - c. The land beast does the work of Satan through false and deceptive teaching and through evil practices (1Tim. 4:1-3).
- D. It behaved much like the beast from the sea. 13:12-17.
 1. It acted in the "presence" of the sea beast, i.e., its actions were co-ordinated with those of the sea beast [civil power].
 2. It exercised the authority of the sea beast [civil government].
 - a. Prior to the emergence of the apostate Catholic church, pagan religions found great advantages in reciprocal supporting roles for religion and government. Pagan priests regularly endeavored to promote the strength of the empire as a means of strengthening their own self-interests. Committees functioned throughout the empire to enforce compliance with civil regulations.
 - b. As the status of paganism diminished, its religious connections with civil administrations were replaced by those of the rising apostate church. It became apparent to civil rulers that the best interests of the empire were tied to the power of the church. Increasingly, religious leaders assumed a *controlling* influence in civil affairs and eventually gained the upper hand in determining the conduct of the empire. This trend was culminated in 962 A.D. in the formation of the Holy Roman Empire which promoted the mutually supportive roles of emperor and pope. The pope ultimately usurped temporal authority from the emperor and claimed to possess the sole right to appoint and govern the rulers of nations.
 3. While seeking to seize power from the civil authorities, the apostate church saw the advantage in supporting the role of the empire and in encouraging "worship" [civil submission] to the government, which in turn would allow a free course of

conduct by the church to pursue its goal of total supremacy. “Worship” might include requirements to pay homage to emperors who often claimed divinity for themselves and to their statues that frequently were set up in temples and other public places.

4. Both pagan and “christian” religions thus became strong factors in the “healing” of any wounds that might be suffered by the civil powers of the empire. Collaboration with the Roman church certainly helped to heal the “deadly wound” inflicted on the empire by the pagan hordes that finally invaded from the north.
5. The priests of paganism are frequently cited by historians for their fraudulent activities intended to deceive the populace into submitting to the government. While we do not have the details of their deceptions, we are aware of the great potential for trickery by false religions. [See Acts 8:9-11; 2Thes. 2: 9-12.] How could the impostors “make fire come down from heaven”? We can’t know, although this language might be only a figurative expression for some illusion that they could pull out of their bag of tricks to fool the people.
6. “Making an image” can be understood either literally or figuratively. Images often *were* made to honor emperors during the reign of the empire, and people were expected to show due reverence to them. On the other hand, the expression could simply have reference to reinforcing the empire’s “image” of power by offering total submission to its laws and cooperating with its endeavors.
7. Some suppose that the land beast [false religion, acting through its priests] sometimes actually caused the images of emperors and others to “speak.” This, it is suggested, might have been done by ventriloquism or by other devious means that would lead the ignorant to believe that the image had “breath” [life]. Of course, this “breathing” and “speaking” may just be symbolic language to indicate how effective both pagan and “christian” leaders were in infusing the empire with the strength needed to survive its difficult times.
8. The far-reaching influence of false religion on the relationship between the empire and its subjects is seen in religion’s role in enforcing the edicts handed down by the civil government.
 - a. Those who refused to submit to “worship” of the “image” of the empire might be executed for their disobedience. The land beast [false religion] supported the sea beast [civil rulers] in its drastic enforcement of penalties for non-compliance with the dictates of the civil authorities.
 - b. All classes of people were required to wear a “mark” on their hands or on their heads. This mark, either literal or symbolic, declared ownership by the empire of the lives and souls of the populace, in much the same way as the marks borne by slaves signified ownership by their particular masters.
 - c. The empire’s “mark” validated the wearer’s right to participate in the buying

and selling carried on throughout the empire.

(1) Hailey comments:

Whatever the mark was (here it is identified with his “name,” as the “seal” of God was identified with His name), no one could enter the field of trade or earn a living without it. The view advanced in interpreting the opening of the third seal...that the rider of the black horse signified scarcity through discrimination, seems to be confirmed here. The saints who refused the mark even at the risk of death, were boycotted by the world, being discriminated against even to the point of hunger or possible starvation.

(2) Hendricksen adds his thoughts about the “mark of the beast”:

The “mark of the beast” is the God-opposing, Christ-rejecting, church-persecuting spirit of antichrist, wherever and whenever it manifests itself. This mark is impressed in forehead or right hand. Cf. Deut. 6:8. The forehead symbolizes the mind, the thought-life, the philosophy of a person. The right hand indicates his deeds, action, trade, industry, etc. Hence, receiving the mark of the beast on forehead or right hand indicates that the person so characterized belongs to the company of those who persecute the church; and that--either pre-eminently in what he *thinks, says, writes*; or more emphatically in what he *does*-- this antichristian spirit becomes evident.

E. It is identified by a cryptic number. 13:18.

1. This number was another sign [mark] that could be worn to gain access to the commerce of the empire.
2. While the exact number is not divulged to John, “wisdom” would enable him and those who read the record of his vision to know what the number was and what person or persons were represented by the number.
3. The number of this persecutor of God’s people was **666**. Of course, all would understand that it was not simply someone who answered to “666” as his actual name who was identified as the powerful sea beast, although many have tried to make that very application of the number.
4. “666” was the number of “a” man [many versions]. However, the RSV has, “a human number,” suggesting that it was *not a particular* man who was the target of the “wisdom” that could unfold the secrets of John’s vision. Rather, it was *any* man [or men] who might commit the great sin of persecuting the saints. The indefinite article “a” does not appear in the original text.
5. Summers offers a fairly comprehensive discussion to solve the mysteries surrounding this “number of a man.” Primitive languages, he says, often used letters in the place of numbers. So, the Roman people used V for 5, X for 10, C for 100, etc. Most scholars have determined that this is the approach taken in John’s vision in specifying “the number of a man” as “666.”
6. Two basic efforts have been made to solve the puzzle of “666.”
 - a. It is the name of a particular individual who was oppressing the church. Using the various systems of matching letters with numbers [called “gematria”], numerous persons have been “identified” as the vicious enemy of the church.
 - (1) Perhaps the most popular solution is the emperor Nero. This explanation

is important to those who contend that Revelation's focus is on the awful fate of the Jewish nation at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70.

- (2) Domitian, as the "reborn" Nero, is also frequently chosen by scholars.
 - (3) Latinus, an early predecessor to the emperors and the father of all things "Latin", also has a large following. The "Latin" connection associates him with the Latin [Roman Catholic] church in several respects, including the use of Latin as the official language of the mass.
 - (4) Hitler and numerous other more modern characters are often included in the solutions proposed by students who suppose they have found the key to one of the most perplexing problems in Revelation, the problem of "666."
- b. It is *not* the name of an individual but of a *class* of persons who oppose God and His people at any time and place in history.
- (1) It is obvious that numbers are used as symbols throughout Revelation. The use of a particular number may not in itself have any importance. The significance may be in the thing symbolized.
 - (2) Seven is the number of perfection or completeness. There were seven churches, seven angels of the churches, seven seals, etc.
 - (3) Six is the number of human failure. It is *not* seven, and it can *never be* seven! It is incomplete, always failing to be perfect or complete.
 - (4) 666 is *triple failure!* Failure upon failure upon failure. It is therefore the number of man, who can only expect to fail in his human endeavors.
 - (5) McGuiggan quotes William Milligan on the mysterious "666":

The number six awakened a feeling of dread in the breast of the Jew who felt the significance of numbers. It fell below the sacred number seven just as much as eight went beyond it...the number six was held to signify inability to reach the sacred point and hopelessly falling short of it. To the Jew, there was a doom upon the number six, even when it stood alone. Triple it...and we have represented a potency of evil than which there can be none greater, a direfulness of fate than which there can be none worse.
 - (6) Perhaps this latter position on "the number of [a] man" is better.
 - (7) Hinds offers the student a noteworthy suggestion:

Even if the expression, "six hundred and sixty and six" remains an unsolved puzzle, we know that in some way it describes a false religious power that was an enemy of the true church for the symbolic period of 1,260 days. This phase of the matter is definitely fixed by the language of the text.
 - (8) This chapter ends, therefore, on a positive note. It deals mainly with fearful descriptions of two great beasts and how their devastating attacks will be suffered by the people of the Lord. But it ends with the assurance that human foes cannot succeed in destroying the church because they all wear the name of the beast, "666"-- ultimate FAILURE!!

- 1. Describe the beast John saw rising from the sea. (1,2)**

- 2. What had happened to its head, and what effect did that have on the world? (3,4)**

- 3. How long would the sea beast make war? (5) Is there any significance in that number?**

- 4. What things did the beast blaspheme, and what further authority was he given? (6,7)**

- 5. Who would worship the sea beast? (8)**

- 6. What comforting truth should be heard by the faithful? (9,10)**

- 7. What two features are attributed to the land [earth] beast? (11)**

- 8. What relationship(s) existed between the two beasts? Cite as many particulars as you can find. (12-17)**

- 9. Was the land beast a civil or a religious figure? How do you know? (12-17)**

- 10. What penalty would be inflicted on those who refused to worship the image of the first beast? (15)**

- 11. How were people to be certified to buy and sell? (16,17)**

- 12. Those who “understand” should know what about this great sea beast? What does the number “666” mean? (18)**

Lesson Fourteen: Chapter 14:1-20

Firstfruits and Harvests

In chapter six, John was first introduced to the frightful events that God had planned for the future of the earth and for the punishment of His foes. To allay unnecessary fears in His righteous saints about these ominous occurrences, the Lord immediately offered in chapter seven strong assurances of His care and keeping for them. Similarly, chapter thirteen carried warnings about two powerful, faith-destroying beasts that would seek to terrorize Christians in days to come. The chapter ended with God's promise that such efforts would ultimately fail because they were the efforts of men rather than God. Chapter fourteen will bolster the confidence of the churches by offering another interlude in which the Lord's plan to save the righteous and to punish the unrighteous is affirmed again.

I. The firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 14:1-5.

A. John saw the Lamb and His 144,000 followers standing on Mount Zion.

- 1. Zion was first mentioned as a strong city of the Jebusites conquered by David and which came to be known as the "City of David" (2Sam. 5:6-9). The term came to be applied to the entire city of Jerusalem, part of which occupied the hill called Zion (Isa. 33:20; Psa. 87:2).**
- 2. Zion was part of the larger hill on which the temple of God was built. The particular site of the temple was called Mount Moriah, but the entire hill came to be known as Mount Zion. "Zion" sometimes was applied to the temple proper (Isa. 2:3).**
- 3. Zion was so closely associated with Israel that, representatively, the name was sometimes applied to the nation (Isa. 41:27; 49:14).**
- 4. The writer of Hebrews attaches the concept of "Zion" to the New Testament church and to those who enjoy spiritual security within its walls: "*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel*" (Heb. 12:22-24).**
- 5. Standing with the Lamb are 144,000 saints who wear the name of the Father on their foreheads. We may assume that these are the same individuals appearing in chapter seven who were sealed against the terrible plagues to be visited upon the earth's wicked (7:3,4).**

- B. John heard the awesome sounds of a *new song* praising God.**
1. “A” voice was likely the collective voices of many sealed singers.
 2. “The” voice had unique qualities:
 - a. It was loud *like* the crashing of waters upon the seashore [perhaps like the sounds made by the rushing seas around Patmos];
 - b. It also sounded *like* loud thunder.
 3. Singing voices were accompanied by sounds *like* harpists playing on their harps.
 - a. This would have added sweetness to the sounds heard by John.
 4. The song of the singers was a “*new song*” which only they knew.
 - a. It was likely similar to the song [saying] of the saved multitude (7:10).
 - b. It probably resembled the song [saying] of angels, elders, and creatures (7:12).
 - c. It must have been like the song [saying] of the twenty-four elders (11:17,18).
 - d. But it was newer than *any* of those:
 - (1) It reflected a new relationship: standing with the Lamb as His very own.
 - (2) It proclaimed a new status: redeemed as the firstfruits to God and Jesus.
 - e. Before the sacrifice of the Lamb on the cross, such a song was impossible for any to sing (Heb. 9:15).
 - f. Albert Barnes, who viewed this passage as applying to the saved in heaven and not to those now justified in the church (Heb. 12:22-24), explains why only redeemed ones could sing such a song:

A great truth is taught here. To appreciate fully the songs of Zion; to understand the language of praise; to enter into the spirit of the truths which pertain to redemption; one must himself have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. He must have known what it is to be a sinner under the condemnation of a holy law; he must have known what it is to be in danger of eternal death; he must have experienced the joys of pardon, or he can never understand, in its true import, the language used by the redeemed. And this is only saying what we are familiar with in other things. He who is saved from peril; he who is rescued from long captivity; he who is pardoned at the foot of the scaffold; he who is recovered from dangerous illness; he who presses to his bosom a beloved child just rescued from a watery grave, will have an appreciation of the language of joy and triumph which he can never understand who has not been placed in such circumstances; but of all the joy ever experienced in the universe, so far as we can see, that must be the most sublime and transporting, which will be experienced when the redeemed shall stand on Mount Zion above, and shall realize that they are saved.
 5. The *new song* was sung before a righteous audience.
 - a. The song was sung before the throne of *God*.
 - b. It was heard by the living creatures and the elders in heaven.
 6. The *new song* was sung by persons with righteous characters.
 - a. They were virgins not defiled with women. While spiritual defilement likely is the primary sin intended (2Cor. 11:2), physical purity is also a requisite for singing in this heavenly choir (1Thes. 4:3; Eph. 5:3).

- b. They followed the Lamb *wherever* He went. Their dedication was complete; their loyalty was uncompromised by the attraction of sin (Matt. 16:24).
 - c. They were guiltless of speaking any guile. Their teaching was free from error and compromise; their verbal conversation was exemplary (Eph. 4:25,29).
 - d. They were without fault before God's throne of judgment. Their washing from sins was thorough (Eph. 5:25; Tit. 3:5). Their sins now could be regarded *as if they had never been committed*.
7. The *new song* was sung by those who were sureties of a greater harvest of souls.
- a. They were themselves redeemed [purchased --ASV] *from among* the unrighteous. They had been sinners, but now they were saved.
 - b. Their salvation was an unchallenged testimony that *all* other sinners could also be saved if they too would "follow the Lamb wherever He goes."
 - c. These singers were firstfruits to the Father and Son. They were just the beginning of a *great harvest* of redeemed souls made possible by the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16,17).

II. God's eternal plan is affirmed once again. 14:6-11.

- A. John saw an angel [symbolic of all gospel messengers] flying in the midst of heaven.
- 1. This was "another" angel, i. e., one different from any mentioned earlier.
 - 2. This angel had the gospel that was [still] to be preached to the world.
 - a. The charge to preach it had long before been given to men (Matt. 28:18-20).
 - b. It had already been proclaimed to "every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23).
 - c. The angel symbolizes all the work of preaching yet to be done in the world.
 - (1) Interestingly, Adam Clarke proposes the rather narrow view that the angel represents the "British and Foreign Bible Society, whose object it is to print and circulate the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through all the habitable world, and in all the languages spoken on the face of the earth." But as noble as that purpose might be, the scope of evangelizing suggested here is surely broader than Clarke recommends.
 - 3. In its initial proclamation, the gospel had promised "salvation" to the obedient; "condemnation" would come only to the disobedient (Mark 16:15,16).
 - 4. Anxious disciples might wonder: would the suffering and death of Christians in the persecutions ahead invalidate their promise of "salvation"?
 - 5. Were unbelievers actually being *rewarded* for their disobedience?
 - 6. Saints needed assurance that spiritual salvation and condemnation were not affected by whatever might happen in the tribulations ahead (Matt. 10:28).
- B. The angel carried a gospel that was *everlasting* and unchanging!
- 1. It was still universal in scope; *all* men came under its authority.
 - a. The hope of salvation was available to "every tribe, tongue, people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

- b. The danger of condemnation threatened “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” among earthdwellers (14:6).
 2. It was still demanding in its terms; *none* were exempt from its requirements.
 - a. Fear God and give glory to Him (Acts 10:34,35).
 - b. Worship Him for His creative power (Rom. 1:20).
 3. The hour of judgment had come-- all must account for their behavior, good or bad, under the terms of the everlasting gospel.
- C. Another angel appeared with a message of great hope.
1. “Babylon” was fallen! This is the first reference to “Babylon” in Revelation.
 - a. Ancient Babylon had been a prime enemy of God’s people and had carried the nation into a humiliating captivity.
 - b. This present “Babylon” was still a principal foe of the Lord’s church and would seek to take it into the captivity of compromise and iniquitous living.
 - c. This was a “great” city because of its vast influence and power over other nations. It was not truly great for possessing any observable virtues.
 - d. “Babylon” is symbolic of Rome, which earlier had been represented by a *beast* out of the sea (13:1). The beast was the image of Rome as a strong military power. Now, it is a *city* that brings to mind the dissipation and sinful lifestyles of most great cities. “Babylon” is Rome’s image as a strong influence of lust and moral corruption that would drag down many nations with it when she fell before God’s wrath when the day of reckoning came.
 - e. Rome [“Babylon”] actually had not yet received the final recompense for her many sins. Nevertheless, so *certain* are the Lord’s purposes, God and His prophets frequently have spoken of unfinished matters as being already done (Isa. 46:10).
 2. Rome’s destruction would be *just* [fair] because she had led so many nations into idolatrous and lustful practices. Those nations had expected great advantages from “drinking the wine” of dissipation that Rome drank. Sadly, they failed to see that they were only making themselves subject to the same great wrath of the Lord that soon would bring the empire to its knees.
- D. A third angel sternly warned earthdwellers who failed to resist Rome’s influence.
1. The beast from the land encouraged making an image to the sea-beast (13:14).
 2. It also promoted a mark which declared men's subjection to the beast (13:16).
 3. Those who yielded to the beast’s domination would share in severe retribution.
 4. They would be made to drink “full strength” punishment from God’s cup of indignation. Personal responsibility for one’s own sins cannot be escaped.
 5. Fire and brimstone [like that suffered by Sodom and Gomorrah] would torment both Rome and its sympathizers. [See Genesis 19:12-29.]
 6. As smoke from Sodom signified the retributive power of the Almighty, “smoke” ascending from the destruction of wicked men would likewise declare the folly of

being swayed from God's truth by the strong influences of "Babylon," worshiping the beast, and receiving its mark of ownership.

III. The patience of the saints was the salvation of the saints. 14:12,13.

- A. The severe wrath of the Lord was the only prospect for unfaithful people.**
 - 1. Their punishment would be "full strength" (vs. 10).**
 - 2. The temptations to fall into line with Rome's purposes were strong and danger in resisting was very real, but disciples had one effective defense against Satan's workers: the patience [steadfastness] to resist, knowing that temptation and danger eventually would end. Then, their endurance would be rewarded.**
 - 3. This great truth about escaping God's wrath through patience and faith had already been pronounced earlier in the vision (Rev. 13:9,10).**
- B. Patience [confidently waiting for deliverance] must be *demonstrated* by saints:**
 - 1. By keeping the commandments of God (1John 5:3);**
 - 2. By keeping the faith of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:13,14).**
- C. Patience must be *greatly rewarded* by the Lord.**
 - 1. Even those who would be persecuted and die in [the cause of] the Lord would be blessed spiritually. [See Rev. 2:10.]**
 - a. "From now on," many loyal saints would suffer death at the hands of their Roman oppressors.**
 - b. "From now on," perhaps, there would be a *special degree* of blessing for those willing to make the supreme sacrifice for Jesus in the perilous times ahead.**
 - 2. The reward of steadfastness would be worthwhile for those willing to be patient.**
 - a. Jesus had promised, "In your patience possess [save] your souls" (Lk. 21:19).**
 - b. Total spiritual rest would be theirs to enjoy throughout eternity (Matt. 11:28).**
 - c. Their works [enduring tribulation and death] would not be ignored in heaven. If a reward is never lost for giving a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord, how much greater a blessing will follow for giving one's life for Jesus' name?**

IV. Rewards and punishments are certain for good men and bad. 14:14-20.

- A. Verses fourteen through twenty of this chapter clearly represent scenes of judgment.**
 - 1. Widely differing viewpoints are held about this judgment:**
 - a. Some ["futurists"] believe that there are *two* different judgments separated by an interval of time, but this obviously does not agree with Jesus' promise that all judgment of both the good and the bad will occur at the same "hour" (John 5:27-29);**
 - b. Others ["cyclicists"] see *one* literal judgment of all men taking place at the end of time. This, they say, is the final reckoning also recorded in Revelation 20: 11-15. Hendricksen comments on this passage, "And so, the final judgment**

has again arrived.” He contends that these verses constitute actual events at the end of *one* of Revelation’s *seven* cycles “from the first to the second coming of Christ.”

- c. Still others apply the passage not to judgment at the end of the world but to God’s ongoing “harvesting” and “gathering the vintage” of the earth until the final judgment takes place. This description is, therefore, symbolic rather than literal as it stresses the power of the Lord to accomplish His purposes despite the opposition of Satan and his angels to heaven’s eternal plan. Summers depicts it as “judgment as an instrument of defeat for the forces of evil.”
2. The last position seems most likely. The chapters that follow are filled with narratives about rewards and punishments that must occur before time completely runs out for the world. This indicates that “the harvest” and the “gathering of the vintage” will continue during the years between John’s reception of Revelation and the final judgment.
- B. The “harvest” of the righteous on the earth. 14:14-16.
1. One *like* the Son of Man appeared to John’s sight.
 - a. This was the Son of Man, the same Jesus who also appeared “like the Son of Man” in the first chapter of this book (1:13). The Savior still bore the image of humanity with which He had ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9,10).
 - b. Daniel long before had described the Christ as “*One* like the Son of Man” to whom all authority had been given over “all peoples, nations, and languages” (Dan. 7:13,14).
 2. Jesus sat on a white cloud.
 - a. Clouds were often associated with deity in the Scriptures:
 - (1) A pillar of cloud guided Israel through the wilderness (Exo. 14:19);
 - (2) The Lord descended in a cloud on Mt. Sinai (Exo. 34:5);
 - (3) God appeared in a cloud over the mercy seat of the tabernacle (Lev. 16:2);
 - (4) The Father endorsed the Son from a bright cloud (Matt, 17:5);
 - (5) Jesus ascended into heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9);
 - (6) The Son of Man will return with the clouds (Mark 14:62; Rev. 1:7).
 - b. “White” is symbolic of purity and righteousness (Mark 16:5; Acts 1:10; Rev. 6:11). The Lord’s judgment would be righteous in every way.
 3. A golden crown [*stephanos*--victory crown] was on His head. He had overcome every attack of His foes and would execute His judgment despite their opposition to His divine purposes.
 4. Ominously, the Son of Man held a sharp sickle in His hand. The sickle, or pruning hook, was a tool familiar to ancient peoples in the harvesting of grains from the fields and in the gathering of grapes from the vineyards. Obviously, Christ is ready to pursue the task of assigning rewards and punishments to those who were destined for one or the other.

5. “Another” angel [in addition to those already mentioned] came out of the temple.
 - a. The “temple” evidently signified the place where God dwells.
 - b. The angel came directly from God with His instructions for the Son of Man.
 - c. “The time has come to reap the harvest of the earth.”
 - (1) This harvesting probably symbolized the continuing protection of God’s righteous saints through their various approaching trials from Rome and other sources.
 - (2) The faithful were “ripe,” i.e., proving their faithfulness by perseverance. Their rescue from Satan’s devices would be both appropriate and timely.
 6. The harvesting was accomplished by the Son as directed by the Father.
 - a. The promise previously given, “Be faithful until [unto] death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10), was still in effect for the salvation of the saints.
 - b. “The earth was reaped” suggests the inclusiveness of the Lord’s care for His people during persecutions. All of them [“the earth”] without exception were to be delivered from the evil designs of the devil to cause their defection.
- C. The “gathering” of the unrighteous on the earth. 14:17-20.
1. Angels five and six of this chapter make their appearance, number five coming out of the temple and carrying a sharp sickle. Like the fourth angel, he apparently came armed with a commission straight from the Lord. His task, it turns out, was to execute God’s judgment on wicked unbelievers who had chosen to reject the everlasting gospel preached by angel number one.
 2. That task was disclosed when still another angel [number seven] came from the altar of burnt offering under which martyred disciples were seen earlier (6:9). This was an altar of fire on which sacrifices to the Lord were made regularly as a means of declaring the greatness and supremacy of God. Old Testament worshipers sacrificed animals, but now it would be human souls offered symbolically to proclaim the awesomeness of the same Almighty Ruler of the universe.
 3. Angel number seven had “power” [control] over the “altar fire” which would consume the earth’s unruly. He would direct the actions of angel number six to use his sickle for the destruction planned for persecutors of the faithful.
 4. The wicked also were “fully ripe” for retribution. Their evil deeds against Christians were ceaseless, and consequent suffering for their sins would be ceaseless too.
 5. Some suggest that the “vine” represents governments or groups dedicated to oppressing the saints and the “grapes” symbolize the individuals within those organizations.
 6. This series of events constituted a judgment distinct from the saving harvest of righteous people described in the previous verses. The unrighteous who were gathered, the “vine” or “vintage” of the earth, were forthwith thrown into the

- Lord's great winepress, where His wrath, incurred by their wickedness, crushed the blood [life] from them.
7. The wicked souls were "trampled" outside the city, where winepresses normally were situated. The "city," some believe, was representative of the church, which is the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 10:22). Of course, heaven's retribution is always directed toward those outside the church.
 8. So complete and so intense was the Lord's "payback" for the transgressions of earthdwellers, their blood [life] flowed in great abundance from the winepress of wrath. John describes the river [or lake] of blood in mind-boggling terms. The blood of the wicked rose around the winepress to the depth of horses' bridles for a distance of sixteen hundred furlongs, some two hundred miles!
- D. There is a stark difference between the Lord's "harvest" of the good and His "gathering" of the bad.
1. The two events paint in vivid pictures the "goodness and severity" of our God (Rom. 11:22). His grace is abundant to save His chosen people, but He will judge without mercy those who refuse to choose Him as their Savior.
 2. Persecuted Christians who would face the bad times of forty-two months [twelve hundred and sixty days or three and one-half years] of trouble and trial could rest assured that they would not be forgotten or forsaken by a God who had always promised, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19).
 3. While the events portrayed in this chapter obviously are to be interpreted as symbols, they nevertheless provide both warm reassurances to the righteous and harsh warnings to unbelievers about literal things that are to come in God's treatment of each group of people in the final judgment of the world.

- 1. Where did we meet the 144,000 earlier in Revelation? How had these been “sealed”? (1)**
- 2. What unique ability did these 144,000 possess? (3)**
- 3. What characteristics of the 144,000 are listed? (4,5)**
- 4. What actions did the “everlasting gospel” prescribe for avoiding the destruction foretold for Babylon? (6,7)**
- 5. Why would Babylon be destroyed? (8)**
- 6. Who would share in Babylon’s punishment? What would that punishment be? (9-11)**
- 7. Who were called “saints”? What were they promised and on what terms? (12,13)**
- 8. Who was sitting on a white cloud? How is His description similar to that in chapter one? Chapter six? How is it different? (1:13-16; 6:2; 14:14-16)**
- 9. What emphasis is suggested by each description [above]?**
- 10. Who are the four beings who participate in the “harvest of the earth”? (14, 15, 17,18)**
- 11. Describe the process by which the earth was reaped. (16-20)**

Lesson Fifteen: Chapter 15:1-8

A Great and Marvelous Sign

Back in chapter *six*, John saw in his vision a sacrificial altar and under it the souls of righteous martyrs who had been slain “for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (6:10). These saints cried out for vengeance, “How long, O Lord...until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10). They were told to “rest a little while longer” until the persecutions had run their course.

In chapter *ten*, God’s angel swore that retribution would be delayed no longer, but when the seventh trumpet sounded, the Lord’s mystery would “be finished” (10:6,7). John witnessed the fulfillment of that oath at the close of chapter *fourteen* when, in symbolic language, the apostle recounts the treading of earth’s “grapes” in God’s great winepress of wrath and eternal justice (14:17-20).

Chapter *fifteen* is intended to remind Christians about God’s power to execute His vows. Although His payback has seemed long in coming, it has always been certain to occur. Now, the time has come, and the bowls will be poured out to settle the score throughout eternity against all the persecutors of the faithful.

The Text

Preliminary Observation:

The careful student of Revelation will notice a distinct pattern followed in the unfolding of John’s vision. Although uninspired scholarly groupings, outlines, and other such distinctions that are applied to the inspired Biblical text must be handled with caution, such things sometimes can help us to understand otherwise difficult texts. It is interesting to note that much of Revelation can be divided into three categories: (1) Warnings, (2) Interludes of Encouragement, and (3) Action(s) Taken. This pattern [or cycle] can be seen in numerous places in the book. While some scholars believe that these cycles are merely repetitions of the same occurrences, others hold that only the *arrangement* of the material is the same; the *incidents* described are different from one another.

To this point in John’s narrative, we can detect at least *three* cycles of the categories mentioned above:

<u>Cycle</u>	<u>Warning</u>	<u>Interlude</u>	<u>Action</u>
1.	Six Seals--6:12-17	Saints Sealed--7:1-17	Seventh Seal-- 8:1-9:12
2.	Little Book--10:8-11:14	Saints Rewarded--11:15-18	Temple Opened--11:19
3.	War in Heaven--12:7-13:18	Patience of Saints--14:1-15:4	Temple Opened--15:5-16:21

In the examples above, one may detect a distinct pattern. First: a warning is given about ominous events to come. Second: encouragement is given to allay the concerns of the saints about those events. Third: follow-up action against the wicked is described, which gives validity to God's warnings and promises. Other examples of this pattern of events will be noted later.

I. Another sign in heaven. 15:1,2.

- A. This the *third* sight which John described as a "sign" or "wonder" [KJV].
1. He saw a "great sign" of a beautiful woman (12:1).
 2. He saw "another sign" of a fiery red dragon (12:3).
 3. This sign (15:1f.) was both "great and marvelous."
- B. A "sign" [*semeion*-- "a sign, mark, indication, token"] was used to "distinguish a person or thing from others" [W.E. Vine]. Perhaps John wished to give special attention to the significance of the events represented in the three signs. While many other elements of his vision were vital to the revelation of God's plan for dealing with good and evil throughout eternity, these three [above] are especially important:
1. The "sign" of the beautiful woman introduces us to the saved people of God;
 2. The "sign" of the dragon shows us the great enemy of the saved, Satan;
 3. The "sign" of the angels and their bowls of wrath reveals the final outcome of the intense and ongoing struggle between truth and error in the world.
- C. The elements of this "great and marvelous" sign.
1. Seven angels.
 - a. We cannot determine whether these were some of the numerous angels already taking part in John's vision or angels appearing for the first time.
 - b. Remember, *seven* is an apocalyptic number signifying completeness. Hence, the *seven* angels employed were fully capable of performing the monumental task of delivering final retribution to the enemies of God's people. Their *seven* bowls of wrath were fully adequate to address the totality of earth's evil treatment of the Lord's church.
 2. Seven "last" [omitted in ASV and RSV] plagues.
 - a. When the bowls of wrath are emptied of their contents, similarities between these plagues and those inflicted upon Egypt during Moses' time will become evident.
 - b. Also, these plagues are said to "complete" [NKJV; Conf.], "fill up" [KJV], "finish" [ASV], "end" [RSV] the wrath of God. These terms all reflect both the extent and the terrible nature of the actions to be taken by God against His foes from the time of John's vision until the final scene of judgment described in chapter twenty.
 3. Something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. 15:2.
 - a. A sea of glass was located before God's throne in chapter four (4:6). There,

- heavenly creatures were *completely separated* from Jehovah by that sea.
- b. Here, victorious saints stand *on* the sea, indicating perhaps that they have *now drawn nearer* to the Almighty, although they are still *somewhat separated* from Him.
 - c. Later, John will declare that after the last judgment of the world there will be “no sea” in the new world (Rev. 21:1), suggesting that there will be *complete fellowship in God’s presence* after every battle has been won by the saved.
 - d. The fire mingled with the glass of the sea suggests the fiery trials by which the early disciples proved their right to draw nearer to the likeness and to the presence of their Savior. [See Zech. 13:9; 1Pe. 1:7.]
 - e. The credentials of these righteous persons included victories over their persecutors who had tried to force them to worship the image of the beast and to wear its mark and its name (13:11-18).
 - f. Each overcomer was prepared to praise his Great Benefactor both with song and with harp. These were “harps of God” of unknown nature. The use of these *symbolic* instruments with which the *heavenly* saints apparently accompanied their song does not authorize the use of *literal* instruments in church worship to accompany the songs of *earthly* saints. If so, it would follow that only 144,000 literal virgins will ever be qualified to sing heaven’s “new song” of salvation (Rev. 14:1-5).

II. The saints sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. 15:3,4.

- A. Both songs sung by these heavenly saints were obviously hymns of praise to honor God’s unmatched power over His enemies and His unquestioned mercy and grace toward His own people:
 1. His works were great and marvelous; His ways were just and true;
 2. His Person was worthy of fear; His name was deserving of glory;
 3. His holiness had inspired the worship of all nations;
 4. His judgments had always proved to be sure and uncontested.
- B. Such a song was sung by Israel under Moses’s guidance when the nation had been delivered from Egypt’s strong hand of bondage (Exo. 15:1-19). Although the words of Moses’ song vary somewhat from those in this Revelation hymn, their themes are very similar to each other. “Moses’ song” paid tribute to the same qualities of Jehovah that are featured in the heavenly song of John’s vision:
 1. His works were great and marvelous, just and true (Exo. 15:6,7);
 2. His Person was worthy of fear, His name deserving of glory (Exo. 15:11);
 3. His holy might had inspired the respect of all nations (Exo. 15:14,15);
 4. His judgments had always proved to be sure and uncontested (Exo. 15:16).
- C. Another such song in which Moses promoted the magnificence of Jehovah and His beneficent dealings with Israel is found in Deuteronomy 32:1-43.

- D. This “new song” was also sung by the 144,000 redeemed ones [and perhaps others] in the interlude of encouragement in chapter fourteen (14:1-1-5).
- E. The great heavenly chorus also sang the song of the Lamb. This appears to be a different song from the song of Moses, but it is also very similar in some ways. This song also rings with praises to Jehovah for the marvelous power and grace He shows to His people, but this song also declares that His watchcare is now accomplished through the slain Lamb of God (Rev. 5:6) rather than through Moses, the servant of God (vs. 3).
- F. The “song of [about] the Lamb” had previously been sung by the creatures and elders as a “new song” in Rev. 5:9. There they confessed that salvation had been brought to the world by the blood of Jesus. By His sacrifice the saints have become kings and priests to Jehovah, and by the Lamb they shall “reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9,10).
- G. A vast multitude of worshipers joined in the “song of the Lamb” in Rev. 5:11-13 as heaven and earth paid tribute to God’s Son for His participation in the Father’s eternal plan to redeem lost humanity.
 - 1. The Lamb was *worthy* to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing.
 - 2. The Lamb was *worthy* to share such recognition with His Father forever and ever!

III. The temple of the tabernacle was opened in heaven. 15:5,6.

- A. The temple of God had been opened in chapter eleven, verse nineteen. The ark of God’s *covenant* of faithfulness and blessings had been revealed to emphasize the cause-and-effect relationship between disobedience to God and becoming the object of His great wrath. Upon the opening of the temple, rebellious people were visited with multiple signs of impending destruction from the hand of heaven.
- B. Now, the temple is opened again in this section of Revelation to stress the fact that previous angry demonstrations against the wicked (11:19) were not merely occurrences resulting from natural laws of the earth. Instead, they were dispensed at the hands of the Almighty’s angels of retribution against oppressive and unrepentant foes of the Lord’s people. At the opening of heaven’s doors, these seven agents of holy vengeance are loosed to do their deadly work in the world. This is apparently the same work as represented by the lightning, thundering, noise, hail, and earthquake disclosed earlier in 11:19.
- C. These angels were dressed in clothing appropriate both to their spiritual nature and to their holy mission.
 - 1. They wore “pure bright linen” [NKJV; RSV]; “pure and white linen” [KJV]; “clean white linen” [Conf.]; “precious stone” [ASV]. Although the high priest of

Israel came from the most holy place of the temple wearing twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes, the “white linen” commonly worn by angels engaged in various tasks throughout the Bible seems more appropriate to the dress of angels about to embark on a solemn and earthshaking mission of death and destruction against the persecutors of Christians.

2. They also had their chests girded with golden bands [girdles]. This feature will possibly remind us of the “breastplate of righteousness” or the “breastplate of faith and love” which every soldier of Christ is urged to wear in his battle against the forces of evil in this world (Eph. 6:14; 1Thes. 5:8). Golden girdles perhaps suggest that these heavenly beings enjoy a *high level* of spirituality that humanity, even at its best, is unable to attain (Heb. 2:7).

IV. Seven bowls of God’s wrath were given to the seven angels of wrath. 15:7,8.

A. A living creature (4:6f.) [we are not told which one of the four creatures] gave seven golden bowls of God’s wrath to the seven angels. “Gold” identifies the bowls with *divine* purposes. “Seven” customarily symbolizes completeness and finality. The Lord’s plan to dispense appropriate retribution to the wicked will now be carried out successfully.

1. This chapter began with the promise that seven “last” plagues would “complete” the Lord’s purpose to make rebellious people pay for their sins. The fulfillment of that purpose is now about to be realized.
2. The saints under the altar in chapter six (6:9-11) had cried out for a final reckoning against their oppressors. They were told to “rest a little while longer” for their vengeance to be executed. Now, the time for waiting is over. God is ready to act in their behalf. He lives “forever and ever” and has not forgotten His promise to His disciples, even though time has passed slowly for them. It is hard sometimes to remember that a “thousand years” is only as “one day” to the Lord (2Pet. 3:8).

B. Smoke filled the temple to signify the glory and power of God.

1. Smoke was often associated with the presence of God [e.g., Isa. 6:4; Joel 2:30].
2. Smoke sometimes was a means of keeping men *from* God’s presence (Exo. 19:18).
3. The smoke of this symbolic picture perhaps conveys the idea that God’s patience had run out for the unrighteous of earth. Approaching Him for intercession was no longer available. Ample WARNING had been given to cause the wicked to repent of their sins of persecution and dissolute living. The time for ACTION had arrived....So, let the plagues now be poured out from the golden bowls of wrath!

V. Final thoughts about this chapter.

A. This chapter clearly serves as a prelude to the pouring out of the great wrath of God

upon wicked men in the world. The vengeance of heaven will now be felt keenly by unrepentant sinners in chapter sixteen as the bowls are emptied of their plagues.

- B. Many commentators view these chapters [fifteen and sixteen] as involving punishment upon wicked men throughout the earth and throughout time. They also suggest that there is a special emphasis in the symbolic events of chapters 12:1-20:10 on God's retribution against Rome's civil and religious sins against His church. Emphasis is also given to the ultimate victory of *all* faithful saints over the tribulations suffered in living the Christian life. Thus, the total picture is bigger than Rome, although Rome typifies all the wrongs committed against God's plan and Christ's cause all time past until the great and awesome day of final judgment.**
- C. Some writers are convinced that the basic message of Revelation discloses warnings and promises related to the Lord's dismantling of the Jewish nation because of its long-standing and inexcusable disobedience to His will. Such scholars apply these chapters primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Roman soldiers. Consequently, they take a more limited approach to the events of the chapters referenced above. For instance, Ogden says:**

What John observes in the Apocalypse is God preparing to pour out His wrath upon the nation of Israel to the fullest and for the final time. The fullness of God's wrath was poured out in 70 A.D. when the nation of Israel as it had existed under God was destroyed never to exist again...These angels, then, represent the messengers of wrath sent forth by our High Priest to pour forth the full and final wrath of God upon the nation of Israel unto the end.

- 1. Why were the seven plagues called the “last”? (1)**

- 2. How is the sea described? (2)**

- 3. Over what had the saints been victorious? (3)**

- 4. Why is this song the “song of Moses” [see Exodus 15] and “of the Lamb”? (3,4)
[See Hebrews 2:9; 14-16.]**

- 5. What was given to the seven angels to use against the wicked on earth? (7)**

- 6. What happened in the temple in heaven that signified impending punishment for the wicked? (8)**

- 7. When would the focus again be on God’s mercy rather than on His wrath? (8)**

Lesson Sixteen: Chapter 16:1-21

Seven Bowls of Wrath

The book of Revelation appears to be divided into two distinct parts. The first part, consisting of chapters 1-11, reveals to first-century churches the massive struggle against their enemies that soon would engulf them. In fact, their problems seem already to have begun in some places. The emphasis in these chapters is on the events forecast to occur. Persecutors of the saints would be punished for their persecutions, and the saints, while subjected to *physical* harm, would be shielded *spiritually* and their eternal salvation would be made secure.

The second section, chapters 12-22, also includes descriptions of the punishments and rewards in store for sinners and saints. However, John's vision here deals more with the reasons for the events it describes. First-century disciples should be aware that their sufferings were neither singular nor personal. Instead, their tribulations were part of a much larger and never-ending conflict between spiritual and eternal forces: God and Satan; good and evil; godliness and ungodliness. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2Tim. 3:12).

TheText:

I. Pouring out the bowls of God's wrath. 16:1.

- A. Several times already John has heard a voice or a loud voice making a proclamation or issuing an order. Now, such a voice comes from the temple [suggesting divine authority], giving directions to the seven angels who had received bowls "full of the wrath of God" in the previous chapter.
- B. The solemn commission to the angels was to pour out the Lord's wrath from the seven bowls.
 1. "Pouring out" perhaps indicates the great amount of wrath the foes of God had heaped up for themselves as they set about to do harm to the divine cause being carried out in the name of Jesus by faithful disciples on earth.
 2. The earth [earthdwellers; persecutors], not the righteous, were to be the targets upon which God's wrath was focused.
- C. Preliminary observations.
 1. There are striking similarities between these bowls of wrath and the trumpets of

warning described under the seventh seal, chapters 8-11. At the same time, there are also significant differences, indicating that the symbols of the trumpets and of the bowls either deal with *different* events [some having similar details] or with the *same* seven plagues [some of which may have additional particulars supplied]. Another possibility is that the *same language and symbols* are used to describe events that actually were *not* the same.

2. A close examination of the trumpets and of the bowls of wrath will disclose:
 - a. Both series involve woes visited on both nature and humanity;
 - b. Both draw from the events of the plagues sent upon Egypt in Moses' time (Exodus 7-11);
 - c. Numerous likenesses exist among the trumpets, bowls, and Egyptian plagues;
 - (1) Inanimate things: Waters [salt and fresh] becoming blood; darkness on the earth; hail, thunder, and lightning; Euphrates river, etc.;
 - (2) Animate things: Sore[s] or boils inflicted on men; swarming locusts; frogs, etc.;
 - d. Likewise, important differences are to be found.
 - (1) Only one-third of groups were affected by the trumpets; complete groups were impacted by the bowls.
 - (2) Men were hurt directly by the first bowl, but they were initially harmed by the fifth trumpet and by the sixth plague.
 - (3) Repentance was available until the seventh trumpet, the sixth bowl, and the tenth Egyptian plague.
3. See the chart on page 160 for more comparisons of trumpets and bowls.

II. Pouring out the first three bowls of wrath. 16:2-4.

A. The first bowl.

1. Wrath was directed toward the earth and those who were earthy in spirit.
 - a. Heaven was the *source* of God's wrath, but earth was its target.
2. Retribution immediately was enacted against God's enemies in the form of "a foul and loathsome sore." The RSV has "sores" and reminds us of the terrible boils that fell upon the Egyptians in the sixth plague.
3. Those who were slaves of the great beast of the sea (Rev. 13:1) and who wore his mark of ownership were the recipients of this first plague. Their errant spiritual commitment to Satan was solely responsible for their hopeless situation.
4. This plague was also aimed at those who worshiped the image of the sea beast [oppressive civil power]. This image had been promoted by the land beast [corrupt religion], and multitudes had fallen victim to its campaign of deceit (Rev. 13:11-15).

B. The second bowl.

1. This plague was directed at the sea. The sea became blood; not warm, life-giving (151)

blood, but the foul-smelling coagulated blood of a dead man. The repulsive condition of the sea water caused the death of every creature living in the sea.

2. Two opinions exist about the “sea.” Some identify it as literal sea waters and suppose that a great calamity will at some point befall all maritime activities and those who depend on the sea for their existence. Others interpret this “sea” as representing the vast hordes of humanity that comprise the history and the activity of the earth (8:8,9). It was from such an unstable “sea” that corrupt societies and their oppressive worldly governments had arisen to fight against the people of God (Rev. 13:1-8). This sea of death accurately reflected the spiritually dead condition of the Roman state at the time of the revelation to John.

C. The *third* bowl.

1. This plague was poured out upon the inland waters. They, too, became blood and their benefit to men was completely erased.
2. Egypt’s waters and streams were polluted, but the people apparently could dig in other places and survive by alternative sources (Exo. 7:24). This bowl of wrath, however, eliminated *all* possibilities of securing life-giving water.
3. This condition of the inland waters could result only in the destruction of all living creatures on the earth, just as the sea had destroyed its inhabitants when the second bowl was poured out.

III. An interlude between the bowls of wrath. 16:5-7.

- A. It is characteristic of Revelation to insert periods of silence or of encouragement to the churches of the Lord between episodes of warnings and punishments intended for the wicked of the earth. Several such interludes have already been encountered [e.g., 7:1-17; 10:1-7; 15:2-4, etc.].
 1. So here, following the terrible pronouncement of “death by agonizing thirst” to all of earth’s nations by the complete pollution of their drinking waters, it was appropriate again to offer comfort to those who might question the severity of such action by a beneficent God.
- B. The Lord’s justice was validated by the angel of the waters.
 1. Barnes alludes to the practice of the Hebrews to attribute the control over the natural elements to angels: “Each element was committed to the jurisdiction of a particular angel.” Thus, the angel who [in their tradition] presided over the waters would be the one most involved in their condition and the one expected to be most likely to object to such drastic treatment by the Almighty.
 2. But such was not the case. Instead, this angel was bold to proclaim:
 - a. The righteousness of the eternal God who had created those waters and who was justified in whatever use He determined to make of them in the execution of His plan for dealing with the good and the bad of earth;

- b. The use of the waters to punish those who had persecuted the saints and the prophets was also entirely justified. They had caused the earth to drink up the blood of the faithful; it was now altogether fair for God to give them blood to drink. "It is their just due."
- C. Another angel added his testimony about the justice of Jehovah in punishing men who had proved themselves worthy of His punishment. He testified, "True and righteous are Your judgments."
 1. This angel spoke from the altar, either the altar of sacrifice from under which weary saints had pleaded for justice (Rev. 6:9-11) or the altar of incense from which the prayers of the persecuted saints had risen to heaven's throne in pursuit of vengeance on their persecutors.
 2. This endorsement of God's fairness is, therefore, far more comprehensive than only involving things concerning the waters of the earth. *Every* judgment of the Father is true and righteous-- without exception!
 3. Jim McGuiggen makes these comments about this precious, unvarying truth:

"And I heard the altar saying, Yea, O Lord..."

Yes, the altar. The altar from which they took the fire and cast it on the earth. It played its part, too. The altar around which the slain had gathered, asking (without vindictiveness) for justice. We hadn't heard from them, so the altar cries out for them! Let this ring out: JUSTICE WILL BE DONE. For all the tears of lonely little boys and girls sitting by themselves in the corner of an orphanage wondering what's gone wrong; for all the hardworking wives who lie senseless beneath the pounding feet and hands of drunken bums; for all the tortured youths who live under the slavery of the drug traffic; for all the exploited and intimidated young girls whose lives are full of shame and disgrace; for all the poor who live under the grinding power of the loan sharks; for all the victims of the Mafia; for all the slandered souls; for all those children who were born in the straw and nurtured in infamy-- for these, there will come a day! Justice will be meted out. The criminals will pay.

If there's a God, there's got to be a judgment day. And in that day, the altar will cry out, YES, Lord! And those Roman thieving generals who stole the modesty of sweet young ladies; for those Roman soldiers who raped and plundered; for those howling mobs who watched our brothers and sisters writhing in torture; for that Nero, for Domitian, Diocletian, Decius and Galerius, and the rest of their tribe-- their day came in history, but a greater day is yet to come when all the robbed, cheated, raped and ravaged, intimidated and hounded-- that day when all the "victims" watch while the cutthroats and villains are placed on trial-- THAT DAY IS YET TO COME! Such has been the treatment of the Family of Jesus Christ, that were there no judgment day, the rocks would cry out-- the altar would continue to cry out!

IV. Pouring out three more bowls of wrath. 16:8-12.

A. The fourth bowl. 16:8,9.

1. This plague was directed toward the sun.

- a. One-third of the sun, moon, and stars were darkened under the warning of the fourth trumpet (8:12). Now, however, rather than being darkened, the sun

- became so intensely hot [and bright?] that it could “scorch men with fire.”
- b. God’s wrath would transform one of man’s greatest benefactors [the “warming sun”] into a lethal weapon of retribution.
 - c. This radical transformation of the sun, from being a blessing to becoming a source of danger and death, was imitative of changes also made by the Lord in man’s relationship to the land, the sea, and the waters. Whereas man’s very existence had always depended on these four natural elements of his world, now each one had suddenly been altered into becoming a dreadful agent for his destruction.
 - d. The Scriptures have sometimes used the sun as the symbol for a great leader or prominent person. Christ is called the “Sun of Righteousness” in Malachi 4:2. Joseph assigned the sun to represent his father Jacob in one of the dreams he related to his brothers (Gen. 37:9,10). Some writers connect the sun of the fourth bowl with some man who would emerge as a strong ruler and who would become the agent by whom terrible treatment would be visited upon society. Some choose one of the Roman emperors to fill that role, while others select later military leaders like Napoleon Bonapart as the “sun” who would scorch men with fire.
 - e. John saw that the power to hurt men was put into play in his vision, and men were horribly burned with “great heat.”
2. This plague had a “reverse effect” on the objects of God’s wrath.
 - a. Its intended purpose was to bring the wicked to repentance.
 - (1) Throughout the gospel age, heaven seeks repentance in the lost (Acts 17:30; 2Pet. 3:9).
 - (2) Gospel terms would prevail at the time of the “sun” plague.
 - (3) For some, goodness leads to repentance (Ro. 2:4); others require severity before changing their ways (Ro. 11:22; Jonah 3:4,10).
 - (4) The possibility of repentance indicates that these bowls of wrath are not part of the Lord’s *final* judgment. Then, “another chance” will be unavailable, and the opportunity to be saved will be past (Matt. 25).
 - b. Even scorching by the sun failed to bring these wicked men to repentance.
 - (1) Instead, they still refused to glorify God for His power and justice.
 - (2) Instead, they blasphemed God’s name, which included:
 - (a) His Person [existence], Nature, and Pre-eminence;
 - (b) His Power to avenge man’s deeds against His law.
- B. The *fifth* bowl. 16:10,11.
1. This plague was directed at the throne of the beast and his kingdom.
 - a. This beast was previously recognized to be one of *two* powerful agents of Satan, corrupt government and false religion. During the time covered by John’s vision, it was first manifested in the civil and military power of the

Roman empire that so often oppressed God's church. [See page 128.] But the same evil spirit of the devil can later be seen in the thrones of other corrupt kingdoms that would seek to hurt Christ's disciples.

- b. When the beast symbolizes the Roman empire, the throne [seat of power] of the beast was primarily the *great city* of Rome. It was headquarters for the forces set to destroy the cause of Jesus throughout the Roman world.
 2. "Darkness" often represents mental ignorance and moral depravity. People who allow such qualities to rule their lives are certain to practice things that will be extremely hurtful to themselves and to others around them (Eph. 4:17-19). In the case of Rome, the darkness of emperor worship and pagan religion so engulfed Roman lifestyles that the kingdom eventually became self-destructing.
 3. A darkness so thick that it could be felt had been inflicted on Egypt as the ninth plague (Exo. 10:21). Even that failed to soften Pharaoh's heart to relent and allow Israel to depart the land. So here also, the consequent "pain" of their ignorance and sin was inadequate to produce repentance in the enemies of the Lord's cause.
 4. As was the result of the fourth bowl, this plague generated man's wrath against God rather than man's repentance toward God (Acts 20:21). Guilty men cursed the Lord and charged Him with responsibility for their suffering, ignoring the obvious truth that their own dissolute lives had caused their pain and their sores.
- C. The *sixth* bowl. 16:12.
1. This bowl was poured out on the great river Euphrates.
 - a. Earlier, John had heard a command for four angels to be released at the Euphrates to carry out a gruesome mission to "kill" a third of mankind (9:14,15).
 - b. In that phase of John's vision, as here, the Euphrates river represented factors and forces that hindered the progress of Rome's eastern enemies in their determination to bring the empire to its knees. Among those foes were the Parthians and other warlike nations.
 - c. The Euphrates was an appropriate symbol for the obstacles confronting the ambitions of Rome's adversaries because of the natural barrier it posed to all travel from east to west toward Rome.
 - d. The river was "dried up" to allow the "way" [access] of eastern powers to the western provinces of the empire and ultimately to Rome itself. Hindrances were to be removed in keeping with the Lord's plan for the empire to be overrun by the pagan peoples from the east.
 - e. Of course, these are symbolic images, not real. The drying up of the Euphrates only *represents* the removal of obstacles to allow waiting armies to join the fight to overthrow Rome, the wicked beast, the great enemy of righteousness.
 - f. The implication here is that God would use forces usually associated with Satan as instruments in his defeat. In this same way He used Assyria and Babylon to

execute His retribution against the two nations of Israel. Insofar as Revelation promotes the Roman empire as the beast from the sea, that is exactly what occurred in the invasions of pagan hordes during the latter days of Rome's vain efforts to hold on to its greatly weakened empire.

- g. Beyond Rome, we can be assured that God continues to use whatever or whoever is necessary to the prosecution of His cause in the world. He controls all of earth's activities and eventualities.

V. Satan's countermeasures promoted by three unclean frogs. 16:13-16.

- A. *Three* strong powers formed a formidable alliance against the armies of truth.
1. The dragon. Satan was in command of these forces of evil. The red dragon had been devoted since the birth of the Savior, and before, to the defeat of heaven's eternal plan to redeem lost mankind (Rev. 12).
 2. The beast. The Roman empire and other godless nations were willing tools of the dragon. This beast from the *sea* (13:1) took his power, his throne, and his great authority directly from the dragon (13:2).
 3. The false prophet. The beast from the *land* was false religion, first centered in pagan religion and later in emperor worship in the empire. It worked diligently to promote the *sea* beast and resorted to whatever trickery and lies were necessary to accomplish its purpose. Many see the *visible* church, as it rushed headlong into full-blown Catholicism, becoming a strong force and joining the evil legions of Rome to make war with Christ and His loyal troops.
- B. Three unclean spirits of demons appeared "out of the mouths" of these mighty foes in the form of frogs [refer to the plague of frogs in Egypt-- Exo. 8:3.]. Their task was to spread falsehoods "out of the mouth" and to perform [pretended] signs by which to persuade as many as possible of the "kings of the earth" to join in their warfare with the Lord and His allies. The time had come to fight the great battle that would forever determine the ultimate victor in the struggle between good and evil that began on earth in the garden of Eden and would continue even to the outcome of this "great day of God Almighty."
- C. We must remember that this is a *symbolic* scene described by John. Nothing is literal; not the frogs, not the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, nor the battle to come. Only the deceit and the falsehoods are *real*, but there is stark reality in the wicked powers represented by the symbols John saw.
- D. One last-ditch effort would end the ongoing spiritual conflict between right and wrong. A concerted effort must be made by the dragon and his cohorts to "rally the troops" to a place called *Armageddon* and once for all settle any dispute over who really controls the eternal destiny of mankind.
- E. Ferrell Jenkins has a good summary of the significance of "Armageddon":

The kings of the whole world gather together to the war of the great day of God in the place called in Hebrew *Har-Magedon*. Literally this word means Mount Magedon

(Megiddo). No such place is named in the Old Testament, but the figure likely is based on Megiddo and its famous battle field. Megiddo overlooked the plain of Esdraelon, strategically located in north central Palestine on the main trunk road between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Here we are presenting a brief survey of important events associated with Megiddo...Joshua and Israelites defeated the king of Megiddo (Josh. 12:21)...Deborah and Barak defeated the kings of Canaan (Jud. 5:19)...King Josiah of Judah was slain in a battle against Pharaoh Necho. Josiah was the first king of Judah to fall in battle and the mourning for him became typical of national grief (Zech 12:11). Thus, Megiddo became a symbol of decisive battle.

- F. This battle of [at] Armageddon is not mentioned again until chapter nineteen, verses 11- 21. Even there, the combat is not described, only the results of the Lord's complete triumph over the dragon and his co-conspirators. Thayer [pg. 73] has a good analysis of John's use of this imagery to forecast this great battle.

VI. An interjection and a reminder to the saints. 16:15.

- A. In the middle of John's narrative about the preparations being made to fight the last great battle between heaven and hell, a solemn reminder is heard directly from the mouth of the Lord.
1. The final conflict would come without further warning to the saints.
 2. Readiness as for a "thief" was essential for those who hoped to survive the mighty struggle.
- B. Watching and keeping one's garments were the components of readiness.
1. Watching [diligence] often is urged upon disciples (1Thes. 5:6; 1Cor. 16:13).
 2. Our wedding garments (Matt. 22:11-14) that signify our allegiance to Jesus must be clean and worn at all times. [See Rev. 3:5.]
- C. Failure to prepare would bring eternal shame to negligent Christians.
1. Spiritual "nakedness" would expose unfaithful disciples to spiritual disaster.
 2. This same warning had been given earlier to the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:18).
 3. Every member of the churches must heed this warning before Armageddon.

VII. Pouring out the last [seventh] bowl. 16:17-21.

- A. The seventh bowl's plague was directed into the air.
1. This is the last of the four elements thought by the ancients to be basic to life on the earth:
 - a. Earth (16:2); water (16:3,4); fire (16:9); air (16:17);
 - b. All of nature could be seen in opposition to the evil designs of Satan.
 2. The "air" was considered by many cultures of Biblical times to be the habitat of evil spirits and the realm from which their wicked purposes originate. Paul utilized this concept when discussing the devil's role in leading humans into sinful behavior: "...in which you also walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

3. A loud voice [vs. 1], apparently from Jehovah, came from the throne in heaven's temple to declare that "It [emptying the bowls of wrath] is done!" This seventh bowl will reveal the last and perhaps the most intense expression of the Lord's great displeasure with the beast's treatment of His people.
 4. Immediately, John witnessed divinely-generated signs that forecast the severe nature of the final retribution about to take place. The noises, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake had been encountered earlier at the conclusion of other warnings and punishments [Rev. 8:5; 11:19]. The difference here is in intensity. The extremity of the earthquake probably reflects the severity of the other phenomena as well.
- B. In *summary* of what was about to be accomplished by this last bowl of wrath, John announced that "great Babylon was *remembered* before God." Of course, God had never forgotten the sins of Babylon against righteous saints, but now He would finally exact a full measure of vengeance for those transgressions.
1. As the unfolding of her retribution began, Babylon, the "great city," was broken into *three* parts, likely indicating the completeness of her destruction ["three" signifies *completeness* numerous times in Scripture].
 2. Details of Babylon's demise will be disclosed in the next two chapters of John's vision.
 3. Along with their evil "mentor," other cities and nations would be brought down to their own unhappy conclusion. Societies so entangled in Roman commerce, religion, and military protection from enemy armies could not expect to survive the removal of their mighty protector and sustainer. Also, they were themselves guilty of many of the same sins against godly people that were bringing down their godless benefactor.
 4. Mountains and islands can be demolished only by the most catastrophic events. However, such a *great earthquake* as would help to execute God's purpose to avenge the atrocities on His saints (vs. 18) could accomplish that outcome, and it would do just that!
 5. Perhaps the symbol of islands and mountains disappearing is intended to stress the contrast between the *vulnerability* of the things upon which the wicked beast had depended for its survival and the *total invulnerability* of the things that gave support to the Lord's church. Paul declared that ours is a "kingdom which *cannot* be shaken" (Heb. 12:28). The kingdom of the beast, on the other hand, not only would be *shaken* but also totally *destroyed*! No longer could it provide any refuge for the nations that had chosen to participate in the sinful treatment of Christians.
 6. In Israel's distant past, hail had been an instrument of God's judgment on Egypt (Exo. 9:19). Now, "*great hail*" of a hundredweight [talent] would judge the sins of spiritual Babylon. Sadly, men blasphemed and blamed God, not themselves.

More Voices of the Scholars

The symbols employed by John in his vision are likely to be comprehended well enough to form clear pictures in our minds of the events disclosed in the revelation. What may be the meaning of those symbols, and thus the message intended in the book, may prove to be much more perplexing. Explanations offered by commentators often can assist us in trying to understand difficult passages.

Understandably, explanations from various writers about Revelation will differ from one another. Sometimes, these differences are significant. Scholars write out of their own perspectives of the book, which accounts for wide variations in their explanations. Still, it is interesting and often helpful to examine what they have to say. This chapter provides fertile soil for great diversity about the message of the seven bowls of God's wrath.

Ray Summers identifies a general lesson intended for the comfort of struggling disciples:

These scenes do not compose a scene of connected events for the purpose of satisfying our curiosity about the future. All of us possess that curiosity; some control it better than others. These visions are designed to set forth the promise of the ultimate triumph of righteousness over all the evil forces which oppose it. This was the message to the Christians of Asia Minor about A.D. 95. It assured them of the certain victory of Christianity over Rome. In a similar way today it assures us of the certain triumph of Christ's cause over the cause of evil in every age.

Homer Hailey is somewhat more specific in his view:

These plagues did not introduce the final judgment; for after hail had killed whom it killed, there were those left who blasphemed God. The severest of divine judgments had now been poured out upon wicked and ungodly men, touching all phases and realms of Roman society and power. Only the final judgment, which would bring all men, nations, and wickedness to a total end, could surpass in intensity and finality judgments such as these.

Arthur Ogden applies the symbolism of the bowls to events related to the Lord's final punishment of Israel, accomplished in the Roman-Jewish wars and in the destruction of their chief city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70:

The seven angels go forth and, like the seven trumpeting angels, they affect the same things. It appears, however, that the bowls of wrath are broader in scope and more generic in application. The trumpeting angels showed the development of the conflict between the Jews and the Romans primarily as it related to the Jews, but the bowls of wrath appear to show the development of the conflict as it related to the Romans...

Again, we have observed the development of the Roman-Jewish War as ordered and directed by the throne of God as vengeance upon the nation of Israel. Satan did not so conceive it, Rome could not so perceive it, and paganism would never believe it, but their proposed fight against God was in reality used by God as His own instrument of judgment. God served His own purposes while defeating Satan and his helpers. How glorious and marvelous are His ways.

Many commentators attempt to associate the specific symbols of the bowls of wrath with

particular historical events. Albert Barnes, John Hinds, and B.W. Johnson all follow this path. They see the distinct fulfillment of events surrounding the bowls in certain well-documented occurrences in the historical record:

Barnes offers a lengthy exposition of the connection of the bowls with events surrounding the French revolution, the exploits of Napoleon Bonapart, and attacks on the Papacy:

The scenes which occurred in the times of the French revolution were such as would be properly symbolized by the pouring out of the first, the second, the third, and the fourth vials...

The effect of this [French Revolution--RG] was to affect the Papacy-- a blow, in fact, aimed at that power. Of course, all the infidelity and atheism of the French nation, before so strongly Papal, went just so far in weakening the power of the Papacy; and in the ultimate result it will perhaps yet be found that the horrid outbreaks in the French revolution were the first in the series of providential events that will result in the entire overthrow of that Antichristian power. At all events, it will be admitted, I think, that on the supposition that it was *intended* that this should be descriptive of the scenes that occurred in Europe at the close of the last century, no more expressive symbol could have been chosen than has been employed in the pouring out of this first vial of wrath...

It seems to me that there can be no hesitation in applying this [the first bowl--RG] to the direct attacks on the Papal power and on the pope himself, as one of the consequences of the French Revolution, and to the calamities that were thus brought upon the Papal States.

Hinds cites the assault on Papal influence by the French emperor Bonapart:

That events transpired during the French Revolution and soon after it that weakened the power of Rome and strengthened Protestantism is too well known to need reciting...

The Pope saved himself [from Napoleon--RG] with a payment of some thirty million francs, and surrendered a hundred of the finest paintings and statues in the Vatican. But he lost his temporal power, was taken away as a prisoner, and soon thereafter died. In 1804 Pope Pius VII was summoned to Paris to crown Napoleon as emperor...

Johnson also subscribes to the connection between the bowls of wrath and the violence involved in the French Revolution:

As, under the seven seals, Old Pagan Rome was judged and brought to an end; as, under the seven trumpets, the Roman Empire under its new form is judged and its destruction symbolized; so, under the seven vials, we have symbolized a series of judgments which weaken and destroy Papal Rome; and with the seventh vial, the Great City, the type of the Apostate Church, falls...

For many centuries France was the stoutest and staunchest of the supporters of the Romish Church. It was Charlemagne, the emperor of France, who bestowed the temporal power upon the Popes. It was to Avignon in France that, at one time, the Papacy was transferred for seventy years. The ruler of France was long styled "the eldest son of the Church..."

The first vial, the breaking forth of grievous, painful, malignant ulcers, most fitly represents the breaking out of the French Revolution, its awful excesses, and the irreparable injury done to the great spiritual despotism by the events of which it was the beginning and the cause.

William Hendricksen, contrary to several clear facts, supposes that the bowls are related to the last judgment. He believes that this section of the vision ends with a "very vivid description of the terror of the final judgment, the seventh bowl."

Revelation-- Chapter *SIXTEEN*

CHART-- TRUMPETS AND BOWLS

CHAPTERS 6-11: MORTAL CONFLICT

CHAPTERS 14-16: SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

Seven Seals of Human Destiny

Seven Angels [Seals] of Heavenly Purpose

Seal 1: White Horse [Gospel proclaimed].... 6:1,2

[Seal] 1: Gospel preached..... 14:6,7

Seal 2: Red Horse [Persecution follows].... 6:3,4

[Seal] 2: Roman force conquers..... 14:8

Seal 3: Black Horse [Economic hardship]... 6:5,6

[Seal] 3: Economic hardship..... 14:9,10

Seal 4: Pale Horse [Death and suffering].... 6:7,8

[Seal] 4: Torment of Idolaters..... 14:11

**Seal 5: Cry of Martyrs [Retribution
promised]..... 6:9-11**

**[Seal] 5: Patience of Saints
[Protection promised]..... 14:12,13**

**Seal 6: Retribution begins
[Final warnings]..... 6:12-17**

**[Seal] 6: Retribution begins
[Vintage of the earth]..... 14:17-20**

INTERLUDE-- Sealing of Saints..... 7:1-17

INTERLUDE-- Safety of Saints 15:1-4

**Seal 7: Seven Trumpets to Validate
God's Warnings..... 8:1-6
[Preparation for Retribution]**

**[Seal] 7: Seven Bowls of Wrath to
Execute God's Purpose..... 15:5-8
[Preparation for Retribution]**

Trumpet 1: Hail, Fire, Blood on Earth..... 8:7

Bowl 1: Sore(s) on Idolaters..... 16:2

Trumpet 2: Sea became Blood..... 8:8,9

Bowl 2: Sea became Blood..... 16:3

Trumpet 3: Waters became Bitter..... 8:10,11

Bowl 3: Waters became Blood..... 16:4

Trumpet 4: Sun, Moon, Stars Darkened..... 8:12

Bowl 4: Wicked Scorched by Sun..... 16:8,9

**Trumpet 5: Smoke and Locusts..... 9:3-11
[First Woe]**

Bowl 5: Devil's Kingdom Dark..... 16:10,11

**Trumpet 6: Horsemen from East..... 9:16-21
[Second Woe]**

**Bowl 6: Kings from East;..... 16:12-14
Three Demons/Frogs**

**INTERLUDE-- Continuing Christ's
Work..... 10:1-11:14**

**INTERLUDE-- Faithful Service
Blessed..... 16:15**

**Trumpet 7: Five Expressions of Wrath;
Rome's Ultimate Fall..... 11:15-19
[Third Woe]**

**Bowl 7: Five Expressions of Wrath;
Rome's Ultimate Fall..... 16:16-21**

- 1. What took place when the first bowl of wrath was poured out? (2)**
- 2. What occurred when the second bowl was poured out? (3)**
- 3. The pouring out of the third bowl caused what to happen? (4)**
- 4. How had God dealt justly with the wicked on earth? (5-7)**
- 5. What did men do and not do when the fourth bowl was poured out? (8,9)**
- 6. Was the impact of the fifth bowl similar to that of the fourth? How? (10,11)**
- 7. For what did the sixth bowl prepare the earth? (12,14)**
- 8. What service did the spirits of the demons [frogs] perform? (13,14)**
- 9. What grave warning is inserted into the vision? For whom is it intended? (15)**
- 10. At what place were the forces of evil to gather? (16)**
- 11. What signs and events followed the pouring out of the seventh bowl? (17,18,20,21)**
- 12. How did God “remember great Babylon”? (19)**

Lesson Seventeen: Chapter 17:1-18

A Marriage Made in Hell

In the very first few verses of Revelation, John reveals the charge that accompanied his vision. He had been told to relay the Lord's message to God's servants and to apprise them of a promise and a warning. The promise was encouraging: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it" (1:3a). The warning was urgent: "For the time is near" (1:3b). Whatever adjustments were needed must be made quickly, for this revelation concerned "things which must shortly take place" (1:1).

The Lord had many things to tell the churches, but everything was centered on just two themes: (1) Regardless of how difficult things in the world might become in future days, God would preserve His *children* and their ultimate salvation in heaven; (2) In spite of the strength and perseverance of their *foes*, Jehovah would in due time take vengeance on all of them and consign them to an eternal torment for their sins. What a comfort these two disclosures must have been to struggling disciples and to churches of John's day.

Revelation's messages, for the most part, were conveyed in *apocalyptic* language to protect the saints from retaliation by those whose doom was pronounced in the messages. Perhaps it was easier for first-century Christians to understand the meanings of John's symbolic figures than for today's students of the book. Certain principles of apocalyptic literature must be remembered if our study is to be profitable:

- (1) The messages of apocalyptic writing are veiled in a deliberate attempt to close their meaning to those for whom the messages are not intended;
- (2) Symbolic language is employed, wherein many things are made to *represent* other things. The symbols enhance understanding for the "in" group and hinder others from grasping the apocalyptic message;
- (3) Events and persons often are viewed from diverse perspectives, and different symbols may be used to represent the *same* event or person whose qualities are emphasized by this diversity;
- (4) Various elements may be utilized in apocalyptic literature to produce a certain effect or to convey a central message. In Revelation, for example, such things as warnings, reassurances, extreme symbolic actions, songs and poems expressing strong emotions, and sweeping declarations of finality all convey the impressions of encouragement for believers and doom and despair for unbelievers.

This chapter [17] is replete with symbols that will either enhance our understanding of Revelation's message or add to our confusion about what this book says to us.

Previously, John was introduced to the enemies of the Lord's cause on earth: the red dragon (12:3f.); the beasts from the sea and from the land (13:1f.); and the "great city" Babylon which had seduced all nations through her lust and deceit (14:8). In chapter 16, God's bowls of wrath were poured out upon the wicked, and His retribution culminated in the final pronouncement against Babylon when she was "remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (16:19).

Chapters 17 and 18 will now deal with the *details* of Babylon's fall. First, we will see the vision of the city's decadence; then, God's just vengeance on the evil woman/city.

The Text

I. A welcome invitation. 17:1,2.

- A. One of the seven angels who had poured out bowls of wrath upon the wicked is reported to "talk with" John. Some think this indicates that John and the angel had a substantial conversation. However, most versions say the angel only "spoke" [ASV] or "said" [RSV] that John should "Come..."
- B. The apostle must have been much intrigued at the angel's invitation: "Come and see [the details] of how Babylon will be destroyed."
 1. He probably was especially attracted to the angel's terminology in describing the city. She was a "great harlot," and she "sat on many waters."
 2. It seems significant that Babylon is called a "harlot" and not an "adulteress" in John's references to her:
 - a. Three times she is called a "harlot" [vs. 1, 15, 16] and once the "mother of harlots" [vs. 5];
 - b. Her sin is labeled "fornication" rather than "adultery" [vs. 2 (twice), 4].
 3. Some commentators magnify Babylon's sin because, they say, *Israel* was "married to God" and was unfaithful to her vows to Him.
 - a. It is true that Old Testament Israel was characterized as God's figurative bride in their holy relationship (Isa. 49:18; 62:5; Jer. 2:32).
 - b. Also true is the fact that Israel was often guilty of spiritual adultery when she went after other gods instead of Jehovah (Jer. 3:8,9; Ezek. 23:37).
 - c. It is contended that Babylon, within this context, represents Jerusalem which was destroyed along with the nation of Israel in A.D. 70 as punishment for her repeated spiritual infidelities.
 4. On the other hand, if there is a deliberate distinction in John's vision between "harlot" and "adulteress" and between "fornication" and "adultery," attention would necessarily be transferred from Jerusalem to Rome, a city never "married" to the Lord in any way.

- C. Also impressive was the **justice** of Jehovah's vengeance on Babylon.
1. She had enticed the kings of the earth to commit fornication with her.
 - a. Babylon's fornication consisted of *unlawful* indulgence in pagan religions [including emperor worship] and in lustful lifestyles. No nation or individual has any *lawful* right to be devoted to any god but Jehovah God.
 - b. Other kingdoms had also engaged in spiritual fornication when they sought Babylon's favor by corrupting their own moral standards and perverting their own religious practices to mimic those of the "great harlot."
 2. The earth had become "drunk" [totally insensitive] to God's expectations for human behavior. The harlot's "wine" [prospects of national prosperity and prestige] had blinded its inhabitants to their responsibilities of social and religious integrity. Selfish ambition had become the benchmark of their conduct.
 3. One who was exerting such a widespread and wicked influence over others must be made to account for her hurtful conduct, and the things that had made her attractive must be exposed as empty and spiritually destructive. The great harlot must be terminated, not just reprimanded.

II. John's wilderness vision of the harlot and the beast. 17:3-6.

- A. The images he would "see" were *spiritual*, not *literal*.
1. He was carried "in" the Spirit [not "by" the Spirit] by the angel.
 2. Other references stress the spiritual nature of this experience:
 - a. John was "in the Spirit" when he first received the revelation (Rev. 1:10);
 - b. He was "in the Spirit" as he viewed the throne scene (Rev. 4:2).
- B. He was carried "in the Spirit" into a "wilderness."
- a. The basic qualities of a wilderness are remoteness and emptiness.
 - b. A wilderness could serve many purposes.
 - (1) The beautiful woman [God's people/church] had received protection from harm in a wilderness (Rev. 12:6).
 - (2) Jesus and John the Baptist demonstrated that a wilderness was a good place in which to focus on important matters (Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:3,4).
 - (3) Israel was sent into a wilderness as punishment for sin (Nu. 14:32-34).
 - c. This was not the *same* wilderness, as some suppose, into which the beautiful woman had fled earlier. This was "a" [not "the"] wilderness.
- C. John "saw" the vision of a woman and a scarlet beast.
1. The woman was sitting on [was supported by] the beast.
 - a. The *two* were *one* in purpose, plans, and tactics.
 - b. They were "married" [joined] in the campaign to destroy Christ and His bride.
 - c. One "marriage" was initiated in hell; the other in heaven.
 2. She also sat on "many waters" (verse 1).
 - a. These are identified as "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (verse 15).

- b. The nations of earth were so completely controlled by the scarlet beast [from the sea-- Rev. 13:1], they willingly supported his purpose to destroy the people of the Lord.
- 3. The scarlet beast had a shocking and fearful appearance.
 - a. He was adorned with [was full of] names that blasphemed holy things. His opposition to righteousness was obvious.
 - b. He displayed *seven* heads and *ten* horns, a positive identification with the sea beast of 13:1.
- 4. The harlot was dressed in purple and scarlet, colors usually associated with royalty. She wore precious stones and pearls, highly valued in Gentile society.
- 5. She also held a golden cup in which one would expect to find something desirable to drink.
 - a. Instead, in the cup were the abominations and filthiness related to her sins.
- 6. Displayed on her forehead was the revelation of her true character.
 - a. Her real nature had been a “mystery” craftily concealed from the nations.
 - b. God’s assessment of her essence was different from what she pretended to be.
 - (1) She presented herself to the nations as “Babylon the Great.”
 - (2) Her only claim to “greatness” was in the extent of her evil influence.
 - aa. She was the “mother” of harlots. In addition to her own shameful harlotry, she had drawn many other nations into similar practices.
 - bb. She also had spawned a multitude of abominable [*bdelugma*-- “an object of disgust”] practices that would bar people from heaven (21:8).
- 7. She was drunk, not with alcohol, which would have been bad enough, but with the blood of saints and martyrs. Murder was added to her list of crimes.
 - a. Her victims have been introduced to us earlier in John’s vision (6:9-11).
 - b. She had violated a fundamental law of God in shedding man’s blood; her own blood must also be shed to balance the scales of justice (Gen. 9:6).

III. Unfolding the mystery of the wedded pair. 17:7.

- A. John could not understand this beast and this woman. He could only “wonder” with great amazement at what he was being shown.
- B. However, the angel offered him a divine explanation of the images he had seen.
 - 1. *Most* of the rest of this chapter will deal with the image of the scarlet beast.
 - 2. *All* of chapter eighteen will focus on the image of Babylon, the great harlot.
- C. Despite the angel’s assistance, the remaining verses of this chapter are considered by most commentators to be *some* of the most difficult to understand in the entire book. Some even characterize them as *the hardest* of all to interpret. Students will find many different explanations for the symbols employed in this passage.

IV. The scarlet beast that had arisen out of the sea. 17:8.

- A. His vitality was marvelous; he was, was not, and then he was again.
1. In whatever way these facts may apply to the beast, it is clear that in some way he had once *existed*; he then *ceased* to exist; and finally, he *existed again* in some sense or form.
- B. A “sampling” of numerous interpretations offered about the mystery of the beast:
1. Hendricksen believes that it was of the ancient arrogant, ungodly kingdoms of Old Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greco-Macedonia that John wrote. They were in the distant past; at the time John was writing Revelation, they were not; however, they were soon to exist again in the likeness of the wicked Roman empire and other kingdoms exhibiting the same nature of cruelty and oppression as those that had gone before them;
 2. Ogden is convinced that this history of the beast is played out in Rome’s conquest of Palestine and Jerusalem. The Roman beast had almost subdued the nation of Israel when emperor Nero’s sudden death interrupted the campaign, and the armies then departed the scene. Vespasian, the new emperor, dispatched his son Titus to resume the assault on Jerusalem. “The beast that was disappears for a while and then returns”;
 3. McGuiggan also selects Nero to be a major player in the meaning of the beast’s strange demise and recovery. However, Nero’s *role* is somewhat different. He was an aggressive persecutor of the saints, but when he died, persecution ceased. At the time John wrote [McGuiggan thinks that was during Vespasian’s rule, 69-79 A.D.], the beast [personified in Nero] “was not.” Persecution by Nero [not actually but figuratively in the person of emperor Domitian] would revive with renewed vigor. Nero’s resurrection in the person of Domitian became a widespread superstition in the first century, and as Revelation was being written, many believed that “he is” [actually];
 4. Hailey also endorses the concept that this beast who “was, and is not, and yet is” is possibly the persecuting power of Rome represented in the emperors Nero and Domitian. He is not as adamant about this position as McGuiggan. He says, “In the place of one persecutor, ‘who was, and is not,’ another arises from Satan’s domain to take his place. But whoever he might be, however long he might abide, and whatever evil he might do, he is to go into perdition.”
- C. Regardless of his identity, the beast arose [to power] out of the “bottomless pit” [abyss--ASV] and will go to perdition. With Satan’s help he ascended, and in Satan’s company he will inhabit perdition [*apoleia*-- destruction-- “loss of well-being. not of being”]. See 9:1f.; 11:7 for references to the “bottomless pit.”
- D. Those without discernment were impressed with the beast’s vitality. His ability to survive seemingly lethal events appeared marvelous to them. But to those whose

names were written “from the foundation of the world” [See comments, 13:8, page 127.], there was no attraction to the beast despite his strength, for they knew he was destined for hell.

- V. His appearance was ominous and mystifying to the human mind. 17:9.
- A. Wisdom would bring understanding out of confusion about features of the beast.
1. Spiritual wisdom is “seeing things as God sees them.”
 2. God has disclosed His mind to us through His revelations (1Cor. 2:6-16).
 3. The Lord wanted the early disciples to grasp the identities of the scarlet beast and the wicked woman.
 4. He provided identifying marks to *aid*, not to confuse, their understanding.
- B. Perhaps early Christians discerned the meanings more readily than we can.
- VI. One of the beast’s *two* main features was *seven heads*. 17:9-11.
- A. His seven heads were also seven mountains [hills-- RSV]. These hills in turn should be perceived as seven strong kings [rulers/emperors].
- B. The woman was sitting on the heads/mountains/kings.
1. She also sat on the beast as she sat on his heads and on the mountains (vs. 3).

CONSIDER:

This symbolic image of the harlot and the beast probably means *thus far*:

1. The harlot was the city of Rome, the capital of the empire, which historically and poetically was known to “sit on seven hills”;
 2. The harlot was sitting on [was supported in her economy and lifestyle] the great, far-flung Roman empire with its vast resources;
 3. The power of the empire had been generated through its emperors [kings], represented here by the *seven* heads displayed;
 4. Two of the disciples’ greatest enemies through the years had been (1) the *lust* and *corruption* of the world [represented by the city of Rome] and (2) the *political* and *economic pressures* of worldly society [represented by the Roman empire];
 5. These two forces against righteousness [harlot and beast] were “married” [united] in their plans and efforts to destroy the union between Jesus and His bride;
 6. They acted *as one* in their campaign against truth on the earth.
- C. One theory takes the *seven kings* [emperors] straight out of Roman history:
1. Five kings had fallen [in death] at the time of John’s vision;
 2. One king was [currently in power];
 3. One king had not yet come [he would rule *after* the time of John’s vision]; he would reign for a [relatively] short time;
 4. An eighth ruler [perhaps Domitian] would appear and behave like the “beast that

was and is not” [possibly the vicious Nero]. This would connect with the superstition that Domitian was Nero “revived.” [See (2), page 126.]

5. Some scholars attempt to determine when John wrote Revelation by comparing the list of Roman emperors with John’s numbers in this vision. However, this encounters the serious problem of disagreement about which name to begin with and which names to include and exclude in the counting. The identity of these eight rulers will vary, depending on how one handles the complete list of Roman rulers. Jenkins has an informative chart that demonstrates various outcomes derived by using different ways to list the emperors.
- D. Some other interpretations of this vision of *seven* kings:
1. The number *seven* is used symbolically here as elsewhere in Revelation. It is not particular emperors but the total list of emperors upon whom the harlot “sat.” In fact, the symbolism could even include all oppressive rulers and governments who *had* persecuted God’s people before this revelation and others who *would* harass Christians *after* John’s time *until* the final judgment;
 2. The *seven* kings are not individual rulers but pagan kingdoms responsible for seeking to harm God’s people. Rome was the sixth or seventh [according to which list of kingdoms is preferred], and the Antichrist will be the last;
 3. The eight kings are different forms of government employed during the successive developmental stages of the Roman empire. The last “king” represented the union of Papal government with Roman civil government that was responsible for severe oppression of truth seekers, especially during the Middle Ages.

VII. The beast’s other main feature was *ten horns*. 17:12-14.

- A. These horns likely represent ten nations or peoples [or *ten* may symbolize all of the same kind] who had not achieved full self-rule [and probably *never would*] as part of the Roman empire. They would only be allowed to have “puppet” governments that would always be subject to the dictates of the central power of the empire.
- B. The tenure of these puppet-rulers would be insecure. They would rule for only “one hour” with [not apart from] the decrees of the beast [empire].
- C. Despite their tentative and dependent existence, these “ten horns” would be eager to please the controlling officials of the empire and would therefore support Rome’s persecutions against the church whenever and wherever undertaken by their overlords. With “one mind” they would give “their power and their authority to the beast.”
- D. These subjugated nations [horns] would join with Rome in warring against the Lamb. But, like Rome, they would be overcome and go into perdition (vs. 8).
- E. This, of course, is the only possible outcome for those who fight against Christ and His subjects. He is Lord of [all] lords and King of [all] kings, and humans, regardless of their strength and cunning, *cannot* prevail against Him!

F. Neither can those who are with Him-- the called, the chosen, and the faithful-- be overcome by wicked men who elect to oppress them in this world!

VIII. The marriage of the woman and the beast fell into serious trouble. 17:15-17.

- A. The woman [harlot] was pictured sitting on “many waters” (vs. 1).
1. This symbol has been introduced earlier in John’s vision (1:15; 14:2).
 2. “Many waters” represented the numerous nations subjugated by Rome to comprise the vast empire.
 3. These waters [nations] at first provided *strength* to the woman [Rome] in physical resources and military troops [probably the idea in vs. 1].
 4. Later, Rome had great difficulty in controlling these provinces, and they became a primary source of *weakness* in the empire [likely the idea in vs. 15].
- B. The ten horns [nations] upon which the harlot Rome had once depended for strength became less loyal to the central government of the empire and sought more self-control of their civil affairs.
1. Edward Gibbon, in his study of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, attributes the ultimate fall of Rome to four basic causes. In addition to natural calamities and corrupt lifestyles, *internal political strife* and invasions by *barbaric nations* brought down the once-invulnerable kingdom.
 2. Gibbon observes:

The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring *why* the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long. The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries, first oppressed the freedom of the republic, and afterwards violated the majesty of the purple...

The decay of Rome has been frequently ascribed to the translation of the seat of the empire [to Constantinople--RG]; but this history has already shown that the powers of government were *divided*, rather than *removed*. The throne of Constantinople was erected in the East; while the West was still possessed by a series of emperors who held their residence in Italy, and claimed their equal inheritance of the legions and provinces.

This dangerous novelty impaired the strength and fomented the vices of a double reign.
 3. Failing to accomplish a satisfactory assimilation of the varied cultures and lifestyles of the provinces into the central empire, Rome grew to be “hated” by those upon whom they once could depend to be loyal to the republic in everything.
 4. Daniel long before had prophesied that the great kingdom of Rome would have a basic weakness that arose out of the wide disparity among the peoples making up the empire. A kingdom of iron and clay, it would be “partly strong and partly fragile” (Daniel 2:44).
 5. William Hendricksen offers these remarks about the hateful nations:

For a while all seems to go well: the world in general and especially its mighty ones

commit whoredom with the great harlot. They drink of her golden cup and they become drunk with the wine of whoredom. They carry the woman: they yield entirely to her allurements and enticements, her antichristian culture. They are fond of the luxuries of the world...But, in the end...these very people turn against the whore...But then it is forever too late.

6. Another popular explanation of the harlot and the horns interprets the woman to be the corrupted Roman Catholic church and its papacy. The horns are nations that came under the influence and control of the papacy and later revolted against papal authority. France and England are examples of these “horns” who came to “hate” the harlot, as are other countries that renounced the papacy during the Protestant Reformation in Europe.
 7. The hurt inflicted upon the harlot would be *fatal*. She would be stripped, her flesh would be “eaten,” and her body would be burned with fire. Perhaps we are to think of the evil woman as being eaten and burned much like a Jewish sacrifice to acknowledge Jehovah’s supremacy over the agents of wickedness in this world. At any rate, the harlot’s lot is one of complete and final destruction.
 8. The imagery of flesh-eating and burning argues against the interpretation of number 5 [above]. Although the papacy was severely weakened by the Protestant Reformation, it certainly was not destroyed as the text demands. The power to persecute, on the other hand, was indeed ended forever for Rome when its empire was overrun by barbaric tribes and it experienced a complete overthrow in 476 A.D.
- C. The Lord’s eternal plan to preserve His people was still ruling over the acts of men.
1. God has frequently allowed men and nations to rise to prominence and power before striking them down to demonstrate His absolute control over the earth. Pharaoh’s Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon are good examples of this fact.
 2. It was necessary for Rome to become strong in order for God to display His own strength against her. So, the “ten horns” [kings] were providentially moved to first commit to the support of the empire and then to abandon her in her time of greatest need.
 3. The word of God was fulfilled when the empire fell, for the Lord had repeatedly promised through His prophets and through the words of Revelation that evil can never triumph over His people (Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Rev. 7:14-17).
- IX. The wicked woman’s identity was made clear. 17:18.
- A. Many identities have been assigned to the harlot by commentators.
1. Jerusalem, the corrupt and apostate church, the papacy, and the antichristian world are but a few.
 2. Perhaps God’s foreknowledge recognized that a strong identification of their oppressor would lend confidence to Christians that His purpose for vengeance against Rome was *exactly* what they needed. Hopefully, a specific and timely promise such as this should do wonders for their intent to be faithful to Jesus.

- 3. The angel's divine identification could hardly be clearer, short of calling Rome's name [which would not have been very apocryphal]. The woman was:
 - a. A city-- not a church, not a religious system, not an evil environment;**
 - b. A city that was then reigning over the kings of the earth.****
- 4. Albertus Pieters offers this observation about this *great city*:**

It is difficult to see how the original readers of the Apocalypse could attach any other meaning to the explanation given in 17:9,18, except to think of the Imperial City...Would they have the slightest doubt-- would it even occur to them to inquire-- what was meant by the seven hilled city, and by the city that ruled the world? This is as nearly as anything can be a direct naming of the city of Rome.

- 1. Who had been involved in ungodly practices with the “great harlot”? (1,2)**

- 2. Describe the beast and the woman who sat upon it. (3,4,6)**

- 3. What was written on the woman’s forehead? (5)**

- 4. What strange statement is made about the beast’s existence? (8)**

- 5. The *seven* heads of the beast (vs. 3) are identified with what two things? (9,10)**

- 6. What details are offered about the kings and the beast? (10,11)**

- 7. What relationship existed between the ten kings and the beast? (12-14)**

- 8. How would that relationship change? Why? (16,17)**

- 9. Explain the “many waters” upon which the woman sat. (1,15)**

- 10. Who was this woman whom John saw? What city best fits her description? (18)**

Lesson Eighteen: Chapter 18:1-24

"Babylon the Great Is Fallen"

Chapter seventeen was devoted to a scene in which the Lord began to exact His vengeance on the great harlot, who was identified as a "great city" that reigned over the kings of the earth. That city sat on seven hills and is commonly believed to be Rome, the capital city of the vast empire which ruled a large part of the known world at the time of John's revelation. Rome was the *driving force* behind much of the distress suffered by Christians in the first century and beyond.

Chapter eighteen completes John's description of Rome's fate and portrays scenes of remorse in which various segments of the population bewail the serious consequences of the city's fall to their own circumstances.

Both chapters [17 and 18] focus on retribution inflicted on a city. Punishment for the cruel beast, the empire on which the harlot sat, is temporarily set aside until later. God will deal with the beast [empire] in 19:19,20. Obviously, the empire cannot be separated from its capital city. Their fortunes were necessarily the same. What happens to one affects both. So, we may properly think of *both* the city and the empire as we examine the pronouncements of doom against either in these passages.

The Text

- I. A monumental proclamation by "another" angel. 18:1-3.
 - A. Numerous angels have been employed by God both to announce and to execute His will throughout Revelation.
 1. This angel came "down out of heaven" to deliver a remarkable proclamation.
 - a. John's position with reference to heaven seems to vary from time to time.
 - b. Sometimes he was in heaven (4:1,2); often, he observed from outside of heaven.
 2. This angel had great authority as God's spokesman about significant events.
 3. The earth was illuminated as a great stage suitable for the angel's declaration.
 - a. The "spotlight" was on this messenger from the throne of the Lord and on his message.
 - B. The importance of the proclamation was made clear to John.
 1. By the "loud" and "mighty" manner in which the message was delivered.
 2. By the substance of the message: "Babylon the great is fallen!"
 - a. *Literal* Babylon had fallen to the Medo-Persian kingdom many years before the time of John's Revelation.
 - b. *Symbolic* Babylon in this vision represented Rome and other oppressive powers.

- c. The fall of *literal* Rome would not occur for more than three centuries;
 - d. The fall of *symbolic* Rome would happen over an *indeterminate* period of time;
 - e. The fall of *both* Romes was so certain that it could be announced as done long before it happened. Hinds calls “is fallen” the “prophetic past” tense.
- C. The reasons for the proclamation displayed the justice and power of Jehovah.
- 1. Literal Rome would soon begin a long and gradual decline, culminating in its ultimate fall, as chronicled by Edward Gibbon in the three volumes of his The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Gibbon documents that much of the city’s problems were self-inflicted, and she was undeserving of survival.
 - 2. Spiritually, both literal Rome and symbolic Rome were guilty of innumerable and heinous sins against God and His people. Their spiritual decline was so drastic that the city [literal and figurative] would be a “habitation of demons” and a “prison” and a “cage” fit for housing only foul spirits and unclean creatures.
 - 3. Furthermore, both Romes [literal and figurative] would exercise an evil influence over people other than their own and would accompany those people into eternal torment. Kings (Rev. 17:2) and entire nations would commit spiritual fornication with them for political advantage, and merchants would compromise themselves in order to share in the wealth generated by their greed for luxurious lifestyles.
 - 4. While there is nothing essentially wrong with kings making treaties to further the political status of their kingdoms or with merchants making a profit in buying and selling, if such things are done in violation of ethical and moral principles of right and wrong, all guilty parties will be held accountable for their sins by a just God.

II. Another powerful pronouncement came from heaven. 18:4-8.

- A. This message was addressed to “my people”-- God’s people, not the angel’s.
 - 1. Come out of her! The reference is clearly to the spiritual harlot, Rome.
 - a. Christians were not being told to leave literal Rome. Jesus wanted His disciples not to be “of the world” while they lived “in the world” (John 17:15).
 - b. Separation from sinful practices is fundamental to sainthood (2Cor. 6:16-18).
 - 2. The consequences of, “while in Rome, do as the Romans do,” is spiritually fatal.
 - a. Christians share with sinners in the guilt of practicing sinful activities.
 - b. Christians will share with sinners in the “plagues” [punishments] for sin (Matt. 15:14).
- B. This was a message of *retribution*.
 - 1. Babylon’s sins had “reached” to heaven.
 - a. All sins, “great” and “small,” reach the attention of heaven (Heb. 4:13).
 - 2. Babylon’s sins were cumulative; none had been forgiven without her repentance.
 - a. The Lord’s patience had been withdrawn from the deliberately disobedient.
 - 3. Babylon’s sins were “remembered” by an avenging Lord. “Vengeance is Mine, I

will repay,' says the Lord " (Rom. 12:19).

- a. Not *one* sin had been forgotten. All were "held in memory"; "kept in mind" [*mnemoneuo*] --Thayer.
- b. The time for reckoning had finally arrived; payback was due!
4. Retribution would be in accord with God's innate justice [fairness] (Rev. 15:3).
 - a. Terms of fairness are repeatedly used in this passage: "just as" (vs. 6), "repay" (vs. 6), "according to" (vs. 6), "same measure" (vs. 7)," "therefore" (vs. 8).
 - b. Render to her *just as* she rendered to you... (vs. 6).
 - c. *Repay her double* according to her works... (vs. 6). *Double* may dictate only a balance between sin and punishment, rather than twice one for the other, which might be construed as unfair.
 - d. Personal glory and selfishness would be *repaid* with personal torment and sorrow (vs, 7).
 - e. An arrogant attitude ["I sit as a queen...no widow..see no sorrow"] would bring total calamity [plagues, death, mourning, and famine] (vs.7,8).
 - f. Babylon's punishment would come in "one day," suddenly and unexpectedly.
 - g. Babylon's testing of God's righteousness and patience would:
 - (1) Result in the evil city's total destruction; she would be burned with fire;
 - (2) Validate once again that the Lord is *strong* and able to uphold every promise to saints and to execute every threat to sinners with unequalled power.

III. Judgment on Babylon's partners in crime. 18:9-19.

A. The consequences of Babylon's fall.

1. Every segment of the Roman world would feel the impact of Great Babylon's destruction in some way. Many people would suffer significant personal losses.
2. Certain groups of people would perhaps realize their losses sooner and more directly than others. In these verses, *three of them* confront the drastic changes that they now must face because of the change in Great Babylon's fortunes. Keep in mind that these are symbolic images related to the misery of Babylon's cronies.

B. The crying of the kings. 18:9,10.

1. Numerous nations were largely dependent on Rome for their prosperity.
 - a. Rome's power dictated the direction to be taken by all players in the arenas of trade and commerce, monetary systems, taxation, etc. If a government wished to function successfully in any of these areas, it played by Rome's rules. That often meant entering into political agreements that were *only* in the best interests of Rome and the empire.
 - b. Whatever ethical and moral "fornication" must be committed to curry Rome's favor was not too high a price to pay if it bought prosperity and luxurious living from the evil harlot.
2. The kings were shocked to see the smoke of the city's "burning."
 - a. Distraught men of both Ai (Josh. 8:20,21) and Gibeah (Judges 20:38) panicked

when they saw their cities go up in smoke at the hands of Israel.

- b. Destruction came as unexpectedly and as quickly to Rome as it did to those cities. It seemed to the kings that it had happened in “one hour.”
- c. Shortly before, men had admired the beast upon which the woman sat. “Who is able to make war with him?” (13:4) Now, they bemoan the fate of the harlot city, and they see also that conditions are reversed in her empire. God’s judgment has fallen on Babylon, and there is nothing they can do to rescue woman or beast. So, they stand afar, weeping and lamenting.
- d. Of course, the crying of the kings is not really for the fallen city but for themselves. In a moment they see their own “cities” in distress, and their security suddenly has vanished. The other groups have similar motivations behind their own shows of sympathy.

C. The mourning of the merchants. 18:11-17a.

1. Both domestic and foreign merchants would face withering changes when there was no more Roman market for their goods. Tradesmen operating within the empire would face severe decreases in their income because of Babylon’s fall.
2. The comment of this “other voice” (vs. 4) was clear. The concern of the merchants for Babylon [Rome] was totally self-centered: “for no one buys their merchandise any more.”
3. A rather lengthy list of items follows, probably to emphasize both the *amount* and *quality* of the unsaleable merchandise and the huge potential *profits* that such items would have brought if this calamity had not happened.
4. Most things in this catalog of goods are familiar to us and require no elaboration. It will be noted that almost the entire list is devoted to items that contribute to the luxurious lifestyles of the wealthy or to things that the rich would use in gaining more wealth.
5. The list: gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple [garments or dye], silk, scarlet [royal clothing], citron wood, ivory, precious wood, bronze, iron, marble, cinnamon, incense, fragrant oil, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, fine wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, chariots, and slaves.
6. Objects of special interest:
 - a. Citron wood may have been cedar or juniper [Webster];
 - b. Cinnamon was a spice used in the holy anointing oil of the temple (Exo. 30:23-25) and for perfumed odors in Jewish household use (Prov. 7:17). It also had a common usage in Gentile societies;
 - c. Incense [*thumiama*, from *thuo*-- “to offer in sacrifice”--Vine] was employed in temple worship by both Jews and pagans. The word here is plural, suggesting a variety of formulas. For Jews, temple incense was made from a strict formula from which they could not vary (Exo. 30:34-38);
 - d. Frankincense was used for fumigation at sacrifices and other functions;

- e. Chariots [*rhede*] were four-wheeled wagons used for hauling;
 - f. Slaves were common to most societies. Romans were infamous for importing them not only for household purposes but also to be exploited as gladiators to entertain in the public arenas.
7. There were at least three contexts within which the commodities are viewed:
- a. They were items bought and sold in the commerce of the Roman empire and traded especially heavily at the capital city;
 - b. They were things brought from many places to Palestine for ordinary and/or temple use;
 - c. They were goods required in later Roman history by various segments of the papal organization.
- D. The finality of the merchants' losses. 18:14.
- 1. Their dreams for prosperity and ease were shattered. The "fruit" of their labors had vanished suddenly.
 - 2. The opportunity for acquiring rich and splendid things was gone forever. Babylon would never recover from her death blow, and those who aligned themselves with her could expect similar treatment by the holy judgments of the Lord.
- E. The merchants were affected by Babylon's fate just as were the kings. 18:15-17a.
- 1. They wept profusely at the realization that their "meal ticket" was canceled.
 - 2. They stood apart, fearing to be engulfed in Babylon's torment.
 - 3. They were dismayed at the unlikely and untimely demise of such a magnificent and powerful place as Rome had been. Her alluring garments by which the nations had been seduced had now violently been stripped from her and she was exposed in all her ugliness to her former admirers. [See 17:3.] How could she lose it all so quickly? Her great riches had "come to nothing."
- F. The sorrow of the seamen. 18:17b-19.
- 1. The third group devastated by the ill fortunes of the great Babylon were those who made their living from the sea.
 - 2. These were the shipmasters, their crews, those who traded on the sea, and others not specified here.
 - 3. Their lament was the same as that of the kings and the merchants.
 - a. Their prosperity had been tied to the great harlot city, and now she had been made desolate ["laid waste"-- RSV; "alone, forsaken"-- Webster]. There was no one to rescue her from this calamity.
 - b. The seamen threw dust on their heads, an aggressive display of grief in eastern countries [e.g., Job 2:12; Ezek. 27:30], but they made no move to assist their former benefactor. Sailors would know that "the rats always leave a sinking ship."
- IV. The joy of justice. 18:20.
- A. The voice that earlier had called for severe retribution upon Babylon (vs. 6f.) now

orders rejoicing over the just consequences that her sins have brought upon her.

- B. *Heaven* should rejoice, for it was from heaven that the justice of God had been executed. Furthermore, heaven's purpose for man's redemption could now go forward as planned from eternity (Eph. 3:11).
- C. *Earth* [in the persons of the holy apostles and prophets] had reason for jubilation because their righteous blood had now been avenged (Rev. 11:18; 16:6; 18:24). Blood of holy men was the price paid by the apostles and prophets for the privilege of proclaiming the precious blood of Christ to a lost world.

V. The demonstration of Babylon's destruction. 18:21-23a.

- A. A mighty [strong-- ASV] angel threw a great millstone into the sea [Remember-- figurative!], and it quickly sank to the bottom out of sight.
 - 1. Babylon was destined to a similar fate when God's judgment came upon her:
 - a. God's strength, like the angel's, was capable of destroying a "great" city;
 - b. The city's overthrow, like that of the millstone, would come with "violence";
 - c. Babylon would return to the restless "sea" of humanity from which she had arisen (Rev. 13:1);
 - d. The wicked city, like the millstone, would "not be found anymore." She would remain only an entry in the history books.
 - 2. This visual demonstration was God's *exclamation mark* at the end of His *sentence* on a great and wicked foe!
- B. The desolation of Babylon would be complete:
 - 1. Joy and happiness would vanish. The sounds of music would be heard no more;
 - 2. Gainful and satisfying employment would be unavailable. All craftsmen would be missing;
 - 3. Industry and commerce would disappear. The sounds of prosperity [e.g., a millstone] would be heard no more;
 - 4. Positive social life would not exist. No lamp would shine upon pleasant interaction among her inhabitants;
 - 5. The stability provided by good marriages and homes would be replaced by turmoil and confusion;
 - 6. Of course, none of these things could be found in a city so utterly destroyed by the plagues of the Lord to be heaped upon her. Obviously, *spiritual impact* instead of simple *reporting* was the purpose sought in these symbols of Babylon's destiny.

VI. Babylon's debt-- paid in full! 18:23b,24.

- A. She "owed" God for the greed of her merchants, "great men" who had deceived many others while they pursued their own abandonment of spiritual values.
- B. She "owed" God most of all for the precious blood of faithful disciples who had wanted nothing more than to save those who wanted nothing less than to destroy them.
- C. Babylon's debt was now PAID IN FULL!!

- 1. What fate was in store for “Babylon the Great,” according to the angel? (1,2)**
- 2. What reason was given for this change in her status? (3,5)**
- 3. What solemn warning was given to the saints about Babylon? (4)**
- 4. By what criteria would Babylon’s punishment be measured? (6,7)**
- 5. What details are given about Babylon’s punishments? (8)**
- 6. How would kings be affected by Babylon’s fall? (9,10)**
- 7. Why would merchants lament Babylon’s destruction? (11,14)**
- 8. What categories of things had Babylon’s merchants bought and sold? (12,13)**
- 9. What about Babylon’s fall most amazed the merchants? (15-17)**
- 10. Why would Babylon’s demise have a unique effect on the apostles and prophets? (20)**
- 11. What object was used to symbolize the fall of Babylon? (21)**
- 12. The absence of what things would signify the completeness of her desolation? (22,23)**
- 13. Name two great sins of Babylon that were responsible for her punishment. (23,24)**

*Lesson Nineteen: Chapter 19:1-21**Heaven Rejoices; More Victories Won*

In chapter eighteen we read about the ultimate destruction of Babylon, the great harlot/city of Rome. This evil woman had led both the kings of the earth and the insignificant people of the world into disobeying God through her tempting promises and lustful practices. Now, she has finally been brought to her knees, much to the chagrin of those who had a selfish interest in her well-being. No longer can they enjoy the luxurious lifestyles and positions of influence that they had acquired as minions of the empire and its leaders, acquiescing to every whim of Roman authority. *Two* more of Satan's rebellious agents remain to receive their just rewards from Jehovah. But first, there is great joy that must be expressed to the Father for the retribution He has executed upon wicked Babylon.

I. Rejoicing in heaven. 19:1-6.**A. By a great multitude.**

1. Loud voices are common to Revelation; they announce very important events:
 - a. An angel in a loud voice asked about opening the seven seals (5:2);
 - b. Martyrs cried out for vengeance with a loud voice (6:10);
 - c. An angel foretold the final woes on the earth with a loud voice (8:13);
 - d. The casting down of Satan was proclaimed by a loud voice (12:10);
 - e. Angels called for the vintage of the earth in loud voices (14:7,9,15).
2. Loud voices are also appropriate for praising and giving thanks to God.
 - a. A great multitude, clothed in white robes, had earlier praised Father and Son with a loud voice for the gift of salvation (7:9,10).
 - b. Either the same or a different multitude now shouts in a loud voice, "Alleluia" ["praise ye Jehovah"] for the salvation, glory, honor, and power of the Lord.
3. "Alleluia" also was for His true and righteous judgments against His foes.
 - a. His promises of retribution for sin are always fulfilled ["dependable"--Wuest] (Heb. 2:2; Malachi 3:6a).
 - b. His treatment of sinners is totally fair ["righteous"-- Wuest] (Ro.3:26; Rev. 15:3).
4. "Alleluia" for His just judgment against the great harlot Babylon rang out as well.
 - a. She had "corrupted" the earth [*phtheiro*-- "to destroy by means of corrupting" as with false religions-- Vine] with her spiritual fornication.
 - b. She *deserved* a severe punishment for her sins (Rom. 11:22).
5. "Alleluia" was for avenging the blood of His saints shed at the hands of Babylon.
 - a. Their waiting for retribution was finally over (6:9-11).

6. “Alleluia” was that Babylon would never again harass the church of God.
 - a. The [literal] smoke that rose from Sodom and Gomorrah was a strong symbol of the folly of violating God’s laws, but their ashes would soon cool (Gen. 19:29).
 - b. Babylon’s [figurative] smoke was a stronger symbol of the same sin, and it remains as an everlasting lesson of spiritual *cause* and *effect*, i.e., sin/obedience equals punishment/reward.
- B. By twenty-four elders and four living creatures.
 1. These were introduced in the great “throne scene” (4:4,6).
 - a. They also appear in 7:11ff.; 11:16ff.; 14:3.
 2. Their “Alleluia” was added to that of the multitude by an “Amen” [“so be it!”].
- C. By a voice from the throne of the Lord.
 1. “Praise our God” [“Alleluia”] was appropriate for:
 - a. All who serve and fear Him by trying to keep His commandments (Acts 10:35);
 - b. Those promised salvation for making this commitment (Acts 10:35,43).
 2. Both “small” and “great” have this obligation of praise and thanksgiving.
- D. By another [or same, vs. 1] voice of a multitude.
 1. It sounded like many waters and thunderings [cf. 1:15; 4:5; 8:5; 14:2, etc.].
 2. “Alleluia” was for the fact of Jehovah’s omnipotent reign over all things.
 - a. His reign is as *eternal* as His very Being (1Cor. 15:27).

II. Getting ready for the *marriage feast*. 19:7-10.

- A. Joy was centered in God’s final reward to His church-- eternal marriage to His Son.
 1. “Rejoice, be glad, and give Him glory.”
- B. Marriage/the marriage feast is used in Scripture to emphasize several different things:
 1. The similarities between the relationships of Christ/church and husband/wife (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:22-32);
 2. The essentiality of proper character in the Lord’s disciples (Matt. 22:1-14);
 3. The importance of preparation for the Lord’s return (Matt. 25:1-13);
 4. The joy that purity of life will bring at our ultimate union with Jesus (Rev. 19:7).
- C. These figures are *not* contradictory; they illustrate different lessons in different ways.
 1. Some deny the *present* marriage of Christ and His church because Revelation places the “marriage” in the future (21:2).
 2. They relegate “marriage” to the time when Christ returns to judge the world.
 3. Various ways of being “married” existed in different senses at different times.
 4. Hendricksen cites Jewish customs that recognized several stages of a marriage.
 - a. The betrothal [espousal--KJV; ASV]. Terms of marriage were accepted in the presence of witnesses and a blessing pronounced. The bride and groom were legally married from that time. “Betrothal” [*mnesteuo*-- “to be promised in marriage”] was similar to our engagement but much more binding.
 - (1) The case of Joseph and Mary (Lk. 1:27; Matt. 1:18-24).

- (2) Christians are “betrothed” to Christ, yet are “married” to Him (2Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32).
- b. The interval between the betrothal and the wedding feast, during which the dowry was paid to the bride’s father (Gen. 34:12).
 - c. The procession of the groom and his friends to take his bride, who has prepared herself for his coming, to his own home. All engaged in much singing and celebration (Matt. 25:10).
 - d. The wedding feast [or supper] which might last for several days (Matt. 22:1f.).
5. How Christians are “married” to Christ:
- a. We are bound [betrothed by spiritual law] to Christ when we accept His terms of marriage and obey them (Acts 2:36-39);
 - b. We are now living and serving in an interval of time during which the Father accepts Christ’s blood as the “dowry” paid in exchange for the forgiveness of sins (Rom. 5:8,9). During this interval we must “make ready” for the arrival of our betrothed husband by faithful and pure lives (1Thes. 5:23). God *grace* “gives” us fine white linen [in exchange for righteous lives] to wear at Jesus’ coming;
 - c. Jesus will return with His angels (Matt. 25:31) for His bride and will take her to heaven to live with Him there (1Thes. 4:13-17);
 - d. The wedding feast in heaven will be celebrated forever (1Thes. 4:18);
 - e. The anticipated consummation of the marriage is described in Revelation 21, 22.
- D. Another beatitude was pronounced to stress another vital lesson.
1. The bride is “blessed” to be called to Christ’s supper (1Cor. 1:10).
 2. The church is the “called out” [*ekklesia*] people of the Lord (Matt. 16:18).
 3. The figure may also allow for saints as *guests* at the feast (Matt. 22:2-14).
 4. “He” [the voice from the throne (vs. 5)] validated the promises given to saints.
 - a. These promises [verses 2-9] were God’s, and they were dependable (vs. 2).
- E. The impact of God’s promises on John.
1. He was apparently so overcome by the divine assurances that he fell in awe at the feet of the messenger [angel--RSV] who delivered them.
 2. That was no excuse; he was rebuked for this misdeed-- “Don’t do that!”
 3. Obviously, John knew better than to honor *any* idol, whether in the form of a creature or its image (1John 5:21).
 4. He would repeat this mistake in chapter twenty-two (22:8).
 - a. His emotions possibly were too strong to be controlled by his reason.
 5. Angels were “fellow servants” and “brethren” with others [like John] who simply testified of Jesus.
 - a. Men [like Peter] filled the same role (Acts 10:25,26).
 6. The singularity and unique holiness of Jehovah were proclaimed-- “Worship [only] God!”

7. All prophecy [O.T. & N.T.] is focused on the Godhood of Jesus. To worship anyone or anything other than the Godhead would ignore completely everything that had ever been taught by heaven's messengers to the world.

III. A recapitulation of some basic facts:

- A. As the first main division of Revelation [chapters 1-11] ended, *two* profound promises were vocalized for the encouragement of harassed Christians:
 1. God would reward His servants and those who feared His name (11:18);
 2. Those who destroyed the earth would be destroyed (11:18b).
- B. Spiritual *war* had broken out in heaven between good and evil (12:7).
 1. The conflict was mirrored in earthly persecutions and retributions [chapters 6-11].
 2. The *spiritual* roots of *earthly* battles would be set forth [chapters 12-20].
 3. Afflicted saints could be comforted in the assurance of ultimate victory (19:2).
- C. As the monumental engagement began, each "side" possessed strong weaponry:

Satan's Weapons

1. The power of ignorance and deception;
2. The allure of physical lusts;
3. The attraction of many false religions;
4. The might of civil government;
5. The leverage of economic control.

God's Weapons

1. The might of knowledge and truth;
2. The strength of pure conduct;
3. The commitment to one true religion;
4. The stability of heavenly government;
5. The trust in divine providence.

- D. These weapons of evil and good would be utilized through:

Satan's Weapons

1. The beast from the sea [Roman empire];
2. The beast from the land [paganism and emperor worship];
3. The evil harlot/city [Rome and other godless places/influences].

God's Weapons

1. Jesus and His eternal kingdom;
2. Gospel truth and gospel teachers;
3. Pure and devoted lives of persevering Christians.

- E. At this point in Revelation [19:11], *one* great enemy [Babylon the harlot] has been vanquished as promised. *Two* more of the devil's agents remain to be defeated [false religion and the cruel empire that it supported (13:12-15)]. Then, Satan himself must be forever punished. The destruction of Satan and his agents was Jesus' mission as the Savior of humanity (1John 3:8). John's narrative now turns to this task.

IV. Getting ready for the monumental *battle of Armageddon*. 19:11-16.

- A. Wedded bliss lay ahead for the Lamb's bride in heaven (vs. 9).
 1. But, one obstacle must be overcome before spiritual dreams could come true.
 2. The sea beast and the land beast both were still determined to prevent the fulfillment of God's eternal plan for Christ's spiritual wife (Eph. 3:10,11).
 3. They must be removed from contention in a final contest at Armageddon (16:16).

- B. The invincible Christ was prepared to wage war against the forces of wickedness.**
- 1. Heaven opened to reveal Him in His glory and might.**
 - a. He rode on a *white* war horse; his cause was righteous and pure in motive.**
 - b. His struggle was not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). These He had judged to be deserving of destruction.**
 - c. He was called *Faithful* and *True* because loyalty to His word and consistent accuracy in His pronouncements are the very *essence* of His Being (Heb. 13:8).**
 - d. His eyes flamed with the awfulness of divine retribution and His head was crowned with many diadems, which signified His supreme royal status over all other rulers.**
 - 2. He wore a name [*onoma*-- “the authority, character, rank, majesty, power, excellence” of a person] that only He can comprehend in its fullness.**
 - a. His name “Jesus” means He is our Savior (Matt. 1:21).**
 - b. His names “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” give us insight into His character and His work (Isa. 9:6).**
 - c. Although we know His names, in our humanity we cannot understand all the implications of blessedness they hold for us.**
 - d. At the wedding feast, we will receive greater clarity of Who He Really Is.**
 - e. In this passage [vs. 11-16], Jesus bears several names:**
 - (1) “Faithful and True” (vs. 11) describes His absolute righteousness;**
 - (2) A “name” only He knew (vs. 12) maintains the *mystery* of His Person;**
 - (3) “The Word of God” (vs. 13) cites His primary mode of operation;**
 - (4) “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (vs. 16) proclaims His absolute autonomy over every other power in heaven and on earth.**
 - 3. His battle dress was a robe dipped [sprinkled-- ASV] in blood, which was either:**
 - a. Stained with the blood of foes already vanquished in previous warfare;**
 - b. Stained from His own crucifixion to portray His courage and compassion to save the world. It also signified His worthiness to lead in the monumental struggle against the powers that purposed to condemn the world (John 3:16).**
 - 4. His weaponry consisted of the word of the gospel of salvation. His weapons were not carnal (2Cor. 10:4,5), but by the “word of His mouth” every “lawless one” could be totally consumed and destroyed (2Thes. 2:8).**
 - a. Satan’s false propaganda was strong to deceive the nations (13:11-18), but Jesus’ truth was much stronger to free them from their spiritual enemies!**
 - 5. His armies were righteous, clothed in white fine linen, and mounted on white horses. They emulated their leader as completely as they could (Matt. 5:48).**
 - 6. His potential for complete victory was boundless.**
 - a. Out of His mouth went a sword (Eph. 6:17) intended [in this context] not to save**

- but to condemn and destroy (2Cor, 2:14-16).
 - b. His sword would “strike” the nations (Psalm 2).
 - c. His rod of iron would “rule” them. (Isa. 11:4).
 - d. He would “tread” [His foes] in the winepress of God’s wrath (Rev. 14:19).
 - C. His worthiness was displayed by one resounding inscription.
 1. “*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*”
 - a. None can challenge His worthiness or His capabilities to lead God’s armies.
 2. This name was written both on His robe and on His thigh.
 - a. The blood-stained robe transmitted the image of a righteous and battle-tested commander of heaven’s troops.
 - b. The thigh transmitted the image of a leader who was sworn to pursue the total destruction of His enemies until the very end. [See the symbolism of the thigh in the making of oaths, Genesis 24:2,9; 47:29.]
- V. Victory promised. 19:17,18.
- A. A ghastly invitation.
 1. Still another angel was observed standing in the sun.
 - a. He was “spotlighted” to call attention to his important message.
 - b. Perhaps his image shone even more brightly than the sun.
 2. He had an unusual invitation to extend to unusual guests.
 - a. It was offered to the birds of heaven rather than to men.
 - b. It offered something that would attract those birds-- eating the flesh of men.
 3. This invitation was in stark contrast to the “blessed” invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (vs. 9).
 - a. God would host both meals, but the two events would be entirely different.
 - B. A singular menu.
 1. The [dead] flesh of “all [wicked] people” would be sufficient to satiate the ravenous appetites of God’s “cleanup crew.”
 2. A similar menu was provided to birds and beasts following the defeat of “Gog” in Ezekiel 39:17-20.
 3. Both meals signified the *total defeat* of the Lord’s foes at the hands of His people.
 4. These flesh-eating birds clearly forecast the outcome of a battle yet to be fought.
 - a. A battlefield strewn with a multitude of dead bodies awaiting disposal would loudly proclaim the completeness of Christ’s mastery over the devil’s forces.
- VI. The Battle of Armageddon and its outcome. 19:19-21.
- A. Earlier engagements had occurred between good and evil [e.g., 11:7; 14:19].
 1. Results had sometimes seemed mixed in spite of the promised prospect of the ultimate victory of good over evil.
 2. Validation of God’s promise for total triumph would strongly encourage disciples who were facing the agonies and the temptations of Satan’s persecutions by Rome.

- B. One great and decisive battle would forever dispel any doubts about who *truly* ruled in the affairs of men.**
1. Evil spirits of demons earlier had begun gathering their forces for a decisive conflict (16:13,14).
 2. The two beasts and their armies were now assembled at a place called Har-Mageddon [Armageddon] (16:16).
 - a. They had joined with the puppet kings and their godless hordes to wage war with Christ and His righteous army. [See more on Armageddon, pp. 156,157.]
 - b. Everything was ready for the conflict-- let the battle of Armageddon begin!!
- C. The conflict resolved.**
1. Strangely, the *actual struggle* is not reported in John's vision, only its *outcome*.
 - a. Perhaps the omission was intended to keep a focus on a spiritual confrontation instead of an actual sword-and-shield fight between literal opponents.
 2. Both [sea] beast and false prophet [beast from the land] were captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire and brimstone.
 - a. The great city of Babylon [Rome] apparently had already been cast into the lake of torment (18:5).
 - b. This was a fitting destiny for each of the *three* leaders who had challenged the authority and rule of the Almighty God (vs. 15).
 - (1) The sea beast [Roman empire] with unashamed cruelty had sought to destroy the righteous people of the Lord [e.g., 6:9; 11:7; 13:17, etc.].
 - (2) The land beast [paganism and emperor worship] with gross deceit had tried to pervert the true faith of the gospel [e.g., 13:12-15; 16:13,14].
 - (3) The harlot city Babylon [Rome] with relentless seduction had enticed the world's population to abandon every standard of morality and ethical behavior in exchange for the pleasures of luxurious and lustful living [18:2-8].
 - (4) Being cast "alive" into the fiery lake added to the impact of the torment on these two vanquished beasts. They would forever be "alive" to the anguish and suffering experienced in the flames of hell.
 3. The followers of the beasts were killed and their souls held for final consignment to the lake of fire (20:15).
 - a. They were unable to withstand the power of the Lord's sword of damnation (2Thes. 2:8).
 - b. Their defeat was complete-- the birds (vs. 17) were filled with their flesh.
 - c. The battle was over; the question of who would dominate was forever resolved: Christ is Lord over all -- forever and forever!!
 4. Hailey summarizes the implications of this great battle of Armageddon:

The victory is won; and the defeat of the beast and his ally, the false prophet, is complete. The Roman power and the paganism which it supported are now destroyed forever. The vision of Daniel is fulfilled (Dan. 7:11), and in this defeat and destruction is revealed the destiny of all such powers that should ever arise to fight against God and His kingdom. This is God's guarantee of victory... even until the end of time.

- 1. What *two* reasons are given for Babylon's punishment? (2)**
- 2. What are *three* sources of praise for God? (1-6)**
- 3. What special blessing was to be given to God's people? Why? (7,8)**
- 4. Another "beatitude" appears in this chapter. What is it? (9)**
- 5. What mistake did John make? Why was it a mistake? (10)**
- 6. List the names by which Jesus is called when He appears on a white horse. (11, 13-16)**
- 7. What difference was there between Christ's attire and that of His followers? (13,14)**
- 8. List the things that suggest that Jesus was able to wage successful war against His foes. (11,12,14,15).**
- 9. Contrast the two suppers in this chapter. (9,17,18)**
- 10. What was the outcome of the great battle between Christ and the beasts? (19-21)**

Lesson Twenty: Chapter 20:1-15

Satan Bound and Released; The Last Judgment

Only two more parts of Jehovah's plan remain to be completed. One last "nail in the devil's coffin" needs to be driven, and the Lord's faithful people must at last be given the eternal reward they were promised and for which they have patiently labored and waited. Chapter twenty will disclose the completion of the first task, and chapters twenty-one and twenty-two will portray the glorious fulfillment of the second.

I. The binding of Satan for 1,000 years. 20:1-3.

A. As chapter twenty opens, the sea beast [Roman empire] and the land beast [pagan religion and emperor worship] have already been cast into the lake of fire. They have forever been removed from the scene as foes who could inflict damage upon the kingdom of Christ. Only the devil himself stands between the redeemed and their reward, and that is about to change.

B. Then, John saw an angel descending from heaven.

1. The angel carried two objects, a *key* and a great *chain*.

a. Both were to be employed in restraining Satan from further pursuing his main occupation-- harassing the people of the Lord in every way he could.

b. The *chain* would bind the devil and immobilize his powers to lead others into rebellion against the Father and the Son.

(1) Only a *great* chain could bind the "great, fiery red dragon" whose massive tail could sweep one-third of heaven's stars to earth (12:3,4).

c. The *key* would lock the door of the bottomless pit where the devil would be secured to prevent his escape back into the world, where he once again could do harm to righteous people.

(1) The bottomless pit was the place from which heavy smoke had arisen in 9:1-3. There, its lock was opened by an angel, and dreadful locusts came forth to torment men who were *not* sealed by God. Here, the door is closed and locked by another angel to prevent the devil from harming men who *were* sealed.

(2) The bottomless pit [*abussos*] is called the "abyss" in the ASV. Thayer says *abussos* refers to the "common receptacle of the dead" and especially to "the abode of demons." "Abyss" is a "pit, the unmeasurable depth." Cf. Luke 8:31.

(3) Other references to the "bottomless pit" are found in Rev. 9:11; 11:7; 17:8.

2. This angel, as God's agent, proved to be stronger than the "*angel* of the bottomless pit" who ruled over the inhabitants of the abyss. [See Rev. 9:11.] The devil was overcome and bound as God had ordered.
 3. The *names* of this mighty foe indicate the *justice* of his fate:
 - a. Paul called him the "evil one" (2Thes. 3:3);
 - b. He is cited here in Revelation as the "serpent of old," the wicked deceiver whose deception had led to the transgression of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1f.);
 - c. He is the "Devil" [*diabolos*-- an accuser, a slanderer"]. He accuses man to God and God to man (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-5; Gen. 3:4,5);
 - d. He is "Satan" [*satanas*-- "an adversary"]. He is the adversary of God and Christ (Matt. 4:1-11); of their people (Lk. 22:31; Acts 5:3; 1Cor. 7:5, etc.); of all mankind (Luke 13:16; Acts 26:18; 2Thes. 2:9,10).
- C. Satan was bound by the angel for 1,000 years.
1. It is the binding, not the 1,000 years, that is the focus of this passage.
 2. Many erroneous and hurtful theories about the end-times have been based on a literal timeframe for the devil's binding.

Clinton Hamilton comments about these theories:

The twentieth chapter of Revelation is about the binding of Satan and the victory of the Son of God and His people over Satan and not the thousand year period. One needs to keep this focus and not become entangled in theories spawned from what is not the subject and what is not stated in the chapter. Satan has used political power and false religion to torment the saints of God as represented by the two beasts cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 19:19-20). The twentieth chapter is about the defeat of Satan who is also cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10).

Ray Summers adds similar thoughts:

John, in his visions on the isle of Patmos, never dreamed that his readers would debate and divide over the contents of this chapter. No doubt this is true. John did not record the scene to give us a series of connected events to satisfy our curiosity about the future. He gave it to set forth the promise of the ultimate and certain triumph of the cause of Christ and those who were being so sorely persecuted.

3. The specified 1,000 years is a symbolic, not a literal, period, just as many other periods and entities are characterized by *representative* numbers [e.g., *three, four, seven, ten, twelve*, and their multiples]. One thousand years is a somewhat long but indefinite period during which a particular purpose is fulfilled or a task is completed. The devil was bound in the pit for *as long as* God saw fit. [See 2Pet. 3:8 for an example of the Lord's treatment of time.]
4. More will be said at the end of this lesson about the false concept of a literal thousand-year imprisonment of the devil and about some of the theories based on that misconception. [See the CHART, page 200.]

- D. The binding of Satan was limited in its *scope*.
1. He was “shut up” from “deceiving the nations” as he had been able to do.
 2. His deception had been executed by his agents, the sea beast [empire], the land beast [false religion], and the harlot Babylon [Rome]. The nations had been duped spiritually into succumbing to their political bullying, devotion to pagan gods and emperors, and lustful lifestyles.
 3. Deception and dishonesty would never lose all their influence in the affairs of nations and peoples, but during the period under consideration, Satan would not be able to dominate the world as *totally* as he had prior to these “thousand years.”
 4. In particular, the deceptions about the divinity of Roman emperors and the Roman gods would totally come to an end. This development, of course, largely resulted when the empire fell to the invasions of other nations that had their own “deities” to revere.
 5. But Satan would continue to operate in men’s lives by perverted morals and corrupt activities as he always had. History and human observation make that very clear.
 6. Details about this “binding” of Satan for a thousand years are not revealed. Naturally, numerous speculations are entertained among scholars and students of John’s revelation:
 - a. “...but the idea is that his power to do what had been done in the days of John is now limited by his being shut up and sealed in the abyss. By his binding, he is prevented from elevating nations to the level of the persecution of the saints of God as had been characteristic of the days of Domitian” [Clinton Hamilton];
 - b. “This leads to the conclusion that the thousand years symbolizes that period of victory beginning with Constantine, when the Roman persecution ended, and continuing until some time before the Lord’s return” [Homer Hailey];
 - c. “This work of *binding the devil* was begun when our Lord triumphed over him in the temptations in the wilderness... As a result, Christ begins to cast out demons. The power and influence of Satan over the deluded masses was beginning to be curtailed” [William Hendricksen];
 - d. “When the Protestant Reformation broke the Roman religious yoke of bondage by giving the Bible back to the people with liberty to read and obey it without human dictation, Satan was bound in the fair meaning of the text” [John Hinds].
 7. Christ’s death on the cross and the preaching of the gospel of salvation have effectively “bound” Satan from controlling the hearts of men who choose to deny him entrance. Before the cross, the whole world was under the curse of sin and deception. The devil once *had* the power of death over all humanity, but

now the power of Jesus' blood has *destroyed* him (Heb. 2:14). Now, the devil is loosed to operate freely only in men who opt to allow him that freedom.

E. The binding of Satan was limited in its *duration*.

1. He would be "released" when the thousand years were finished.
 - a. His influence and control would increase significantly following his release.
2. He would again "deceive" the nations about sin, much as he had done earlier.
 - a. It is not likely that his deceptions would lead his victims to believe again in emperor power and pagan rituals.
 - b. Other lies would gain an equally strong hold on the hearts and lives of earth dwellers and would just as certainly impair the efforts of the Lord's church.
 - c. Deceptions such as worldliness, godlessness, materialism, social corruption, atheism and skepticism, and numerous similar transgressions can prove to be just as deadly as those sins perpetrated by Rome and its mighty empire.
3. This release would continue only for "a little while."
 - a. The devil earlier had displayed great wrath because he knew that he had but a "short time" to work his wickedness among the people of earth (Rev. 6:12).
 - b. We aren't informed about how long this "little" time might be. We only know that it would continue until the Lord was ready to demonstrate once for all that it is--- *Jehovah*, not Satan, who is ALL in ALL!

II. The reigning of the saints for 1,000 years. 20:4-6.

A. The saints sat on thrones.

1. Verses 1-3 and 4-6 are passages in sharp contrast with each other. The first depicts the defeat and consequent punishment of God's foes. The second reveals the complete victory and subsequent reward of the Lord's faithful followers.
 - a. Christ's *enemies* were suffering torments in a hellish lake of fire and brimstone.
 - (1) They had been the tormentors; now they had become the tormented.
 - b. Jesus' *friends* were gloriously enthroned in a heavenly environment.
 - (1) Some commentators confine these friends to martyrs; others include other faithful disciples who had escaped death.
 - (a) The ASV and other versions seem to support the latter view; they speak of martyrs "and such as worshipped not the beast..."
 - (2) Thrones are places of prominence. The role of these overcomers is now seen as central to the victory that had been achieved over the devil and his allies.
 - (3) Thrones are places of authority. These saints once had languished under an altar of sacrifice because the *unrighteous* judgment of wicked men had killed their bodies (Rev. 6:9-11). Now, they are sitting upon thrones from which their own *righteous* judgment would "kill" the souls of those with whom, in an ironic reversal, they had completely exchanged roles.

- (a) Like the men of Ninevah who will “rise up in judgment” against those who refused to repent at Jesus’ teaching, and like the queen of the south who will condemn people who ignored wisdom superior to Solomon’s, these wise and obedient saints [“they”] from their thrones will “judge” [condemn] the gross ignorance and disobedience of Satan’s disciples who had sold themselves to the devil’s cause. [See Matt. 12:41,42.]
- (b) The saints’ judgment is symbolic. It sent the message that if *some* could reject sin, *all* could. Those who chose to follow Satan were without excuse (Rom. 1:20). All *actual* judgment, of course, is left to the Son of God (John 5:22,23; Acts 17:31).
- c. These judges were well qualified to condemn the ungodliness of the wicked.
 - (1) Some had sacrificed their lives to be faithful to the Lord and to His word.
 - (2) Others had withstood great pressure to compromise with Roman religion.
 - (a) Emperor worship and pagan devotions had been refused.
 - (b) The marks they bore identified them with *Jesus*, not with the godless Roman emperor (Gal. 6:17; Rev. 13:16-18).
 - (c) They knew what it meant to pay a price for salvation (Mk. 8:34-38).
- B. The saints [martyrs and others] *lived* and *reigned* with Christ for a *thousand years*.
 - 1. They lived through the positive *influence* of their faithful service to Christ.
 - 2. The reigned through the *justice* of damnation exacted upon the unfaithful.
 - 3. One thousand is a symbolic number, representing a long and complete period of time. [See comments on 20:2, page 189.]
 - 4. The saints’ reign would be concurrent with the devil’s binding.
 - a. Their “judgment” continued to proclaim the justice of Satan’s punishment and of their own enthronement and reign.
 - b. This was *exactly* what God had *always* promised (Matt. 7:24-27; Col. 3:24,25).
- C. The “rest of the dead” would not *live* during the years when Satan was bound.
 - 1. Satan’s work of persecuting the church had been accomplished by men who willingly had executed his purpose to harass the Lord’s disciples (Jn. 8:44).
 - 2. Now, the “binding” [diminishing] of persecutions by his *followers* would effectively “bind” the *devil’s* work in the world.
 - 3. The influence of godly martyrs [and other faithful saints] would increase during the thousand years; the righteous would “live” as they had not been able to do while Satan reigned over [dominated] men through his influence on the empire and its ungodly rulers.
 - 4. The influence of ungodly persecutors would decrease; they would *not* “live” [prevail over the righteous] as they had before.
 - 5. In fact, when the empire would fall, harassment intended to support the empire would finally come to an end. Ungodly persecutors [“the rest of the dead”] would

cease to “live” [dominate the righteous] as they had in the past.

D. This reign of the faithful during the thousand years was the *first resurrection*.

1. It was not a physical resurrection; John saw the souls of the martyrs on thrones as he had seen them earlier under the altar upon which they had been killed (6:9-11).
2. Their bodies would be raised later in the physical [second] resurrection of *all* the dead (vs. 12-14).
3. John’s impression of this heavenly picture was, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the *first* resurrection.” This is the fifth of seven “beatitudes” appearing in Revelation.
 - a. Obviously, God’s favor rested upon them.
 - b. The *second* death has no power over them.
 - (1) The “second death” is eternal death in the lake of fire (verse 14).
 - (2) The second death will have “power” only over the wicked and irreligious.
 - c. The martyrs [and other faithful disciples] will be honored as priests and kings [as they reign] during the time of the devil’s binding (Rev. 1:6).
4. These verses [4-6] have been used to support many unsound doctrines. It is evident that their symbolic message is difficult to understand. However, any interpretation must be in harmony with plain and literal teaching found elsewhere in the Scriptures. Summers makes this comment on the misuse of the passage:

If verses 4, 5, and 6 of Revelation 20 had been omitted, no one would ever have dreamed of a literal thousand years of Christ’s reign upon the earth-- his setting up a temporal throne in Jerusalem and inaugurating a millennial reign as an earthly monarch. Yet whole systems of eschatology [last days--RG], theology, and philosophy of history have been constructed on this precarious basis of highly symbolical verses.

III. The loosing of Satan after the thousand years. 20:7-10.

- A. John made a troubling prophecy about Satan’s “release” when the time appointed for his confinement had expired.
 1. The thousand years would not last forever.
 2. The devil’s release was a certain eventuality; it was as much a part of God’s plan as Satan’s binding.
- B. The prisoner of the bottomless pit would come forth unrehabilitated.
 1. His purposes were unreformed; he sought still to deceive the nations as before.
 2. The scope of his goal was still broad; his sights were set on deceiving many nations throughout the earth.
 - a. The battle of Armageddon [19:11-21] should have proved to Satan that his was a lost cause that would end in total defeat at the hands of Jehovah.
 - b. Apparently, the clear message of his binding failed to convince the devil of the futility of his goal. His evil nature compelled him to renew his attack on the Lord’s purpose to save the saved, even though his ultimate defeat was certain.

- C. Satan would launch one last-ditch effort to harm God’s people.
1. He would enlist Gog and Magog in this final campaign of evil. Their armies would report in large numbers, as many as “the sand of the sea.”
 2. Gog was a prince from the land of Magog who had fought against Israel in Old Testament days (Ezek. 38). Some make a literal application of this reference to the campaign against Israel by the Syrian leader Antiochis Epiphanes about 175 B.C. However, in keeping with the view of Revelation as a book of symbols relating to events not yet completed, many scholars identify the armies of Gog and Magog as representatives of all the forces of evil solicited by the devil to join in this final assault against the church of Christ. McGuiggan compares the use of the Gog/Magog imagery with the original references in Ezekiel:

In that place [Ezekiel--RG], as in this [Revelation--RG], the army is called from the four points of the compass with “Gog” as the leader. In that place, as in this, the defeat of Gog and his hosts was decisive and total. In that place, as in this, Gog made his appearance after the vindication of God’s people. In that place, as in this, the size of the host is staggering (see Ezekiel 39:12,13). In that, as in this, the defeat takes place without the people of God having to lift a finger.
 3. Satan’s purpose will not change. His only reason for existing is to cause all the harm possible to the Lord’s redeemed.
 4. His agents and allies will be different. As time progresses, God’s enemies will move off the stage of history and other foes will take their place. While some believe that some form of the Roman empire must be restored to the world before this last battle can be fought, that hardly seems to be a reasonable expectation.
 5. The identity of Christ’s foes in the final conflict cannot definitely be determined. They well may appear on earth in the form of ideologies and lifestyles rather than as nations and rulers. The Lord’s battle may be with such things as atheism, moral corruption, worldliness, humanism, indifference to religion, and other such human misconduct instead of peoples and governments like Rome and her allies.
- D. The progress of the last great conflict between heaven and hell.
1. Evil appeared ready to achieve a resounding victory over good.
 - a. Wickedness covered the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp and the beloved city of the saints [the church].
 2. But-- God intervened and changed the outcome of this momentous confrontation.
 - a. His enemies [whoever they were] were devoured by fire from heaven.
 - b. Fire was frequently employed by the Lord to punish evildoers:
 - (1) The wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24);
 - (2) Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2);
 - (3) Achan and his family (Joshua 8:25,26).
 - c. These are symbolic images that stress Revelation’s main lesson to the churches-- regardless of the intensity of Satan’s efforts, righteousness has nothing to fear from unrighteousness. God and His people will prevail!

3. The devil was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.
 - a. He was reunited with the beast and the false prophet.
 - b. They had once joined *him* in his hopeless campaign against the Lord.
 - c. He now joins *them* in the torment allotted to *all* of them for their evil conspiracy.
 - d. **Justice has prevailed...**the wrongs done to God's people have been righted!

IV. The last judgment of Satan's disciples. 20:11-15.

- A. As John's vision moves rapidly toward its end, he reports its progress in a series of scenes, each of which contains discrete information about matters important to its conclusion.
 1. Each scene is introduced to us with what the apostle "saw" in his vision:
 - a. He saw heaven opened and Christ ready for battle-- 19:11;
 - b. He saw the beast and his allies gathered to attack the Lord's armies-- 19:19;
 - c. He saw Satan defeated and cast into the bottomless pit-- 20:1-3;
 - d. He saw thrones from which the righteous reigned for a thousand years-- 20:4;
 - e. He saw the throne from which Christ judged the dead-- 20:11,12;
 - f. He saw a new heaven, a new earth, and a holy city for the righteous-- 21:1.
 2. John "saw" all of God's promises fulfilled to both righteous and unrighteous men.
- B. The Great Judge sat at the center of the judgment scene.
 1. Jesus Christ has been given the role of Judge by the Father (John 5:22).
 2. The Father judges through the Son (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16).
 3. Earth and heaven fled away from His awesome presence. Either:
 - a. Those fearful of judgment would have fled, but no place was found to hide;
 - b. The elements of earth and heaven were dissolved at judgment day (2Pet. 3:7).
- C. All the *dead*, small and great, were judged according to their works (Heb. 9:27).
 1. Emphasis here seems to be on judging the wicked and irreligious, the "dead."
 - a. Prior to this scene, righteous men had been "alive" (vs. 4).
 - b. The unrighteous had been spiritually "dead" (vs. 5).
 2. The righteous are not excluded from this judgment; their vindication seems to be *assumed* (2Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12).
 3. The standard of judgment was the "books" ["scrolls"--Wuest] opened by the Lord.
 - a. There were "books" [plural] opened prior to Christ's judgment of the dead.
 - b. Several different opinions exist about *what* these books are:
 - (1) The complete record of deeds [works] attributed to each individual throughout his lifetime. These books are thought to be similar to the books which recorded the evidence of the deeds of Daniel's beast (Dan. 7:10);
 - (2) The Bible *and* a record book of man's works;
 - (3) The Old and New Testaments upon which man's judgment is based (John 12:48; Rom. 2:16).

- c. Another “book” [singular] was identified as the “Book of Life.”
 - (1) This book is often mentioned in Scripture [Psa. 69:28; Mal. 3:16; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3].
 - (2) It figuratively represents God’s recognition of all godly individuals who have been faithful to His expectations and whom He considers to be among the number of the saved.
 - d. Even without a precise identification of these books, one thing is made perfectly clear in this revelation and in other places in God’s word-- all men will be judged by the Lord’s promises and commandments (1Jn. 5:3; Rev. 22:14).
- D. The inclusiveness of the last judgment.
- 1. The “small and the great” will be among those judged (vs. 12).
 - 2. All the “dead” who were in “the sea” will be judged. These are either:
 - a. All dead persons whose physical remains are in the literal sea. Some might suppose that the “recovery” of those bodies would be more difficult than those buried in the land. The “sea” and the “land” [death and Hades] would include all the dead, regardless of where they are buried.
 - b. All men who are alive physically but dead spiritually in the “sea” [the corrupt world of unrest-- see comments on Rev. 13:1, page 124]. This concept assures that all lost [spiritually dead] persons, whether physically living *or* dead, will stand before the Great Judge and give an accounting to Him for such wicked deeds as have been portrayed in the entirety of this revelation to John.
 - 3. Those whose spirits had been separated from their bodies in death (James 2:26) and who are being held in Hades awaiting the judgment (Luke 16:23) will appear.
 - a. Hades [“hell” in KJV and Confraternity] appears to be an interim habitation between death and judgment for all the dead. It has a place of rest and blessing [“Abraham’s bosom”-- Luke 16: 22,25] and a place of torment [Luke 16:23,24].
 - b. While the emphasis may still be on the appearance of wicked men to be judged, the good will also be included, since “Hades” holds both classes of men.
- E. The destiny of the wicked following the last judgment.
- 1. Death and Hades [all *evildoers* who had died and whose souls were in Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This punishment is called “the second death.”
 - a. “Death” [*thanatos*] is a “separation.”
 - b. Physical death is the separation of the body from the spirit (James 2:26).
 - c. Spiritual death is the separation of man from God (Genesis 3:24).
 - d. *Sin* separates man from God in this world (Heb. 3:12); *sin* also will separate wicked men from God in the world to come (Rev. 21:27).
 - 2. The first death of the wicked is the death of their spirits in sin; their bodies live physically (Rom. 7:9-11). The second death is the death of *both* body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28).
 - 3. A sobering truth-- “Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Does Revelation Chapter Twenty Teach Premillennialism?

One of the most hurtful and erroneous doctrines to which one will be exposed in the modern religious world is called premillennialism. The term has *three* parts: (1) *pre--* “before”; (2) *millennial* -- “one thousand”; (3) *ism--* “adherence or attachment to a system or idea.” It suggests, therefore, “promoting a doctrine that involves things thought to occur before the end of the ‘thousand years’ mentioned in Revelation 20.” Although there are many varieties and different forms of premillennialism, most hold to several concepts:

1. God’s plan for man included the establishment of Christ’s earthly kingdom;
2. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews as their King postponed that goal;
3. The church was substituted for the kingdom until Christ’s second coming;
4. Both living and dead saints [only] will be caught up to be with Jesus in the air when He first comes; this occurrence is called the “rapture” [a “transporting”]. This “rapture” will continue for about seven years;
5. During that same time, great tribulation will afflict the wicked left on earth; many will be converted during this period;
6. When the “rapture” is completed, Christ and His saints will return to earth in a “revelation.” The tribulation saints will be raised and Christ will finally set up His kingdom in Jerusalem, where He will rule on David’s throne for 1,000 years. The raising of saints at the “rapture” and at the “revelation” is the “first resurrection”;
7. During these 1,000 years, the Jews will be converted to Jesus and return to Palestine, where they will restore Mosaic worship and other Jewish activities;
8. The 1,000 years reign of Christ will also witness widespread peace, prosperity, and spirituality throughout the earth. Satan will be “bound” during this time and the saints will reign with Christ;
9. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed to resume his war at Armageddon against Christ and His cause; the devil will be defeated;
10. The wicked dead will be raised [the “second resurrection”], the final judgment will be conducted, and eternal reward and everlasting punishment will begin.

[See the CHART, “Premillennial View of Revelation Chapter Twenty,” page 200.]

While no form of the term “premillennialism” appears in Revelation 20, several concepts common to the theory may be found: 1,000 years; binding of Satan; the bottomless pit; saints reigning with Christ; the release of Satan; beheaded souls; the mark of the beast; a first resurrection; a second death; Gog and Magog; a great battle; a lake of fire and brimstone; etc.

The question, “Does Revelation 20 teach premillennialism?” is best answered by observing that most of the key elements of the theory nowhere appear in the chapter. Jenkins cites Foy Wallace’s list of “missing links” in the theory. In Revelation 20, you will not find:

1. The second coming of Christ;
2. A bodily resurrection;
3. A reign on earth;
4. The literal throne of David;
5. Jerusalem or Palestine;
6. Modern day Christians;
7. Christ on the earth.

Hailey adds two other key components that will not be found:

8. The conversion of the Jews;
9. The church on earth.

The theory of premillennialism, supposedly taught in Revelation 20, demands:

1. *Two* future comings of Christ-- one at the time of “revelation” and another at the end of the world. The Scriptures speak of only *one* return of the Lord. The saved will not then reign with Him on earth but will meet Him in the air and “thus *always* be with the Lord”(1Thes. 4:13-18);
2. *Three* bodily resurrections-- one at the “rapture” [the saints], one after the “revelation” [“tribulation” saints], and still another at the end of time [the wicked dead]. The Bible clearly supports only *one* resurrection of good and bad people (John 5:28,29);
3. *Two* thrones upon which Christ will sit and rule-- one in literal Palestine and another in heaven. The apostles proclaimed only *one* throne and *one* rule. Jesus began to rule after His resurrection (Acts 2:3-36) and continues to rule until death has been destroyed at the end of time (Rev. 20:13);
4. *Two* inheritances for the righteous-- one in Palestine during the “millennium” and another in heaven in eternity. The Bible declares that the *land* promise to the Jews was fulfilled (Joshua 21:43). The promise of *salvation* will be fulfilled after the last judgment (Matt. 25:36);
5. *One thousand* years of peace, prosperity, and spirituality on the earth. Instead, the Lord’s promises are that: (1) He came not to give peace on the earth but a sword and division (Luke 12:51); (2) the poor will always be with us (John 12:8); (3) evil men will grow worse and worse and will deceive and be deceived (2Tim. 3:13).

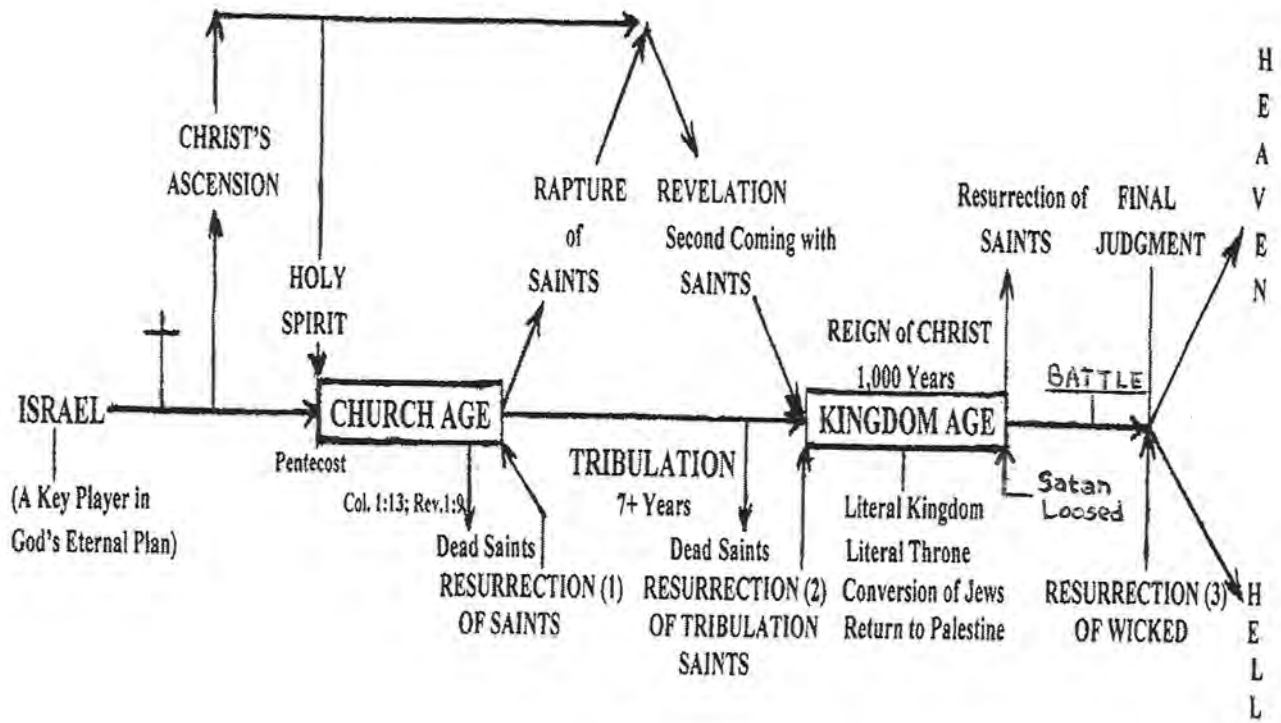
If Revelation 20 teaches premillennialism, it *contradicts* the rest of the Bible.

1. It would teach that the church of Christ and the kingdom of Christ are not the same institution. But they are (Matt. 16:18,19).
2. It would teach that the church was established only as a substitute for the kingdom and represents a frustration of God’s original plan. But

inspired teachers preached “good news” about the kingdom, not disappointment (Acts 8:12).

3. It would teach that the church is a second-rate institution, not nearly so important as the yet-to-be-established kingdom. But all that is said about the church in the New Testament stresses its supreme importance. It is: God’s family (1Tim. 3:15); Christ’s bride (Eph. 5:32); God’s temple (1Cor. 3:16); Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22,23); the saved on earth (Eph. 5:23); the *fulness* of Christ (Eph. 5:23).
4. It would teach that Christ is not now king on His throne but that He will begin to reign after a period of “rapture.” But inspiration assures us that He is now reigning on David’s throne in heaven, not just *ready to reign* in Palestine when the time is right (Acts 2:29-36).
5. It would teach that the Jews are still God’s special people and will enjoy special blessings when their political eminence is re-established and their land is restored. But Scripture teaches otherwise that God now has no favorites; all are treated equally (Acts 10:34,35).
6. It would teach that Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years as an earthly king. Contrariwise, God’s word emphasizes that only *after* we have entered heaven will we be privileged to “see His face” (Rev. 22:4).
7. It would teach that Christ’s return is not imminent [liable to occur at any time]. Many other things must happen first: the Jew’s conversion; rebuilding the Jerusalem temple; etc. But if those things are not imminent, neither could His second coming be imminent. Jesus warned that only at a time when we do not expect His return will it occur (Luke 12:40).
8. It would teach that the Jews will be converted as a nation. But Paul declared that each one as an individual, not as part of a nation, will “give account of himself before God” (Rom. 14:12).

PREMILLENNIAL VIEW OF REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY



1. What *two* objects did the angel have in his hand? (1)
2. What did the angel do with each object? (2,3)
3. For how long would the dragon [Satan] be bound? (3)
4. What did John see on the thrones? How long did some reign with Christ? (4)
5. When did the “rest of the dead” live again? (5)
6. Those in the “first resurrection” would reign for how long with Christ? (6)
7. At the end of 1,000 years, what would be done to Satan, and what would he do? (7,8)
8. What was the outcome of the battle between Satan and God? (8-10)
9. Who were already in the lake of fire when Satan was thrown there? (10) [See 19:20.]
10. **Find the verses:**
 - a. Where the second coming of Christ is mentioned. _____
 - b. Where saints are promised to be “raptured” for seven years. _____
 - c. Where sinners will suffer great tribulation during the rapture. _____
 - d. Where Christ will reign on earth on David’s throne for 1,000 years. _____
 - e. Where all Jews will eventually be converted to Christ. _____
 - f. Where the nation of Israel will return to physical Palestine. _____

Lesson Twenty-one: Chapter 21:1-27

Home at Last-- All Things Made New

As has been pointed out several times previously, Revelation was written to the seven churches of Asia with *two* fundamental purposes to accomplish. First, the saints who were being persecuted at the hands of the Roman government needed assurance that their tribulation was neither hopeless nor endless. Despite the severity of their problems, relief would “shortly” be accompanied by wonderful spiritual rewards for them. Second, God’s justice in dealing with mankind must be proclaimed with the utmost certainty. Not only must He reward righteous people for their trust and obedience to His will but also He must punish those who had chosen to follow the dictates of Satan and his earthly agents.

John had witnessed the souls of martyrs under a sacrificial altar as they cried out to the Lord for vengeance. Their plaintive question was, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth?” (6:9-11). In John’s vision, heaven answered that question. The ultimate destinies of the dragon [Satan] and his *three* principal agents, the sea beast [the political empire], the land beast [pagan religion and emperor worship], and the great city Babylon [Rome] were declared when all three were cast into the eternal lake of fire and brimstone. God, in His time, would surely inflict on the oppressors of the saints punishment commensurate with the terrible suffering for which they had been responsible.

Now, only *one* issue remained to be resolved. What about the promises made to Christians who had persevered in their faithfulness under the worst of circumstances? Would their reward be worth the awful price they had paid? The final scenes of John’s heavenly drama would put their concerns to rest. The glories of their eternal home with the Lord would be sufficient to convince them that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

B. W. Johnson makes these remarks about the happy prospects for the faithful which were about to be revealed to John as the revelation nears its conclusion:

The last verses of the last chapter have portrayed the terrors of the eternal judgment and the fate of those who have not served God. There ends the history of the godless world. As far as inspiration has revealed the future state the godless disappear forever from the history of the Universe in the prison house called the Lake of Fire. If the prophet’s eyes had not been opened to see beyond these scenes, dark would seem the fate of our race. After a thousand years of purity and triumph history would seem to end in the terror of the judgment day and the darkness of the second death. But our Lord has mercifully lifted the curtain beyond and revealed to us the glorious final destiny of man. After a long and weary struggle, and a history full of dark and eventful episodes, mankind will reach a goal of happiness and splendor that it is vain to attempt to describe or even conceive. When the

last battle is ended and the author of evil with all his works, the curses he had wrought, and the servants that have promoted his ends, are cast into the eternal prison house, and their power to do evil forever broken, then will dawn the bright morning of eternal bliss and glory.

The Text:

I. A new heaven and a new earth. 21:1.

A. Numerous scenes revealing the punishment of the wicked had passed before John's eyes in rapid succession [chapters 18-20].

1. They had culminated in the picture of God's ultimate judgment of all who were "not found written in the Book of Life" (20:15).
2. Perhaps his readers at this point would be asking, "But what about us?" "What will happen to those who are written in the Book?"
3. Chapters twenty-one and twenty-two will answer such questions of persecuted Christians with strong assurances of their future reward.

B. Among the casualties of Satan's evil operations in the world were the "old" heaven and earth.

1. Man's first home had been created to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), but it had been corrupted and diminished by man's sins against the Creator (Gen. 3:17-19).
2. The original heaven and earth were destined to be destroyed by fire (2Pet. 3:7,12), and man would need another habitation.
 - a. A *far better* home [heaven] would be provided for the righteous (2Pet. 3:13).
 - b. A *far worse* home [hell] would be occupied by the unrighteous (Matt. 25:41).
3. The old heaven and earth would "flee away" at the judgment and "no more place" would "be found" for them (Rev. 20:11).

C. This new home for the saved would also be God's home (21:3); there was "no more sea" to separate Him from His people.

1. Separation was present when John's vision opened at the great "throne scene" (4:6).
2. Separation had diminished when victorious disciples stood on the sea (15:2).
3. Separation had disappeared in this new relationship between the Lord and His redeemed children.
4. The "sea" also may represent the turmoil of the sinful world, which is the cause of separation between God and man (Isa. 59:2).

II. The holy city descending from heaven. 21:2,3.

A. It was the *New Jerusalem*.

1. The "*old Jerusalem*" was identified with those in bondage to sin (Gal. 4:25).

2. The “*New Jerusalem*” was composed of those who were free from sin (Gal. 4:26).
3. It was the blood-bought *church* of Christ (Matt. 5:14; Heb. 12:22,23).

B. It was a *holy* city.

1. Babylon was a “great” city, but it was very wicked and bound to Satan (18:21).
2. Its “greatness” had only brought it eternal torment (20:10).
3. This city’s “holiness” had brought communion with God (Rom. 6:22; Heb. 12:14).

C. It was the *bride* of Christ.

1. See the comments on Jewish marriage traditions, pages 181, 182.
2. The harlot/city had been arrayed in gaudy worldly ornaments (17:4).
3. The bride/city was adorned with holiness appropriate to her husband (1Pet. 1:16).

D. It was God’s *tabernacle* with men.

1. Kenneth Wuest translates the verse, “Consider this. The tent of God [the glorified body of the Lord Jesus in which He lives] is with men. And He shall live in a tent with them.”
2. The O.T. tabernacle was the place where humanity could meet with divinity to worship and serve (Heb. 9:2-7).
3. The new tabernacle [*skene*-- “a tent, booth, tabernacle,” a tent of meeting] where man communes with God is the *church*, which is also His family (1Tim. 3:15).
4. God’s *temple* is also identified with the *church* as the place where He dwells and walks among His people (2Cor. 6:16-18).

III. Unique blessings in store for the holy city of God. 21:4-7.

A. All things would be “made new” for them by a loving God.

1. “Old” [former] things were the undesirable things that had characterized the earthly lives of Christians as they suffered for Christ and for His truth.
2. Christians were well acquainted with tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain inflicted upon them at the hands of their Roman persecutors.
3. Relief from an environment of overwhelming oppression was very important to disciples who were anxiously looking forward to the secure and tranquil surroundings of the new heaven and earth.
4. In order to emphasize the *certainty* of relief for the saints, the Lord from His throne ordered John to make sure that he wrote down His promise. Furthermore, He gave His personal testimony that the promise of “new things” was “faithful and true” and would be carried out.
5. The promise of relief was so certain of fulfillment that it could be declared already “done!” Christ so completely controls both the beginning and the end of every event in heaven and on earth that He may be seen as the very essence of Alpha [the beginning] and Omega [the end].
6. Albert Barnes remarks on the attractiveness of an existence in heaven without the

things that are burdensome to human life on earth:

In all that future world of glory, not one shall ever die; not a grave shall ever be dug! What a view do we begin to get of heaven, when we are told there shall be no *death* there! How different from earth, where death is so common; where it spares no one; where our best friends die; where the wise, the good, the useful, the lovely die; where fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, sons, daughters, all die; where we habitually feel we must die... we have here a view of heaven [where] the redeemed will never see death again...the slow funeral procession will never be witnessed there, nor will the soil ever open its bosom to furnish a grave...

The word sorrow here--*penthos*-- denotes sorrow or grief of any kind; sorrow for the loss of property or friends; sorrow for disappointment, persecution, or care; sorrow over our sins, or sorrow that we love God so little, and serve him so unfaithfully; sorrow that we are sick, or that we must die. How innumerable are the sources of sorrow here; how constant is it on the earth! Since the fall of man there has not been a day, an hour, a moment, in which this has not been a sorrowful world; there has not been a nation, a tribe-- a city or a village-- nay, not a family, where there has not been grief. There has been no individual who has been always perfectly happy. No one rises in the morning with any certainty that he may not end the day in grief; no one lies down at night with any assurance that it may not be a night of sorrow. How different would this world be if it were announced that henceforth there would be no sorrow! How different, therefore, will heaven be when we shall have the assurance that henceforth grief shall be at an end!

- B. Everything that had contributed to the unpleasantness of their lives would be taken away by their God and replaced with things extremely pleasant.**
 - 1. The saved would have access to the fountain of the water of life. That blessing comes through intimacy with Jesus, who is the water of life (John 4:14).
 - 2. The saved would inherit “all things” desirable.
 - 3. The saved would enjoy a family relationship with both Father and Son and share in all spiritual advantages attached to family membership.
 - 4. William Hendricksen offers these thoughts about things “made new” by the Lord:

Only God can make new. People may vainly imagine that by means of better education, a better environment, better legislation, and a more equitable distribution of wealth they are going to usher in a new era, a golden age, the Utopia of man’s ardent desire. Their dream remains a dream! Neither economic nor disarmament conferences, neither better schools nor share-the-wealth programs are going to bring about a really golden age, a new heaven and earth, a new order. It is ever God who through his Spirit, makes all things new.

IV. Disaster in the midst of renewal. 21:8.

- A. The *mercy* of God will assure the blessedness of saints who have persevered.**
- B. The *justice* of God will demand the condemnation of disciples who have faltered.**
 - 1. All who comprise the devil’s “rogues’ gallery” will share the devil’s fate in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

2. A wide variety of transgressors will be in the unhappy company of the damned:
 - a. The cowardly [fearful]. God takes no pleasure in people who allow personal concerns to displace personal responsibilities in the kingdom (Heb. 10:38);
 - b. The unbelieving. Faith that cannot sustain a disciple through the trials and temptations that confront him is no better than no faith at all (Luke 12:8,9);
 - c. The abominable [*bdelugma*-- one who professes faith but denies by works] are measured by their *works* rather than by their *words*, and God's judgment is by man's *works* (Titus 1:16);
 - d. Murderers obviously can have no part in a heaven governed by *love*. But Christians must remember that murder is an extreme expression of *hatred*, for which the saved will also be condemned (1John 3:15);
 - e. The sexually immoral [fornicators-- ASV] have abandoned standards of decency and morality for lustful pursuits. It is only right that they should share their eternity with the citizens of Babylon, the "great city" of lust (18:3,7);
 - f. Sorcerers who have dealt in deceit and intimidation to gain an advantage over the untaught and the unwary have much in common with the beast from the land [false religion] (13:13,14). It is appropriate that their fate should be the same as his (19:20);
 - g. Idolaters who chose to honor some power other than Almighty God would be out of place where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are All in All (Eph. 2:18);
 - h. All liars. Jesus declared Himself to be the Way, *the Truth*, and the Life (John 14:6). Disrespect for truth is disrespect for the Word of Truth, and liars face eternity in a second death with others who disregard the importance of truth, whether issuing from God or man.

V. The New Jerusalem appears for John's inspection. 21:9-11a.

A. The New Jerusalem is not heaven.

1. This is the common concept of the images depicted in chapters 21 and 22.
2. John's vision reveals the New Jerusalem as the church in heaven.
 - a. It first appears to John coming out of heaven (verse 2).
 - b. The angel proposed to show John the Lamb's "wife" (verse 9) but showed him "the great city, the holy Jerusalem" (verse 10).
 - c. The "Lamb's wife" and "New Jerusalem" therefore are one and the same.
 - d. The bride [wife] of Christ is the church of Christ (Eph. 5:32,33).
 - e. New Jerusalem is the N.T. church in heaven.
3. Only a brief description of heaven appears in verses 1-5 of chapter 22.
 - a. Conditions necessary for the *maintenance* of eternal life are revealed there.

B. There are several variations among writers about what the New Jerusalem is.

1. Some reject all interpretations that place the church in heaven.

- a. The ideal environment described is said to portray the improvements enjoyed by the church on earth following the end of Roman persecutions.
- b. Jim McGuigan defends this position:

Chapter 21 is the triumphant Church. *But it is the triumphant Church in history.*

It has not moved into heaven. It still shines among the nations and brings light to those who walk in darkness. The figures used to show its triumph and glory could just as easily be used of her eternal abode in heaven, but that is not what John uses them for...

The *picture* in chapter 21 is of a new universe and a huge jeweled city coming down out of heaven and resting on the earth. The people who live in that city are smiling and happy-- they have no fear of any invasion and death...

- c. While this is a proposition worthy of serious consideration, it appears that the conditions portrayed in chapter 21 are *so* perfect and *so* ideal as to be more appropriate to eternity in heaven than to time on earth.
2. Another view is that these images have a *dual* application. They reveal beautiful pictures of both the here and the hereafter of the Lord's people. Hendricksen says:

But over the vision of the harlot-city of verse 8 there hovers over the splendid vision of the bride-city, the city of God, Holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, Rev. 21:9- 22:5. It is the ideal church of the future foreshadowed by the ideal church of the present...

Observe, moreover, that the entire conception is eschatological: the church of the *future* is here described, and the church of the *present*, mainly insofar as it is a shadow of that which is to come.

3. Still another interpretation considers that the New Jerusalem represents "the glorified state of the righteous both now and forevermore" [Arthur Ogden]. Further, Ogden adds:

The vision scene of this holy city, new Jerusalem, must then be viewed from the standpoint of the New Covenant. On earth it involves the church, but...the new Jerusalem is more than the church. It includes the angels of heaven, the just dead who were cleansed by Christ's sacrifice, and the righteous who have died since that time. All of these inhabit this new city. It is the city of our Great King which means that it is the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. This is the Jerusalem in which Christ was to reign!

4. The most popular opinion about the identity of the New Jerusalem is held by Homer Hailey and Albert Barnes, among others. Hailey comments:

In the series of visions beginning in chapter twelve, the seer beheld the birth of the man child; the assault on the church by the dragon's agents; the trials of the church; the waging of the great war; the destruction of the harlot city, the beast, and false prophet; the final conflict with Satan and his destruction; the passing of the present order; the final judgment of mankind; and the punishment of the wicked. From this arrangement of visions it is logical that the next scene in order would portray the final glory of the church as it comes to rest with God beyond time. This appears to be the design of the revelation before us. Heaven could be no more than is revealed symbolically in this picture of perfect fellow-

ship with God, safety, security, and abundance in the glorious city described by everything that is precious and priceless.

Barnes contributes his thoughts about the identity of New Jerusalem:

No man can suppose that this [picture-RG] is literally true, and hence this must be regarded as a figurative or emblematic description. It is a representation of the heavenly state under the image of a beautiful city, of which Jerusalem was, in many respects, a natural and striking emblem.

C. Regardless of these differences, many scholars are generally agreed that:

1. New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ, the church (verse 9);
2. New Jerusalem is a great and holy city, coming “from God” (verses 2, 10);
3. New Jerusalem is a glorious city, having the glory of God (verse 11);
4. As Moses was taken up to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, to view Israel’s promised land on earth (Deut. 34:1), so John was transported to a “great and high mountain” to see the glorified state of spiritual Israel in heaven.
5. The *general* attributes assigned to the saved, verses 9-11, will be developed in the rest of the chapter by a more *detailed* description of the wonderful characteristics of the New Jerusalem.

VI. The glorious features of the New Jerusalem. 21:11b-27.

A. The description of the city is portrayed through symbols which are intended to convey an impression, not to provide an earthly-oriented list of specifications for a literal city.

1. The symbols originate in the readers’ familiarity with the features of great world cities.
2. Even wicked cities like Rome and Babylon could furnish both positive and negative images of physical features that would translate into striking spiritual images of the city of God [e.g., measurements, numbers of gates, ornamentation, systems of lighting, types of inhabitants, etc.].
3. Images of beautiful things in the natural world could also provide concepts of the unrivaled beauty and glory of features incorporated into the New Jerusalem [e.g., precious stones and metals, heavenly bodies, bright daylight, etc.].
4. Symbols must not be pressed into literal molds. Impressions can allow for inconsistencies between the symbolic and the literal, but not for plain contradictions. Thus, dimensions may be exaggerated to convey an impression but should not be incompatible among themselves so as to do violence to the intended impression [e.g., the wall’s given measurement (in cubits) in verse 17 is more likely its thickness rather than its height because that gives a more likely proportion to its length (in miles)].

B. The particular characteristics of the New Jerusalem.

1. Viewing the holy city from afar (vs. 10), the most immediate impression made on the apostle was that it glowed brightly with a pervasive and beautiful LIGHT. “A

- city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14), and neither can a city from which emanates a great light that dispels the surrounding darkness of the night. New Jerusalem is illuminated by the glory of God and the Lamb (vs. 23).
2. The next thing noticed was the great and high WALL of the city.
 - a. It bounded the city, which was twelve thousand furlongs square [1500 miles].
 - b. Its height apparently is undisclosed, but its thickness was about 216 feet. [See A. 4., above.]
 - c. It rested on twelve foundations, each one a huge stone engraved with the name of an apostle of Christ. Every blessing available within the city had been made possible by the gospel which the apostles had preached to every creature (Mark 16:15,16). The foundation laid by God is solid and reflects the gospel by which the Lord knows those who are His children (2Tim. 2:19).
 - d. Although there were actually thirteen names available [including Matthias and Paul] there were only twelve names on the stones. This confirms the symbolic nature of these images and the use of symbolic numbers to convey impressions [i.e., 12 signifies the completeness of God’s revelation through the apostles].
 - e. The huge wall offers *total security* more than *protection* to the inhabitants of New Jerusalem. Although the church is in great need of protection from its numerous enemies while on the earth, the church in heaven will have *no* foes from whom to be shielded. Every enemy of truth will be gone. Security will be assured.
 3. Within the magnificent walls were twelve GATES, three in each wall.
 - a. Ordinarily, gates allow for exiting as well as for entering. Unfaithful members on earth *will lose* their salvation (Gal. 5:4), but none who enter the eternal city will entertain any fear of expulsion. “And they shall reign forever and ever” (22:5).
 - b. The gates into New Jerusalem provide unlimited access to “whoever desires” to enter (22:17). Loyal converts from every direction will march triumphantly through its gates without regard to national or physical qualifications (Matt. 28:19; Rev. 22:17). The gates will never be shut to any loyal saint (vs. 25).
 - c. At each gate was an angel. Each gate bore the name of *a* spiritual tribe of Israel or the names of *all twelve* spiritual tribes [the former is more likely]. See Rev. 7: 4-8 for John’s list of the “sealed” from each spiritual tribe. The function of these angels is uncertain. They probably don’t serve as guards, since no danger exists, but they may represent the role that angels play in the service and in the salvation of saints on earth as they face temptations and persecutions (Heb. 1:14; Luke 12:8; 15:10). Through their providential assistance in our spiritual activities, disciples can be “sealed” [certified] as the faithful of the Lord.
 4. The angel who talked with John (vs. 9) had a gold reed with which to measure the

city with its gates and walls. A ordinary reed [rod] was appropriate for measuring the faithfulness of the church while it struggled on earth, but now only a *gold* reed could proclaim the *perfection* of the now sinless city. The description of its magnificent qualities continues in the following verses as measurements are taken.

5. New Jerusalem boasts both unwavering stability and great capacity. It is four-square in its dimensions, twelve thousand furlongs [1500 miles] in length, width, and height. Such a huge place would accommodate unlimited numbers of saved people. Foolish efforts have been made to compute how many can live in this city, but such endeavors ignore both the *symbolism* of its description and the *power* of the Christ who promised to “prepare a place” suitable for His disciples (Jn. 14:3). Furthermore, literal cities often expand their borders irregularly when confronted with changing circumstances. But God’s city, on the other hand, had remained symmetrical during its development over centuries of time because it had remained faithful to the unchanging pattern predetermined for it by the Lord.
6. The wall was 144 cubits [each about 18 in.] thick [?]. An impression of strength is conveyed by the use of *actual* dimensions with which John’s readers would be familiar. Thus, although the measurements were taken in the vision by an angel, they were expressed in terms [cubits] used by man. That is not to say that the wall was 216 *actual* feet thick, but humans perhaps could relate better to numbers that were within their experience, and their heavenly prospects would seem more *real*.
7. Wuest translates verse 17: “And he measured its wall, two hundred and sixteen feet [in height], using the measuring system of mankind, which was that used by the angel.”
8. The CONSTRUCTION and DECORATION of the city were just as impressive as its size and capacity.
 - a. The *wall* was made of jasper, a stone defined by the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible as a precious green stone “transparent or translucent,” and hence was a kind of chalcedony or agate. The Septuagint [Greek Old Testament] translates the Hebrew word as “onyx.”
 - b. The *city* was made of a sort of gold unknown to humans, pure and clear as glass.
 - c. The *foundations* of the walls were adorned with twelve different kinds of precious stones of all colors and shades, both familiar and unfamiliar to us.
 - d. The *gates* were crafted from twelve pearls. More impressively, each gate was made of only one enormous pearl, a fact difficult for the physical mind to comprehend but which adds to the magnificence of the gates.
 - e. The STREET of New Jerusalem consisted of the same wonderful pure and transparent gold that was used in the construction of the entire city (vs. 18).
 - f. NO TEMPLE was seen by John. The city was as remarkable for what it *didn’t* contain as for what it *did*. No respectable town would exist without a place for Jews and/or Gentiles to worship. But New Jerusalem, unlike old Jerusalem,

had no such edifice. At first, that seems very strange for a city in which a primary activity always would be to worship the Holy Three. But Scripture explains. God Almighty and the Lamb will serve as its temple. That is, there was no *special* place in New Jerusalem where saints should offer worship and adoration to their Creator and to their Savior. The Divine Ones would be accessible *everywhere* within the city, and devotion to them would be appropriate in *every* place.

- g. *NO SUN* and *NO MOON* were needed in New Jerusalem because God's glory and the Lamb's light shone throughout the city, and that far surpassed any light that might emanate from any other source.
- h. Those from every nation who had responded to the call of the gospel (Matt. 28: 18-20)-- all the *SAVED OF EARTH*-- would inhabit the heavenly country. The *glory* and *righteousness* of their faithfulness to Jesus amid the persecutions of the devil would be completely compatible with the environment of righteousness that permeated the entire city. These godly saints had been "kings" who had reigned with Jesus on earth through their faith. Now, the faith of these disciples would forever adorn the streets and the halls of God's abode.
- i. *NO UNGODLY INHABITANTS* would be allowed within New Jerusalem. The spiritually defiled, the abominable, and the liars of earth will be excluded from its premises. Only righteous and devoted persons whose names are enrolled in heaven can find a dwelling place there. What a joy to live forever among good neighbors!

1. If the “sea” symbolizes separation, what does this tell us about God and men in the “new” heaven and earth? (1)
2. What else about New Jerusalem shows the closeness of God and men? (3, 22)
3. What unpleasant things will not be found in heaven? (4)
4. What *three* blessings are promised to the faithful in the new order of things? (6, 7)
5. What is the prospect for the wicked? What are some examples of wickedness that will condemn people? (8)
6. The church is identified by *four* terms. What are they? (9, 10)
7. List *three* main features of the New Jerusalem? (11, 12-14)
8. To what are these features of the city compared:
 - a. Its light (11):
 - b. Its dimensions (16):
 - c. Its construction material (18):
 - d. Its street (21):
 - e. Its gates (21):
9. What things will be missing from the city [in addition to those in number 3]? (22,23,27)
10. Who will and who will not inhabit New Jerusalem? (24-27)

Lesson Twenty-two: Chapter 22:1-21

The New Heaven and a Final Warning

Many Bible commentators believe that the first few verses of this chapter are in fact a continuation of the description of the New Jerusalem in chapter twenty-one. Many even question the rationality of the chapter division following 21:27. One writer voices such an opinion:

It is difficult to conceive what induced the author of the division of the New Testament into chapters to separate the first five verses of this chapter from the preceding chapter. A new chapter should have commenced at ver. 6 of ch. xxii; for the remainder properly comprises the conclusion of the whole book.

These remarks, of course, reflect the interpretation that chapter twenty-two opens by adding more facts about the New Jerusalem described in chapter twenty-one. However, although it is difficult to separate the concept of the church in heaven [New Jerusalem] from the concept of the heaven where its reward will be enjoyed, such a distinction appears to exist in John's vision as the curtain of revelation is about to be closed. The subject of the previous chapter was the glory of New Jerusalem; now it will be the New Heaven, a marvelous habitation where God's saved people can display the *perfection* of their eternal nature.

In the New Heaven, New Jerusalem will manifest: perfect security [no threat of harm]; perfect inclusiveness [no saint left out]; perfect beauty [in every feature]; perfect communion [with divinity]; a perfect environment [no sinners allowed]; perfect subsistence [eternal existence]; perfect health [spiritual]; and perfect service [to God].

None of these things would be possible apart from a compatible place where they could be exhibited throughout eternity. Just such a place is the New Heaven, home of the God-head, prepared by Jesus for His disciples following His ascension from the earth (John 14:3; Acts 1:10).

The Text

I. The New Heaven-- "Home of the Soul." 22:1-5.

A. Another phase of John's vision of the saints' reward is introduced.

1. The nature of the church in heaven will be perfect in every way. [See chapter 21.]
2. The environment in which the church will live is *also* absolutely perfect.
3. John had been shown every aspect of the bride's perfect nature (21:9-27).
4. He now is shown the perfect environment of the bride's new home (22:1-5).
 - a. The narrative seems to turn from the perfect church to the perfect home.

- b. If so, the chapter break, although contested by some, seems appropriate.
- B. The church in heaven will thrive amid its everlasting blessings:
1. It will be exalted and nourished as Christ's *bride* (Rev. 21:1; Eph. 5:24-27);
 2. It will be secure, beautiful, and complete as God's holy *city* (Rev. 21:10-26);
 3. It will be well supplied from the provisions of heaven's *garden* (Rev. 22:1-5).
- C. The bounty of heaven's garden will fill every need for eternal life.
1. Water, food, light, and health are all essential to physical life on earth and to spiritual life in heaven.
 2. Water of life will flow from God's throne to prevent spiritual thirst (John 4:14).
 - a. A river watered the first Paradise of God [Eden] to support the physical life of His first creation [man and animals] (Gen. 2:10).
 - b. A crystal-like river will water the second Paradise [heaven] and support the spiritual life of His new creation [the redeemed].
 - c. The water of life originated from the throne of God and of the Lamb (vs. 3) from whom *all* life comes (John 14:6).
 - d. The symbol of a life-giving river is rooted in O.T. prophecies such as Ezekiel's picture of water flowing from Israel's temple to heal the land (Ezek. 47:1-12).
 - e. Healing by water was also foretold by Joel (3:18) and Zechariah (14:8,9).
 3. The tree of life will provide spiritual food for the church in heaven.
 - a. This "tree" obviously will take the form of many trees, located in the "street" of the garden and on both banks of the river.
 - b. The trees bore twelve fruits ["crops of fruit"-- footnote-- ASV], a crop each "month," signifying a constant and never-ending supply of eternal life for the bride.
 - c. The fruit likely was of one kind that would sustain the saints' eternal life.
 - d. Overcomers in Ephesus had been promised to "eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).
 - e. Even the trees' leaves were intended for the "healing of the nations."
 - (1) There will be no sickness or injury to be "healed" in heaven (21:4).
 - (2) Nevertheless, all the nations of the saved (Isa. 2:2) will require robust spiritual "health" [Vine] to enjoy the wonders of heaven.
 - f. A curse had prevented Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:17,24) because of their sin against the command of God.
 - g. No such curse will deny access to heaven's tree because there will be no sin of disobeying God. "His servants shall serve Him."
 4. An abundance of light will allow the children to see the Father and the Son "face to face." This light will also reveal plainly the "name" [of God and Christ, Rev. 3:12] written [sealed] on their foreheads (7:3) to certify them as children of God.
 5. This pervasive light throughout the "new heaven" will emanate from the grace of the Lord God, not from "old" and less satisfactory sources such as sun and lamps.

6. The church will reign forever and ever through the complete exercise and enjoyment of their heavenly blessings.
 - a. Martyrs had reigned on earth for a “thousand years” in reward for their faithfulness and courage in the battle against Satan (Rev. 20:4).
 - b. Continued faithfulness will be recognized and appreciated even in heaven.

II. JOHN’S SYMBOLIC VISION IS ENDED.

- A. The things that were “near” (Rev. 1:3) and that “will take place after this” (1:19) have been portrayed in apocalyptic pictures in chapters 4 through 22:5 for the encouragement of persecuted disciples.
- B. Only final instructions to John and to the churches were needed before the revelation is completely finished.
 1. John must disperse the revelation appropriately among the churches.
 2. The churches must respond appropriately to the revelation.
 3. Reminders and admonitions to all will reflect the importance and the urgency of God’s message to His persecuted people.

III. The word of prophecy is the word of Almighty God. 22:6,7.

- A. It was imperative that the churches accept John’s revelation as *inspired* prophecy.
 1. Many false prophets were leading Christians astray about many things (1Jn. 4:1).
 2. A prophecy conveyed primarily by symbols might be regarded by its detractors as nothing more than the fantastic ravings of a deranged mind.
 3. It was vital that John should understand that the images he had seen were a real vision from the Lord, not just a dream or some other imaginary experience.
 4. The angel of the vision (21:9; 22:1) attested to the truthfulness of the prophecy.
 5. His mission was similar to that of earlier prophets [*prophetos*-- “a proclaimer of a divine message”] who faithfully delivered other revelations to the people of God.
 - a. Real prophecies always came to pass (2Pet. 2:21) because their messages were inspired by the “God of the prophets.”
 - b. The *same* God had commissioned His angel [the angel of 21:9 or some other] to transmit this revelation to the churches; it too would be fulfilled *as stated*.
 6. Time was short before the fulfillment of John’s revelation would “take place.”
 - a. Fulfillment obviously would not be completed within a short time because after twenty centuries everything foretold has not been done.
 - b. Execution of the revelation would “shortly” be set in motion; the time necessary for a *full* enactment was undisclosed.
- B. Tardiness in complying with the terms of the revelation would be foolish.
 1. The Lord would “come *quickly*” to enforce accountability to John’s message.
 - a. This pronouncement was spoken by Jesus Himself or quoted in His behalf by the prophesying angel.

- b. Those who complied with His prophecy would be blessed in all the ways promised in the revelation.
- c. Those who failed to “keep the words” of the prophecy could expect retribution.
2. He had promised to “come *quickly*” to those who turned deaf ears to the warnings included in the letters to the seven churches (2:5; 2:16; 3:3--“as a thief”).
3. It is certain that this was not a promise of a “soon” second coming at the end of the world, as twenty-one centuries prove.

IV. John’s testimony and his mistake. 22:8.9.

A. The angel who delivered the revelation had testified, “These things are faithful and true (vs. 6).”

1. John added the testimony of his two primary senses about the things he had both *seen* and *heard*.
2. The impact of the vision was so great on the apostle that he fell down in awe and amazement before the angelic messenger.
3. Two explanations of this incident are offered for this “repeat performance”:
 - a. John was *so overwhelmed* by the emotion of the moment that he repeated his previous mistake in spite of himself, even though he had been sharply rebuked for his wayward behavior (19:10);
 - b. This was not a *reoccurrence* of bad judgment on John’s part but a *second reporting* of what he had done earlier. McGuiggan adopts this position, and Ogden explains:

John related this sequence previously in 19:10 (cf. page 348). It is our opinion that John related the same occasion twice, and that the latter account is the true chronological setting of the event. It is unreasonable to image John making the same mistake twice. Furthermore, both presentations follow the viewing of the bride, the Lamb’s wife, which indicates that the two incidents are the same.

4. There were *three* reasons why such homage to an angel would be wrong.
 - a. He was merely a fellow servant [*sundoulos*-- *sun* denotes “association, community, fellowship, participation”-- Thayer]. Equality is the emphasis when *syn* is prefixed to another term. Worship requires a state of inequality.
 - b. He was one of a brotherhood of prophets. Brethren [*adelphos*] are “persons united by a common calling” [Vine]. Again, equality is the idea intended.
 - c. He was one of many who “keep the words of this book.” Greatness in the kingdom is determined by *service* (Matt. 23:11). Equality of service *to* the Lord results in equality when standing *before* the Lord.
5. Only ONE is greater than all others. It is evident that only worship to Him [i.e., the Godhead] is appropriate to God’s spiritual order.
 - a. Religions that elevate certain persons [popes, priests, apostles, bishops, pastors, “reverends,” and others, violate heaven’s principle of equality.

V. The urgency of John's revelation. 22:10-17.

A. The prophecy was not to be sealed and kept from the use of the churches.

1. Daniel's prophecy about future events was to be sealed. "Shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end..." (Dan. 12:4).
2. The events of Daniel's book would not take place for some time.
3. The events of John's book would "shortly take place" (vs. 6b).
4. This revelation should be sent to God's servants in a timely fashion (vs. 6b).
5. Premillennial doctrines err in expecting all fulfillment of Revelation's prophecies to be accomplished shortly before the end of the world. McGuiggan quotes John Walvoord, president of the Dallas Theological Seminary and a leading exponent of premillennialism in America:

The book of Revelation is, of course, the classic passage on premillennialism. Revelation...if taken in its plain intent, yields a simple outline of premillennial truth...the only method of interpretation of Revelation which has ever yielded a consistent answer to the question of its meaning is that which interprets the book...as having its general revelation plain, one to be fulfilled literally, and therefore subject to future fulfillment."

B. The prophecy should be used to warn the unfaithful and to encourage the faithful.

1. The unjust [doctrinally corrupt] and the filthy [morally corrupt] had but little time to determine their course of life and their eternal destiny.
 - a. No further warnings from heaven would be sent to attempt their reformation.
 - b. No "second chance" will be available once physical death or the final judgment of mankind overtakes those who are lost in sin (Heb. 9:27).
2. The righteous [doctrinally sound] and the holy [morally pure] just need to "keep on keeping on."
 - a. They will have fulfilled their "requirements" for eternal life once death or judgment occurs.
 - b. They will be in no danger of "losing their reward" (Mark 9:41).
 - c. The Lord is able to "keep" the faithful until the Day of judgment (2Tim. 1:12).
3. Judgment for all men both *in time* and *at the end of time* will be in the hands of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31).
 - a. The reward of eternal salvation will be His to bestow on the righteous.
 - b. The sentence of eternal damnation will be His to pronounce on the wicked.
4. Jesus is the Alpha [the Beginning] and the Omega [the End]. Christ, the Word, was with the Father in the *beginning* of creation (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1), and He will be with the Father when all things *end* in the eternal judgment of the good and the bad of earth (Matt. 25:11-46).
5. The words of Christ in verses 12 and 13 are either injected directly by Jesus into the narrative or His exact words are quoted by His angel for John to record.
6. One more sweeping statement about reward and punishment reminds both the righteous and the unrighteous about what is at stake in their immediate future.

The blessings of living in the wonderful city of God in eternity and the privilege of eating of the tree of everlasting life will be limited to those who respond properly to this awesome revelation given to the apostle John.

- a. Only those who “do His commandments” [wash their robes] will experience those blessings.
 - b. Excluded from those great gifts will be all who live in sin and who spend their lives in the pursuit of things that are ugly and untrue.
 - (1) “Dogs” were unclean animals and symbolic of unclean persons who engage in despicable behavior, particularly in sexual sins.
 - (2) Sorcerors were participants in the false religions of paganism who leaned heavily on trickery and deceit in their rituals and ceremonies.
 - (3) Men who love lies more than truth and who delight in dealing in untruths and in drawing others into their fraudulent schemes are as guilty before the Lord as the sexually immoral, the violent criminals, and the worshipers of gods other than the God of heaven.
 - (4) No sinner guilty of these sins or of other sins will be allowed inside the gates of God’s new heaven.
7. The personal witness of Jesus to the validity of these prophecies is added to that of the angel and to that of John. His testimony lends the strongest certification possible to “these things” that have been revealed to John and to the churches.
- a. Christ is the Root of David, “not in the sense that David sprang from him, as a tree does from a root, but in the sense that he was the ‘root-shoot’ of David, or that he himself sprang from him, as a sprout starts up from a decayed and fallen tree” [Barnes].
 - b. He is the Offspring of David, the Messiah, descended directly from the Jews’ great king in fulfillment of divine prophecy (e.g., Psa. 132:11; Isa. 11:10).
 - c. He is the Bright and Morning Star. Bright stars often represented powerful leaders. A morning star is sometimes seen to shine brightly just prior to the dawning of day. Hence, in Christ there is the promise of a “new order” of things that will bring His saints out of the darkness of affliction and suffering into the glorious light of relief and rest. His message to His beloved children is, “Don’t despair; things are going to get better!”
8. Who would not wish to share in such a hopeful prospect? The door is open to any who choose to participate. Heaven’s invitation is genuine.
- a. The Spirit through the gospel gently urges every sinner to “Come!” He waits patiently for every sinner’s response.
 - b. The bride [church] is also deeply concerned about the destiny of the lost and says to them, “Come! We will share the saving gospel with you!”
 - c. The impact of the gospel is so strong that many who hear it will be moved not

only to obey themselves but also to urge others to “Come!” with them in obedience to its commands.

- d. There is enough of the marvelous water of life for *all* who thirst for redemption to drink to their fill.
- e. Barnes has these words of encouragement for the spiritually needy:

Every one that is disposed to come, that has any sincere wish to be saved, is assured that he may live. No matter how unworthy he is; no matter what his past life has been; no matter how old or how young, how rich or how poor; no matter whether sick or well, a freeman or a slave; no matter whether educated or ignorant; no matter whether clothed in purple or in rags-- riding in state or laid at the gate of a rich man full of sores, the invitation is freely made to all to come and be saved. With what more appropriate truth *could* a revelation from heaven be closed?

- 9. Some scholars understand that the first *two* invitations of this passage were not made to sinners but to Jesus, who had said, “And behold, I am coming quickly.”
 - a. The Spirit is anxious to cooperate with the Son in bringing to fruition the Father’s eternal plan for His creation. He urges, “Come!”
 - b. The bride, the people of God, is anxious to commence the enjoyment of the blessings promised to her when her tribulations are over. She pleads to her Savior, “Come!”

VI. A last warning is delivered to all who will receive this grand revelation. 22:18-21.

- A. Not everyone will be disposed to give it proper respect and a hearing worthy of an inspired message from the heart of God. Ray Summers notes:

Verse 18 is a warning for the protection of the book. Apocalyptic books were treated with great freedom in John’s day. Men cut out the part they wanted and discarded the rest. But this is no ordinary apocalypse. To add to it or take from it is to incur the displeasure of God with its consequences-- strong language to assure the preservation of the book as John sent it to them.

- B. Numerous terrible plagues [punishments] are contained within the book [scroll] of Revelation. Thoughtful persons would strive at all costs to avoid incurring any *one* of them. It is frightening to learn that *all* of them will be visited upon any man who dares to ADD TO or to SUBTRACT FROM “the things that are written in this book.”
- C. Not only will such an offender suffer awful afflictions for his transgression, but he will also *miss the enjoyment* of the *good* “*things that are written in this book.*” What a wasted opportunity!
- D. This warning added by John demands an *urgent* response from its recipients.
 - 1. Jesus sounds the alarm for action once more: “Surely I am coming quickly.”
 - 2. Reformation must have top priority in the lives of the unprepared!
 - 3. Perseverance must be exhibited in the lives of the redeemed!
- E. Christ’s grace will be needed by all if they are to overcome and be ready!

AMEN.

- 1. What are some physical objects used symbolically in John's description of heaven? (1,2,14,19)**

- 2. What will assure God's people of their eternal closeness to their Father? (4)**

- 3. What everlasting blessing [among others] will Christians enjoy in heaven? (5)**

- 4. What are the last *two* "beatitudes" found in Revelation? (7,14)**

- 5. What earlier mistake did John make [or report again]? What admonition did he receive each time? (8; 19:10)**

- 6. Does verse 11 mean that wicked or righteous people cannot change their behavior or their eternal destiny? Why or why not? (11,15,17-19)**

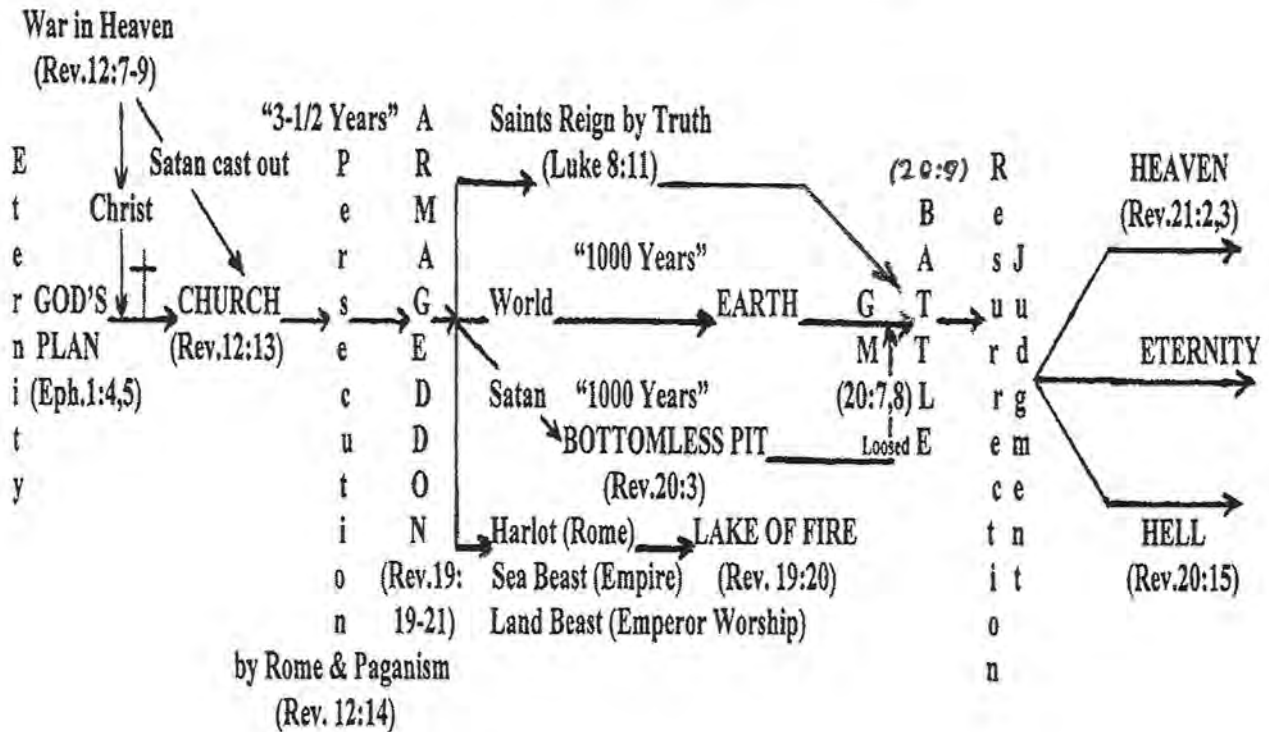
- 7. On what basis will eternal happiness or misery be decided? (12)**

- 8. Who will and who will not dwell inside the city of God? (14,15)**

- 9. What is the final warning in the Bible about respect for God's word? (18,19)**

- 10. What final promise was given to the saints? What does this promise mean? (20)**

REVELATION 12-22 -- *The Heavenly Story*



Explanation

1. There was "war in heaven" as Satan and his angels sought to defeat God's eternal plan to save the saved.
2. Many obstacles to God's plan, initiated by Satan, were faced by Jesus as He lived and taught on earth. Satan failed.
3. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as Savior were crucial for Satan to prevent. Satan failed.
4. Christ's church, also a key element of God's plan, became the object of Satan's fury after he was cast out of heaven and confined to activity on the earth.
5. Satan used the Roman empire with its emperor worship to oppress the church for 3-1/2 spiritual "years."
6. Severe persecution escalated until a "last-ditch" effort by Satan's forces occurred at "Armageddon."
7. The armies of evil, under Satan's and Rome's leadership, were soundly defeated by God, Christ, and the saints.
8. Following their relief from oppression, the faithful martyrs "reigned" with Christ for 1000 spiritual "years" to demonstrate the victory of God's word and God's plan over Satan's best efforts to destroy them.
9. During the 1000 years, people on earth continued to live and make their choices between good and evil.

REVELATION 12-22-- THE HEAVENLY STORY (Continued)

10. After "Armageddon," the great harlot (Rome), the sea beast (Empire), and the land beast (emperor worship) were all cast into the eternal lake of fire to be punished for their persecution of the church.
11. Satan was cast into a "bottomless pit" for 1000 spiritual "years" and much of his evil power on earth was limited.
12. When the 1000 spiritual "years" are completed, Satan will be "loosed" from the bottomless pit to practice evil on the earth with renewed force once again.
13. Gog and Magog (opponents of Christ and truth) will join with Satan to oppose the forces of righteousness in a great and final "battle."
14. God's wrath from heaven will finally and completely vanquish Satan, who will join the beast, the false prophet, and the great harlot to be forever punished in the lake of fire and brimstone.
15. The resurrection of all men will shortly(?) follow this final struggle, and the last judgment will be held for the good and the bad of all ages.
16. The righteous will be received into heaven to accomplish God's *eternal plan* to save the saved.
17. The unrighteous enemies of God's plan will be sent into hell, the lake of fire and brimstone, to be punished forever with Satan and all other wicked persecutors of God's people.
18. God's *eternal plan* will be consummated, and it will govern all things throughout eternity to come!

1. What was the date of Revelation? Give another possible date.
2. Where was John when he was given the revelation?
3. What Roman emperor *first* persecuted Christians? Why?
4. Which emperor was ruling if Revelation was written at the “late date”? Why did he persecute Christians?
5. Of the seven churches of Asia to whom letters were written:
 - (a) Which ones had nothing *bad* said about them?
 - (b) Which ones had nothing *good* said about them?
6. What is the probable purpose of the throne scene in chapters four and five?
7. What does each horseman represent under the first *four* seals?
8. What is the difference between the 144,000 and the great multitude in chapter seven?
9. Which plagues under the trumpets are the same/similar to those under the bowls of wrath? (Chapters 8,9,16)
10. What is the reason for “interludes” being inserted throughout Revelation?
11. How does the “little book” relate to the “big book” [scroll]?
12. Who are the two witnesses of chapter eleven?
13. Who is the radiant woman introduced in chapter twelve? Who [what] does she become in 12:13?

14. What does the sea beast represent?
15. What does the land beast represent?
16. What is the meaning of the “mark of the beast”?
17. What was the “song of Moses and the Lamb”?
18. Where is Armageddon where the great battle was to be fought?
19. Who/what was the harlot on the scarlet beast? What was the beast?
20. Who lamented the fall of Babylon? (Chapter 18)
21. What was the outcome of the battle of Armageddon?
22. What was the “first resurrection”? The “second death”?
23. Who/what were Gog and Magog?
24. What is the “book of life”?
25. Name some things from which saints are free in the “New Jerusalem” ? (Chapter 21)
26. Name some things which saints will enjoy in the new heaven. (Chapter 22)
27. What is the last “beatitude” in chapter 22?
28. What is the last invitation extended to men in Revelation? The last warning?

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