

The Last Judgment by Michelangelo (1475 - 1564)

THE SECOND CREATION

A Study of the Book of Revelation

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THE PREFACE

The Book of Revelation is a vision of hope from beginning to end. Yes, there are images of cataclysms and disasters, but there are also visions of consolation, adoration, and hope. There are 150 verses describing the disasters, but there are also 150 verses describing hope. There are also 120 verses describing what our relationship to God should be like.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the Book of Revelation focuses on life in this world. Yes, it also focuses on life in the next world, but its purpose is to give us hope in the midst of evil.

The Book of Revelation emerged from unfulfilled prophecy, which led to apocalyptic preaching. The prophetic literature had the following characteristics:

1. The prophets reminded the people of the past, and told them what God had done for them.
2. The prophets gave an analysis of the present, and described human relationships and the evil forces at work in the world.
3. The prophets proclaimed their insights into the future, and called their listeners to repentance, warning them of the disaster which would come if they refused to repent.

Apocalyptic preaching slowly replaced prophetic preaching. Apocalypticism had the following characteristics:

1. It is eschatological, that is, it has to do with “last things” or the end the age.
2. It is dualistic. Evil and good are locked in a conflict, and it is not obvious to everyone as to which one will win.
3. It is deterministic. In the end, evil will be defeated.
4. it is esoteric and highly symbolic and sometimes viewed as in a special code, which not everyone can understand.
5. It is comforting to those who are on God’s side, for God will ultimately win.

The difference between prophecy and apocalypticism is as follows: In prophecy we are *actors* called to change the future. In apocalypticism, we are *spectators* to events we cannot change. Most scholars consider the Revelation an apocalyptic book. Some scholars view the Revelation as a mixture of the prophetic and apocalyptic.



John in Boiling Oil

THE INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR John, Son of Zebedee	
Date: 90 C.E.	Place: Patmos
Purpose: To encourage and give hope To Christians expecting persecution and death	

THE AUTHOR

The author of the Book of Revelation was John, the son of Zebedee, and author of the Gospel of John and the three Epistles. Justin Martyr of Rome (150 C.E.), Irenaeus of Gaul (180 C.E.), and Tertullian of North Africa (200 C.E.) all accepted John's authorship. Only Dionysius of Alexandria (247 C.E.) and Eusebius (325 C.E.) disagree. Disagreement usually focuses on the different style of writing, which contains rich imagery and symbolism.

THE DATE

The most common date offered is approximately 90 C.E., which would have been during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 C.E. An earlier date however cannot be ruled out, and the book could have been written as early as 69 to 72 C.E., while either Nero (54-68 C.E.) or Vespasian ruled Rome. Certainly portions of the book were written around 70 C.E., even if it was not finished until 90 C.E. Those who favor a late date believe *Revelation 17:11* refers to Domitian as the reincarnation of Nero and not Nero himself.

THE PLACE

Everyone agrees that a man named John wrote this conclusion to the New Testament in exile on the Island of Patmos, which is one of the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Patmos is about ten miles long and six miles wide, and was used by the Romans for political banishment.

THE PURPOSE

The Book of Revelation may be difficult to read, but its purpose is very clear. It is to encourage and give hope to those Christians who are facing persecution and death. Its message is that through Christ, God will defeat all his enemies—including Satan himself—and reward his faithful people with the blessings of a new heaven and earth.

Seven observations need to be made prior to our study of this fitting conclusion to the New Testament.

1. Revelation contains more allusions to the Old Testament than any other Book. Of the 404 verses in its 22 chapters, 278 verses contain one or more allusions to an Old Testament passage.
2. Revelation is a pastoral letter. Billy Graham is correct when he writes the following:

Revelation is not an academic paper produced for some scholarly professional meeting. It is not a poem created by a gifted genius to entertain and divert. It is not the diary of a senile old man driven to wild hallucinations by his isolation and loneliness. Revelation is a pastor's letter to his floundering flock, an urgent telegram bearing a brilliant battle plan for a people at war. It reflects the realistic horror and heartbreak of a bloody battlefield strewn with corpses. It is frank and it is frightening, but it is a plan for victory—if not for every battle, certainly for the war.

3. Revelation is the only book to promise a blessing to those who read it. The promise is made seven times within the Book. We call these the seven beatitudes of Revelation, and they are located in Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14. William Barclay makes the following comment concerning these promised blessings:

The Revelation is notoriously the most difficult and bewildering book in the New Testament; but doubtless, too, we shall find it infinitely worthwhile to wrestle with it until it gives us its blessing and opens its riches to us.

4. Revelation is like a great symphony or art gallery. Albrecht Durer put together a series of woodcuts portraying the imagery of the Revelation to John. Bruce Metzger suggests that we take in this art gallery as we would a slide show, not being too concerned with the details.

The book contains a series of word pictures, as though a number of slides were being shown upon a great screen. As we watch we allow ourselves to be carried along by impressions created by these pictures. Many of the details of the pictures are intended to contribute to the total impression, and are not to be isolated and interpreted with wooden literalism.

5. Revelation inspires hope in those who suffer for their faith. It contrasts the three and one-half years of the Tribulation to the one thousand years of the Millennium. These numbers are not to be taken literally. The three and one-half years recall the time of persecution and suffering between 168 and 165 B.C.E. under Antiochus Epiphanies IV. The suffering may have been intense, but it only lasted for a short time. On the other hand, those martyrs who suffered under Roman oppression will reign with Christ for a Millennium. This is a symbol for a very long time, for one day in God's Kingdom is equivalent to a thousand years.
6. Revelation describes three methods God might use to wake people up, but since he knows that these methods won't work, he proceeds to destroy the "destroyers of the earth" with another method. The three methods that won't work are the opening of seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath. These three methods describe what we are doing to ourselves. In each case the intensity of the violence increased, but they would not repent. (Revelation 9:20-21 and 16:9-11) Why use a method that won't bring about repentance? When Jesus appears on the white horse to destroy evil he has a sharp sword in his mouth and his white robe is covered with his own blood. His method is not violence, but his own sacrifice and the Word of God (the sharp sword). He is a sacrificial lamb, not a roaring lion.

7. Revelation portrays the coming Kingdom with great urgency. Even in the midst of all the violence we find the great multitude at worship (Revelation 7:10-12), an announcement from heaven claiming the Kingdom for the Messiah (Revelation 11:15-17), and following the collapse of Babylon (Rome), the Marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10). Christ is the groom and the church is his bride. Earl Palmer and Dietrich Bonhoeffer make comments about this Kingdom that must be accepted if we are to understand this final book of the New Testament.

The Kingdom of God is not seen in the New Testament in territorial terms, but rather in relationship terms. —Earl Palmer

We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there was a great future because of Jesus Christ. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

1. THE VISION OF CHRIST

ASSIGNMENTS			
Prologue	Salutation	Context	The Vision
1:1-3	1:4-8	1:9-11	1:12-20

THE INTRODUCTION (1:1-8)

The Prologue (1:1-3)

The Title of this book comes from the very first word. *Revelation* is a translation of the Greek *Apocalypse*, which means, “to remove the veil, to uncover, to make clear, or to reveal.” There has been a radical uncovering of what was previously hidden, and that breakthrough has come through Jesus Christ. The revelation is now given through an angel (Michael), and the Church is encouraged to read it in public. This would have been the only way Christians could become familiar with Scripture.

Those who read, and those who hear—and heed—the message, will be blessed. This book contains seven beatitudes given at various times. They can be found here in 1:3 and scattered throughout the Book: 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14. The word *Blessed* in the Greek simply means “blissful or happy,” but the Hebrew words from the Old Testament which lie behind it help us to better understand it. It probably came from the two Hebrew words *ashar* and *barak*. *Barak* means “to kneel or bow down before” and *Ashar* means “to find the right pathway in the face of false pathways.” It has to do with discovering “meaning” in the face of “chaos.” This then is the principle connotation lying behind the word *blessed*.

The Salutation (1:4-8)

John writes to the seven Churches located in Asia Minor (Western Turkey), whom he greets in the name of God, the Seven Spirits, and Jesus Christ. Seven Spirits are mentioned in connection with these seven Churches, and these would be the seven guardian angels. They might be identified with the seven Archangels of late Jewish angeology; whose names would be: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, and Remiel.

The word *seven* implies “wholeness and perfection,” and determines the structure of the rest of the book of Revelation. It is not written only to seven specific congregations, but to all Christians everywhere, especially those facing persecution and death. The message to them is that the Lord is coming soon, and that everything will be made right. He is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the “beginning” and the “end;” the one who is, who was, and who is to come. This is an expansion of God’s name as it was given in Exodus 3:14. The One, who is coming, has made us His Priests, and so we can anticipate His coming.

THE VISION OF CHRIST (1:9-20)

The Context (1:9-11)

The vision took place on the Island of Patmos, a six by ten mile Rocky Island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Western Turkey, to which John had been exiled. It was on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) while he was in the Spirit (worshiping) that he had a vision of Christ. This is the first time that “the Lord’s Day” is used in the New Testament, although “first day of the week” has been used. Jesus described worship to the Samaritan woman in terms of “in the Spirit.” (John 4:24) The context for this worship then seems to be on the Lord’s Day on the Island of Patmos. Was anyone else present? No one is mentioned.

The Vision (1:12-20)

A great deal of imagery is used to describe this vision, but the essence of it is the presence of Christ in the midst of his Churches (Lampstands). Albrecht Durer has attempted to recreate this vision in one of his famous woodcuts, “St. John’s Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks.” Below is a list of some of the imagery to look for in the woodcut.

Seven Golden Lampstands

The Son of Man (Daniel 7:13 and Mark 2:10)

The Long Robe

A Golden Girdle around his breast

Head and hair white as wool and snow (Daniel 7:9)

Eyes like a flame of fire (Daniel 10:6)

Feet like burnished bronze (Daniel 10:6)

Voice like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2)

Seven stars in his right hand

A two-edged sword in his mouth (Isaiah 49:2 and Hebrews 4:12)

His face like the sun shining in full strength (Daniel 10:6)

As John beheld this vision he fell prostrate, as dead, before Christ. This reminds us of how Isaiah felt when he saw a similar vision in Isaiah 6:5.

Two questions come to mind as we see Jesus standing in the midst of the seven Churches. First, these Churches are highly valued, for the lampstands, which symbolize them, are priceless as gold; and their function is to give off light (Matthew 5:14-16). Secondly, these Churches are connected not by Apostolic Succession or Government or Polity, but by the living presence of Christ in their midst. Christ is dressed as a King to remind John's readers of just who he is. He is the King of the coming Kingdom of God.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCHES

John Places Christ in the center of seven churches, which are described as lampstands, who's function is to give off light. Without the Christ, none of the lampstands would give off light, for Christ is the light of the world. The churches only reflect the light.

Robert Fulghum tells the story of Alexander Papaderos, who suffered under Nazism, but then helped to form an institute dedicated to human understanding and peace, especially between Germans and Cretans. After Papaderos finished his lecture, Fulghum asked, "Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?" After some laughter, Dr. Papaderos looked at Fulghum for a long time and then said, "I will answer your question." Then he took his wallet out of his hip pocket and fished out of it a very small round mirror, the size of a quarter and said,

When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.

I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine—in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I

came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light—truth, understanding, knowledge—is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.

I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the black places in the hearts of men—and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.

And then he took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the bright rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them onto Fulghum's face and hands folded on the desk.¹

Shining the light in dark places is the mission of these seven churches. They are not the light, but they can reflect the light. This was both the task of the People of God in the Old Testament and the Body of Christ in the New Testament. That there are seven churches is significant. Seven is the perfect number, and in these seven churches we will discover that if a church does not fulfill its mission, it will lose its lampstand.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. How well do you think the Jews are doing with their mission to be a light to the nations?
2. Read John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14-16. How well do you think Christians are doing with their mission to be a light to the world?
3. Read Revelation 1:20. What is the mystery of the seven stars?

¹ Robert Fulghum, *It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989), pp. 171-175.



St. John's Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks
Revelation 2-3

2. MESSAGES TO FOUR CHURCHES

ASSIGNMENTS			
Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira
2:1-7	2:8-11	2:12-17	2:18-19

There is a similar structure in each of the seven letters to the seven churches, and I would like to highlight that fivefold structure. While there are elements missing in some letters, the structure is present in most of them.

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)

Danger: Losing Our First Love

Ephesus had a population of 250,000 people and was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It was also the most important of the seven cities. Not only was it the capital city of Asia Minor, but the famous trade route from the Euphrates terminated there. It contained the Temple to Diana (or Artemis), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Temple contained one hundred columns, which were fifty-five feet high, and they stood on a platform which measured approximately one hundred thousand square feet. The Amphitheater seated 25,000 people. In addition to all this, the Church in Ephesus had the advantage of a rich tradition of Christian leadership, beginning with the Apostle Paul, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, and ending with the Apostle John himself.

The Descriptive Phrase

“...him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

The Commendation

The Church is commended for (1) sound teaching and (2) resistance to false teachers. The false teachers are identified as the *Nicolaitans*, who felt free to eat food offered to idols, but practiced immorality in the name of

their religion. They are also mentioned in the Letter to Pergamum (2:15), where they are identified with idolaters who hold to the teachings of Balaam a sorcerer and opportunistic false prophet.

Irenaeus, one of the early Church fathers, said that the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven chosen by the Apostles in Acts 6:5. If he is correct, then Nicolaus fell from Grace and lost his Faith. Clement of Alexandria acknowledges the connection, but insists that Nicolaus himself remained faithful and that the Nicolaitans only claimed him as their teacher. Nothing can be known for certain except that the name *Nicolaitans* flourished as a designation for false teachers.

The Condemnation

In spite of the Church's doctrinal purity, it suffers from the absence of love. It has abandoned its first love, and this is a most serious charge, for without love, faith and even sacrifice amount to nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The Exhortation

Repent or lose your lampstand (status as a Church). Recover the true center of your faith, or your faith is in vain. "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Jesus frequently used this sentence when he wanted to emphasize something. Although it is not used at the same place, it is included as an exhortation to every one of the seven congregations. Sometimes it calls people to repentance, and sometimes it reminds them of the promise God makes to them.

The Promise

Those who *conquer*, that is, recover what has been lost, will be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. Ephesian coins in this period contained carvings of a sacred tree used in nature worship. This promise assured Christians of a far deeper source of life than that gained from the nature goddesses. The ban on the Tree of Life would be lifted (Genesis 2:9,17 & 3:22-24).

2. Smyrna (2:8-11)

Danger: Fear of Poverty and Suffering

Smyrna was a coastal city located some thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. It was known as a strong center for emperor worship. The Temple of Roma was built in 195 B.C.E. and the Temple of Tiberius in 23 (26) C.E., both of which were built on the acropolis in the midst of other Temples. All of this produced a dramatic visual effect, which became known as “the Crown of Smyrna.” Bishop Polycarp worked in this city, but was executed in Rome in February of 156 C.E. Smyrna still exists today, but its modern name is Izmir.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:...”

The Commendation

The congregation, due to its faith, lives in poverty and will experience suffering; but the suffering will not last long. The threat does not come only from the Roman Empire, but also from misguided Jews. The Synagogue of Satan refers to the hostility of some Jews in Smyrna, and does not imply that Judaism itself is demonic. Ten days is not a lengthy period (Daniel 1:12), and so the suffering will not last long.

The Condemnation

Smyrna was one of two Churches not condemned for anything. The other one was Philadelphia.

The Exhortation

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” These are words of encouragement to remain faithful even as the suffering comes.

The Promise

Those who “conquer” will not be hurt by the “second death.” The phrase “second death” is not used elsewhere in the Bible, although it is alluded to in Matthew 10:28; but it does appear three more times in this Book (Revelation 20:6; 20:14; and 21:8). It means that the power of evil is not the final power. Human and cosmic evil cannot overcome the power of Almighty God. Those who trust in this God will be given a Crown of Life

more glorious than the Crown of Smyrna (the Temples on the acropolis). The Crown of Life is an eschatological reward for those who are faithful in the face of blasphemy and persecution.

3. Pergamum (2:12-17)

Danger: Doctrinal and Moral Compromise

Fifty miles north of Smyrna was Pergamum, which had been the capital of the Roman Province of Asia (Asia Minor) since the second century before Christ. Although Augustus moved the capital to Ephesus, Pergamum remained a major center for emperor worship. There were shrines to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and especially Asclepius, for which the city was famous. The serpent was Asclepius' symbol, which is still represented in the caduceus, the insignia of medical associations. To John however this was a symbol of evil.

Temples were built to Roma and Augustus in 29 B.C.E. While some think of the pagan shrines as the "throne of Satan," it is generally considered to be a reference only to those shrines demanding Emperor Worship.

The city also had a library housing more than 200,000 parchment rolls. Alexandria was so jealous of this library, that Egypt refused to ship any more papyrus to Pergamum. As a result a new kind of writing material had to be developed, which was named "pergamenta charta," which we simply call "parchment."

The Descriptive Phrase

"These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword..."

The Commendation

Since they held fast to the Lord's "name" and their own "faith," the members of this Church are commended. About *Antipas*, nothing is known, except that he seems to have been a martyr who inspired the faithful. According to Tertullian, Antipas was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle (bull) during the reign of Domitian. They were trying to force him to profess Caesar as Lord, but like Polycarp, he had no reason or will to deny Christ.

The Condemnation

The condemnation is against those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Balaam was a seer summoned by Balak, King of Moab, to curse Israel prior to its entrance into Canaan. Instead he pronounced a series of blessings, affirming the present and future pre-eminence of Israel (Numbers 22-24). With the exception of Micah 6:5, all other biblical references to Balaam are unfavorable. His journey to Moab is considered motivated by desire for gain and he is blamed for the defection of Israel to the Moabite Baal at Peor (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16 and Revelation 2:14). The teaching of Balaam then has to do with “idolatry” and “immorality.” Since the Nicolaitans were accused of the same sins, they are tied in with the followers of Balaam, but they might have been two separate groups within the Church. Because of these two groups, there was great immorality in the Church. Only Corinth rivaled it in immorality.

The Exhortation

Repent or face the sharp two-edged sword in the Lord’s mouth. This sword represents “ultimate authority,” which is greater than that of the Emperor. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

To those who “conquer,” will be given “hidden manna” and a “white stone,” with a new name on it, which no one knows. The first image is a familiar Old Testament one, and the second a first-century Roman one. The “manna” might be identified with Jesus’ claim to be the “bread of life” (John 6:31-35). The “white stone” was a symbol in the Roman world used in legal trials, academic grading systems, and at athletic events. A Stone with the Roman letters SP imprinted on it was given as an award for valor. The Stone was also a symbol of identity. Patients recovering from a serious illness would take a new name to signify their complete recovery. Those who resist “idolatry” and “immorality” will be sustained by “hidden manna” and given a new identity, symbolized by the “White Stone.”

4. Thyatira (2:18-29)

Danger: Moral Compromise and Tolerance

Forty-five miles inland from Pergamum, with no high-fortress land formations, was located the military outpost town of Thyatira. Not suitable as a major city, it existed to protect the road from Pergamum to Sardis. In the first century it was primarily a commercial center for weavers, leather-workers, potters, and bronze-workers. William Ramsey observes: “More trade guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city.” Along with their presence was also the pressure to worship the idols of the various city temples, the most popular of which was the one to Apollo. This was also Lydia’s hometown (Acts 16:14).

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze...” This makes a vivid contrast to Apollo, the special deity of Thyatira. Apollo was the son of Zeus and twin brother of Diana (Artemis). He was the God of light and purity, and could reveal the future through his oracle at Delphi. Jesus is all of that and more.

The Commendation

A number of good things are mentioned, such as love, faith, service, and patient endurance; and the latter works of this congregation exceeded the former works. There existed an upward progress in spite of the presence of someone like Jezebel and her followers. The concern is that this one rotten apple might make the whole barrel rotten.

The Condemnation

The congregation is condemned for tolerating Jezebel, who like her namesake in the Old Testament, offered food to idols and involved herself and her followers in gross immorality. While the name is used symbolically, it may well refer to a real person and a specific situation in Thyatira. Since “idolatry” and “immorality” are mentioned as the sins to be condemned, it has been suggested that the Nicolaitans are here too. Since the various temples in Thyatira were related to the trade guilds, we become aware of the fact that an economic price would have to be paid for faithfulness. The more subtle challenge to faith does not originate in public amphitheaters, but in the daily places where we earn the money we need to live.

The Exhortation

While the word “repent” is missing, there is a call to “hold fast” until the Lord comes. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Promise

To those who “conquer,” will be given the Lord’s “power” (a rod of iron) and “presence” (the morning star). “The morning star” is an Old Testament image of hope for the morning and the coming of the Messiah.

LET THOSE WITH EARS LISTEN!

One common command made to all the churches is, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” It is even said to Smyrna, which seems to be the perfect church. Nothing negative is said to the congregation of Smyrna. Perhaps they too had to be cautioned, lest they fall from Grace. After all, they faced persecution and a great deal of pressure to conform.

Just what is the Spirit saying to the churches? The Spirit has something different to say to each congregation. It depends upon the context in which the church tries to carry out its mission. The Spirit addresses at least three concerns.

The Spirit encourages churches that face persecution.

The Spirit challenges churches that have to deal with assimilation.

The spirit warns churches that become complacent.

The point being made to these churches is that they need to act like the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The following story makes the point:

The story is told that Clarence Jordan, that great Southern, social prophet, visited an integrated church in the Deep South. Jordan was surprised to find a relatively large church so thoroughly integrated, not only black and white but also rich and poor; and this was in the early sixties, too. Jordan asked the old country preacher, “How did you get the church this way?”

“What way?” the preacher asked. Jordan went on to explain his surprise at finding a church so integrated, and in the South, too.

The preacher said, “Well, when our preacher left our small church, I went to the deacons and said, ‘I’ll be the preacher.’ The first Sunday as preacher, I opened the book and read, ‘As many of you as has been baptized into Jesus has put on Jesus and there is no longer any Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, males or females, because you all is one in Jesus.’”

Then I closed the book and I said, “If you are one with Jesus, you are one with all kind of folks. And if you ain’t, well, you ain’t.”

Jordan asked what happened after that. “Well,” the preacher said, “the deacons took me into the back room and they told me they didn’t want to hear that kind of preaching no more.”

Jordan asked what he did then. “I fired them deacons,” the preacher roared.

“Then what happened?” asked Jordan.

“Well,” said the old hillbilly preacher, “I preached that church down to four. Not long after that, it started growing. And it grew. And I found out that revival sometimes don’t mean bringin’ people in but gettin’ people out that don’t dare to love Jesus.”²

This method of guiding the church is consistent with Methodism. The story is told that John Wesley, upon returning home from an engagement in Northern Ireland, was asked by his brother Charles whether or not the people from that enchanting isle had experienced a fresh awakening of the Spirit of God. “Why certainly they did!” exclaimed the zealous evangelist. “And were there many additions to the Church?” queried his brother. “No,” John reportedly recounted, “but we did have a number of blessed subtractions!”³ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

² Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 103.

³ “How The United Methodist Church Grew,” *Good News*, May/June, 1989, pp. 34-36.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the Ephesian congregation lost its first love?
2. What caused the congregation in Smyrna to withstand persecution?
3. What caused the congregation in Pergamum to compromise Christian morality?
4. Was the congregation in Thyatira too tolerant?
5. What is the danger or challenge of your church?
 - a. Persecution?
 - b. Assimilation?
 - c. Complacency?

3. MESSAGES TO THREE CHURCHES

ASSIGNMENTS		
Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
3:1-6	3:7-13	3:14-22

1. Sardis (3:1-6)

Danger: Spiritual Deadness

Sardis is thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. The city occupies a proud acropolis (1500 feet high), which commands the intersection of five highways. It was a city with a famous past, but a declining future. In the sixth century B.C.E., King Croesus reigned there with his treasures, but the glory of those days was long gone. Twice the city was totally surprised and humiliated militarily, first by Cyrus (Persians) in 549 B.C.E. and then by Antiochus (Greeks) in 214 B.C.E. Both times the city was taken by complete surprise in a night attack by soldiers, who scaled its steep and seemingly impregnable fortress walls. Finally the earthquake of 17 C.E. destroyed the city, but through the kindness of Tiberius Caesar, the city was rebuilt. It competed for the Temple of Tiberius in 23 (26) C.E., but lost out to Smyrna. In the latter half of the first century, Sardis experienced some prosperity with its dyeing and woolen industries.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:...” These words symbolize Christ’s spiritual source of power (seven spirits) and his sovereign control over all the churches (seven stars).

The Commendation

Nothing good is said about the congregation, except that there exists within this “dead” congregation a “faithful few.” There are a few who have not “soiled their garments.”

The Condemnation

While the Church has a reputation for being alive, it is now accused of being dead. Its main problems were apathy and indifference. It had fallen asleep.

The Exhortation

The congregation is told to repent while there is still time, for eventually, the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Since they will not know when, they better be ready at all times.

The Promise

Those who take heed and “conquer” will be “clothed in white garments.” The Lord will confess their names before the Father and his angels. White was the color for purity, but it was also the only color a slave could afford to wear. This promise made a sharp contrast in the minds of those who lived in Sardis, where the main vocation was that of making colorful and luxurious woolen goods.

2. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Danger: Failure to Keep Jesus' Word

Philadelphia, the smallest of the seven cities, was very young, having been founded in 150 B.C.E. by Attalus II Philadelphos, one of the kings of Pergamum, to spread Greek culture around. It was a border town, where the provinces of Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia met, and was located about thirty-five miles southeast of Sardis. Like Sardis, it had been destroyed by the Earthquake of 17 C.E.; and having received a generous donation, it was rebuilt, but not on as grand a scale as Sardis. At this time the name was changed in honor of Tiberius to Neocaesarea, but during the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.), the name was changed back to Philadelphia. Some think this is a good argument for dating the Book of Revelation to the time of Nero, for the name was again changed during the reign of Vespasian (70-79 C.E.), only this time to Flavia. The land nearby was good for growing grapes, and so the area produced wine in abundance.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens...” The key of David symbolizes authority. A similar key was entrusted to Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20-22). The entrustment of the key is a Messianic reference, which ties the Messiah into the line of King David. The Messiah has authority to open or shut the door into the New Jerusalem.

The Commendation

The Christians in Philadelphia have “kept the word” and “not denied the Lord’s name.” They are true to the name of their city, which means “brotherly love.”

The Condemnation

Like the congregation in Smyrna, this congregation is not condemned. Everything is on the positive side.

The Exhortation

Their witness to the Jews will bear fruit, and they will come to them. The congregation will be spared much of the suffering that will overtake the whole world. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

Those who “conquer” will be made “pillars” of the Temple (in the New Jerusalem). The only difficulty with this image is that the New Jerusalem will not have a Temple (Revelation 21:22), but then we should not take any of this imagery too literally. The main point is that they will live out their lives in the presence of God who writes his name upon them. He is their God, and they are his children.

3. Laodicea (3:14-22)

Danger: Lukewarmness

Laodicea had been founded as a major urban center around 250 B.C.E. by Antiochus II (Syria) and named after his wife “Laodice.” It was located

forty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and one hundred miles east of Ephesus, on the south bank of the River Lycus. The city became known commercially for its black wool and carpets, banking, and its famous medical center, which had developed a well-known eye salve called Phrygian ointment.

Although the city lacked an adequate water supply, a stone aqueduct was built to bring water from Hierapolis, some six miles away. Laodicea was the most affluent of the seven cities. Following the earthquake of 61 C.E., its citizens rejected help from Rome, and rebuilt the city using their own resources. The congregation was founded by Epaphras in Paul's day (Colossians 2:1; 4:13-16), and was yoked in a special friendship to the congregations of Colossae and Hierapolis.

The Descriptive Phrase

“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation....” “The Amen” is Jesus Christ himself, who is the Word of God, who was with God at creation (John 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 and 18).

The Commendation

Nothing good is said about the congregation, and yet there still exists hope for the faithful.

The Condemnation

This congregation receives the most serious condemnation of all. Like its water, after it has traveled the six miles from Hierapolis, it is good for nothing, but to be spit out. The congregation is neither hot nor cold; and although it lives in prosperity, it is really spiritually poor. The decline of this church may well be directly related to its affluence.

The Exhortation

Because God loves them, he calls them to repent. Repentance for them means receiving the salve that will enable them to see, and opening the door, allowing Christ to come in. In spite of all their apathy, God still wants them to share in the Messianic Banquet of the coming Kingdom; but he will not force them. They must open the door from the inside of their hearts. When that is done, they will no longer be lukewarm. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

The final promise to those who “conquer” is a place beside Jesus on his throne.

Conclusion

Bruce Metzger in his book, *Breaking the Code*, sums up the seven lessons to be learned from these seven churches.

The seven churches provide examples of the kinds of things that can go wrong in any church. These are the danger of losing the love that one had at first (Ephesus), fear of suffering (Smyrna), doctrinal compromise (Pergamum), moral compromise (Thyatira), spiritual deadness (Sardis), failure to hold fast (Philadelphia), and lukewarmness (Laodicea).¹

CAN A CHURCH LIVE AGAIN?

Two churches are dead and one is alive. Can these two dead churches come alive? Yes, but it won't be easy. Let me share an example of a church that was dying, but then it was resurrected.

Ginghamsburg United Methodist Church is located in the small village of Tipp city, Ohio. Tipp City has a population of 9,689. The church was founded in 1863 by Circuit Rider B.W. Day. It was part of a four-church circuit with a part time preacher. From the 1920s to 1979, the church was served by seminary students. In 1979, Michael (Mike) Slaughter was appointed as its first full time pastor. At the time the church averaged about 90 people in worship attendance. It looked as if the church was dying, but Mike had a vision, which was articulated in the church's new mission statement. The mission, “to win the lost and set the oppressed free,” led first to a significant loss in membership, and then to the church's exponential growth. Today, approximately 5,000 people attend Ginghamsburg's three campuses every week. More than 2,800 adults, students, and children participate in cell groups. The church has come alive.

The success of Ginghamsburg Church is not its growth in numbers, but its ability to focus on its mission. That's what brought it back to life. It wasn't

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 46.

easy. Mike watched his congregation dwindle and he had no assurance that the decline could be turned around. Whether the church grew or declined, he stuck with the vision to save the lost and set the oppressed free. The church's vision is reflected in its mission. There is not space to name all of the ministries and missions of this church. This church came to *life* with a faithful few and a clear vision.

The problem with the churches at Sardis and Laodicea is their complacency. They lost their way, even though they had a faithful few.⁴ Their wealth blinded them into thinking everything was going fine when they were dying.

On the other hand, there is Philadelphia, which Jesus commends and finds nothing to condemn. In Philadelphia they loved one another and were focused on their mission.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the seven churches comes closest to the church you attend?
2. Who should write the mission or vision statement?
3. Do you think all churches should have the same mission statement?
4. What is the danger or challenge of your church?
 - a. Persecution?
 - b. Assimilation?
 - c. Complacency?

⁴ See Revelation 3:4

4. GOD AND THE LAMB

ASSIGNMENTS	
God as Creator	Christ as Redeemer
4:1-11	5:1-14

THE VISION OF GOD AS CREATOR (4:1-11)

John is now invited to move through the open door for a vision of heavenly realities, which he shares with the seven struggling congregations. In the midst of persecution they are reminded of the eternal glory and power of God. This vision of God on his throne, surrounded by twenty-four elders and four living creatures, has similarities to the visions of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-5) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1).

The vision focuses first on God, who is surrounded by precious gems and a rainbow. The precious gems symbolize the glory of his divine presence, and the rainbow reminds us of God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:16) and Ezekiel's bow (Ezekiel 1:28). This vision is a reminder to the struggling Christians that as mighty as Caesar is, his throne room cannot be compared to this one. The Churches needed such a vision as this, and John gave it to them.

Secondly the vision focuses on the twenty-four elders, who represent all of God's faithful people. We think specifically of a combination of the twelve patriarchs (sons of Jacob) and the twelve apostles (disciples of Jesus). Dressed in white, symbolizing purity, they wear golden crowns, which they cast before God (4:10). The above is, in my opinion, the best interpretation of who the twenty-four elders are; but there are at least three other interpretations, which are as follows: (1) A court of angels surrounding God's throne, (2) Representatives of the twenty-four classes of priests from 1 Chronicles 24, or (3) Representatives of the Babylonian astral divinities.

The third focus is on the seven torches of fire, which represent the seven spirits of God, who have been active in warning the seven Churches.



St. John and the Twenty-four Elders in Heaven
Revelation 4:1-10

The four living creatures make up the fourth focus, and they are angelic beings representing humanity and the beasts—all of living creation. The following rabbinic saying, dating back to 300 C.E., but probably much older, supports this idea: “The mightiest among the birds is the eagle, the mightiest among the domestic animals is the bull, the mightiest among the wild beasts is the lion, and the mightiest among all is man.” These same four faces are present in the creatures of Ezekiel’s vision. They are similar to the four winged cherubim of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 10:20) and the six winged Seraphim of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:2-3). The Cherubim were responsible for guarding the tree of life (Genesis 3:24) and supporting the throne of God. The Seraphim had the job of standing before the throne of God and praising him. All of these creatures were God’s agents or ministers with the specific tasks of worshiping Him in heaven, and this they do day and night. Since this vision is about creation, the above interpretation makes the most sense, but there is another, which relates them to the Gospels. Each Gospel has a symbol: Mark=Lion; Luke=Ox; Matthew=Man; and John=Eagle.

The four living creatures sing the great Sanctus of Isaiah 6:3 and the Alpha and Omega affirmation of Revelation 1:8 (4:8). In fact they never cease to sing it. This overshadows the title, “Our Lord and God” claimed by Domitian for himself. The twenty-four elders cast their golden crowns before him, worshiping and exalting God as the Creator. This song is more than an adaptation of an Old Testament song. It is a song of praise to God’s creative power expressed in Genesis 1 and John 1. As such it is a rejection of the Gnostic heresy, which viewed creation as an evil act. The Christian Gnostics would be profoundly disappointed as they read this vision, for their whole theological system is under attack. John’s vision affirms the creation of the world as a good act by the one, holy, God.

The following conclusions need to be drawn about this vision of God on his throne:

- God on the throne: God’s power and authority
- Four Creatures full of eyes: God as All-knowing
- The Heavenly Court: The dignity of Heaven
- Creatures with wings: God as always present
- Worship in Heaven: We too need to worship

THE VISION OF CHRIST AS REDEEMER (5:1-14)

In this vision, John begins to see what must take place within history. The Scroll, with writing on both sides, and sealed, symbolizes the whole sweeping history of creation. It contains the world’s destiny and is about to

be revealed to John in a series of pictures. It is held in God's right hand and sealed with seven seals, which are about to be opened; but who is *worthy* to open them? The only one who is able to set this series of pictures in motion is the Lion of Judah (Genesis 49:9) or the Root of David (Isaiah 11:1), but even he does not do it with the power of a Lion but through the sacrificial death of a Lamb (Isaiah 53:7). This is no ordinary Lamb, for it possesses seven horns (omnipotence or all powerful) and seven eyes (omniscience or all seeing). The theological importance of this vision cannot be overemphasized. This is the theological center of the Book of Revelation. This little Lamb has the scroll, not the devil, not the emperor, not even some scheme of history. None of the latter can even make sense of the Scroll. It is Jesus Christ alone who holds history in his hands. The one to be feared is the Lamb as John the Baptist has rightly announced. "Lamb" is the favorite symbol for the Risen Christ both in the Gospel of John and in the Book of Revelation. He alone can open the book of human destiny, for he alone is worthy. G. F. Handel has captured this concept in a compelling musical work known as "Worthy is the Lamb." He has caught the surprise and joy of this vision in his masterpiece which is based on Revelation 5:12-13 and appears at the end of his *Messiah*.

As the Lamb moved before the throne, to take the Scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before him, holding harps and golden bowls of incense; and they sang a new song. The phrase "new song" has deep roots in the Old Testament messianic psalms. This new song identifies those who have been ransomed or redeemed, and they come from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (5:9). The songs sung in Chapter 4 were about God the Creator, but this song is about Christ the Redeemer. The response to both is universal praise and worship. Seven attributes are listed here: (1) Power, (2) Wealth, (3), Wisdom, (4) Might, (5) Honor, (6) Glory, and (7) Blessing. This Lamb is also worthy of complete adoration. Millions and millions of angels (5:11) worship, as does every creature in heaven and on earth (5:13). And the four living creatures said "Amen" and the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped. The seals are about to be opened by the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sins of the world.

THE THRONE

John is taken into the throne room, where he sees God as Creator. In the time that the Book of Revelation was written, people tried to make gods of their Emperor. Some times their Emperors went along with it and some

times they resisted such attempts. Those who thought of themselves as gods were guilty of arrogance.

An example of such arrogance was King Louis XIV of France, who preferred to be called “Louis the Great” and had declared, “I am the State!” He died in 1717 C.E. His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was the most spectacular. In the church where the ceremony was performed, his body lay in a golden coffin. To dramatize his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be very dimly lit with only one special candle that was to be set above the coffin. The thousands of people in attendance waited in silence for the service to begin. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, “Only God is great.”⁵

John was invited into the throne room to observe God’s presence and power. Every one, including the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders submitted to God. Even the highest orders of angels, the cherubim and the Seraphim submitted.

In addition to seeing a vision of God the Creator, John sees a vision of Christ as the Redeemer. Christ is described first as the Lion of Judah and then as a slaughtered Lamb. God’s power is revealed through weakness. In the throne room of Heaven everything is turned upside down. James Cone illustrated this with a story about a slave named Ike. His slave master had a dream, which he bragged about to Ike: “I dreamed I went to Nigger Heaven last night, and I saw there a lot of garbage, some torn-down houses, a few old broken down, rotten fences, the muddiest, sloppiest streets I ever saw, and a big bunch of ragged, dirty Negroes walking around.” Ike responded: “Umph, umph, Massa, yah sho’ musta et de same t’ing Ah did las’ night, ‘cause Ah dreamed Ah went up ter de white man’s paradise, an’ de streets wuz all ob gol’ an’ silvah, and dey was lots o’ milk an’ honey dere, an’ putty pearly gates, but dey wuzn’t uh soul in de whole place.”⁶

God the Creator holds a scroll on which there are seven seals, which reveal the future, but no one in the throne room is worthy enough to open the seals except for the slaughtered Lamb. As the Lamb approaches the throne

⁵ Jeff Arthurs, “Laying the Foundation for Peace,” *PreachingToday.com*

⁶ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 159-160.

to open the seals, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and myriads and thousands of thousands of angels sing, “Worthy is the Lamb.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you expect to see when you enter Heaven?
2. Read Isaiah 6:1-12 and Ezekiel 1:1—2:9. Are there any similar images?
3. Do you really want to know what’s going to happen in the future?

5. THE SEVEN SEALS

ASSIGNMENTS			
Four Seals	5th & 6th Seals	Interlude	7th Seal
6:1-8	6:9-17	7:1-17	8:1-5

SIX OF THE SEALS (6:1—8:5)

This is the first of three series of judgments, all of which are separate from the final judgment. They all precede the End and prepare the way for its Coming. Their purpose is to soften the evil persons and nations that make up society in order to prepare them for the end of time. They concern seals, trumpets, and bowls; all of which merge into one another. The seventh seal is the beginning of the blowing of the first trumpet and the seventh trumpet is the beginning of the first bowl of wrath.

The events in Revelation have been compared to a slide show. In the opening of the seven seals we find three slides. The first slide includes the opening of the first four seals and can be entitled, The Four Horsemen. The second slide contains the fifth and sixth seals, and the third slide is of the seventh seal, which introduces the seven trumpets, where the whole process is repeated again. In between the sixth and seventh seals we find an important interlude. That too can be represented in a slide.

1. The White Horse (6:1-2)

The rider of the white horse carries a bow and is given a crown. This symbolizes his “conquering power.”

No imagery in Revelation is more common than that of the four horsemen, who make up these first four seals. This imagery is drawn from Zechariah 6:1-8, but John felt free to adapt the material to his own purposes. The meaning however is the same. The horses were sent forth to execute God’s anger on any power that might threaten Judah. In a sense the four horsemen ride with us, for our century has been a century of wars. War, famine, and death are signs of God’s judgment on us for rejecting his rule and his Kingdom.



The Four Riders of the Apocalypse
Revelation 6:2-8

The rider of the white horse is frequently thought of as Jesus. Revelation 19:11 alludes to this when it says: “Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.”⁷

Not everyone agrees that Jesus is one of the four horsemen. Other interpretations would make the rider of the white horse the antichrist or simply “the spirit of conquest.” The latter interpretation, “the spirit of conquest” establishes a more natural connection with the next three riders.

One of the living creatures, the one with the face of a lion, gave the command to the rider. The rider is dressed for victory. He is supposed to be a prophetic invader that will overcome Rome. The crown is the symbol of victory. This marks the initial stage. The invader, in whom they hoped, was probably the Parthians since they were such excellent horsemen.

2. The Red Horse (6:3-4)

The rider of the red horse was given a sword and commanded by the ox-like creature to “slay” or “slaughter,” to deprive the world of peace. He symbolizes war and bloodshed. His sword symbolizes the breakdown of human relationships that ends in war, perhaps civil war.

3. The Black Horse (6:5-6)

The rider of the black horse held a balance in his hand, and he received his command from the man-like creature. There was a cry, “A quart of wheat for a day’s pay” and “three quarts of barley for a day’s pay.” The black horse symbolizes “famine” or “inflation.” The basic essentials will be so expensive that it will take a day’s wages just to buy bread for one person. What about the rest of the family? Starvation under these circumstances

⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. 148. Ellul believes Jesus rides the white horse: “...this white horse must be identified with the one we have already met (19:11). How can we believe that within an interval of thirteen chapters the author could describe to us two white horses with their riders and give them two totally different meanings? It is obvious that what is said in chapter 19 applies to the earlier horseman: he is the Word of God.” “But the objection has been made that it is not possible in the same text for Jesus Christ to be represented, on the one hand, as the Lamb of God and, on the other, as the white horseman.” Ellul sees no problem with the contradiction between the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. It is the Lamb that has the power.

was assured. The phrase “but do not damage the olive oil and the wine” refers to the fact that the devastation will not be complete. These very conditions existed under the rule of Domitian, although there was plenty of wine. Similar conditions existed in Germany following World War I, and they contributed to the advent of World War II.

4. The Pale Horse (6:7-8)

The pale horse’s rider’s name was death, and Hades follows him. This rider receives his command from the eagle-like creature, and symbolizes “pestilence” and “death.” The pale horse suggests the pallor of an unhealthy body, or one whose face was white because of fear. He represents widespread, but not total devastation. One-fourth of the earth’s population is killed by (1) the sword, (2) famine, (3) pestilence, and (4) wild beasts. The terror of the four horsemen is limited. God permits the power of evil, but he does not allow total devastation.

5. The Martyrs (6:9-11)

The souls who had been slain for the Word of God are the martyrs. That they are under the altar means that they have been sacrificed or killed for their faith. They cry out for vindication and ask how long it will take. Is this Christian? It might be explained that they are pleading for the end of this period of judgment, for they must wait until the end of time. They are given white robes and told to be patient. The white robes symbolize their resurrected bodies, which is a way of saying that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord.

6. The Day of Wrath (6:12-17)

Judgment is the meaning of this sixth seal, and nature is the channel of God’s judgment. This terrifying judgment has been called the shattering of the universe. The earth seems to fall apart. Following a great earthquake (Haggai 2:6), the sun turns black, the moon turns to blood (Joel 2:31), the stars fall, and the sky vanishes (Isaiah 34:4). In Babylonian mythology the stars were considered to be gods, who influenced the world in which we live. All this is not to be taken too literally. It refers to the relationship between great social upheavals and divine judgment. The fixed and stable world has begun to disintegrate. All classes will seek to escape, including kings, and although it seems as though survival is impossible in this wholesale upheaval, a surprise comes at the very last moment in the form of a dramatic interlude.



The Opening of the Fifth and Sixth Seals
Revelation 6:9-15

AN INTERLUDE (7:1-17)

As we wait for the seventh seal to open, there is an interlude, during which two pictures or visions offer comfort and assurance to the reader. The purpose of this interlude is to assure God's people that they will be properly marked and protected from the coming judgment. This idea also appeared in Ezekiel 9:4-6, where people were marked with the Hebrew letter "tau" which is similar to our "X."

1. The 144,000 (7:1-8)

The first vision involves the marking of God's people by four angels, who hold back the four winds and restrain the terrors of the four horsemen. This suggests ownership and refers to how a king used to mark off what he owned. Jews are marked by circumcision. Christians are marked by baptism and the Holy Spirit.

The marking of the 144,000 refers to the sum of 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. Twelve is a perfect number and the twelve tribes together refer to completeness. It refers to the total number of the faithful who respond to Christ rather than any literal number.

Some have thought that this number refers only to Jewish Christians, but it is more likely to refer to all Christians who make up the New Israel. Those being marked are not promised freedom from suffering and death; they are only assured that they belong to God, and that they will be protected from the destructive power of the final judgment.

2. The Great Multitude (7:9-17)

The great multitude is the same as the 144,000. They are the ones who will endure the great tribulation, which lies just ahead. John envisages a final, intense, period of suffering occurring in the immediate future under the reign of the Antichrist, which he calls the tribulation. This multitude of the faithful will be made up of people from every nation, race, and language (7:9), and they will have to endure persecution in the most critical period of human history. Their white robes symbolize "righteousness" and their palm branches "victory." They will not be forgotten. The Lamb will "wipe away every tear from their eyes." (7:17 and 21:4)



The Four Angels Staying the Winds and Signing the Chosen
Revelation 7:1-3

THE SEVENTH SEAL (8:1-5)

The last seal becomes the first trumpet. Before the trumpets sound, however, there is one half hour of silence in heaven. This quietness has a dramatic impact on the sounds that have dominated the vision up to this point and the new sounds the seven trumpets will make. It serves to heighten the intensity of the seven trumpets when they blow, and it underlines the importance of the prayers of the saints, allowing them to be heard. The seven angels from Jewish tradition would be Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, and Remiel. It was Michael's specific job to offer prayers for Israel. The object of angelic intervention was to emphasize the unity between the Church in heaven and the Church on earth. These seven angels were of the highest order of heavenly beings next to God, and only they could reveal the impending judgment of the seven trumpets. The prayers for the saints precipitate the judgments, which are then initiated by the angel who took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it on the earth. The silence is now broken, replacing the intensity of silence with the intensity of sound

THE INITIAL CONFLICT

As the seals are opened, the four living creatures call forth the four horsemen. They symbolize what is already happening on earth. None of this is God's will, but if humanity insists on evil, then war, famine, and death will be the result. They are signs of God's judgment for rejecting his rule and kingdom. There is a limit, however, on how much damage can be done by human beings. They are given authority over one-fourth of the earth in which they can kill with sword, famine and pestilence (6:8).

The rider of the white horse is not Christ, nor is he a Roman soldier. Roman soldiers did not use bows in the cavalry. This rider looks more like a Parthian tribal warrior. Like a roaring lion, he fights for the crown. The rider of the red horse carries a sword, symbolizing the method of conquering the world with violence. The result of that violence is famine, which is symbolized by the rider of the black horse, who carries a pair of scales, crying, "a quart of wheat for a day's wage." The final horse is pale green and symbolizes death and hades. These four horsemen symbolize what human beings are already doing to one another. Their way is the lion. God's way is the slaughtered lamb.

Not everyone participates in this self-destruction. Those who were faithful to Christ have been martyred and they wait impatiently for an end to all

this bloodshed. God promises that the end will come, but meanwhile, they will have to be patient, as will all of God's people, whether they are martyrs or not. There is no need to worry, for God's angels will mark the faithful. God knows who they are. They are the 144,000 and the Great Multitude. The 144,000 symbolize the Old and the New Israel, the Body of Christ. The Great Multitude symbolize the faithful from every nation, tribe, and language. They too will need to be patient.

Before the final seal is opened, there is silence for about half an hour. Seven angels are given trumpets in preparation for intensifying the pressure on humanity to repent. Seven trumpets will announce the coming kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah. How should we react? Should we cry out like the martyrs, should we be patient in the midst of evil, knowing that we have been marked for the kingdom of God? We don't know when God will put an end to evil and usher in his kingdom. God could usher in his kingdom at any time, but he patiently waits for us to repent, even though no sign of repentance is evident.

St. Francis of Assisi, hoeing his garden, was asked what he would do if he were suddenly to learn that he was to die at sunset that day. He said: "I would finish hoeing my garden."

Martin Luther was asked the same question, to which he answered: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my little apple tree and pay my debts."

A lady once asked John Wesley, "If you knew that the Lord would come at 12:00 tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?" Wesley answered, "I would spend the intervening time just as I intend to spend it. I would preach tonight at Gloucester, and again tomorrow morning. After that I would ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the society in the evening. I would then go to Friend Martin's house, as he expects to entertain me. I would converse, pray with the family, retire to my room at ten o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, go sound asleep, and wake up in Glory."⁸ Wesley could answer the question in this way because he was totally focused on preparing himself and others for the Kingdom of God.

⁸ D.A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles* (Baker House).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the symbolism of the four horsemen mean to you?
2. Are you patient or impatient when it comes to evil?
3. If you knew the end of the world were coming tomorrow, would you change your plans for today?

6. THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

ASSIGNMENTS				
First Four Trumpets	5th and 6th Trumpets	The Little Scroll	The Two Witnesses	The 7th Trumpet
8:6-13	9:1-21	10:1-11	11:1-14	11:15-19

SIX OF THE TRUMPETS (8:6—9:21)

Angels blow all of the trumpets. Seven archangels are named in Tobit 12:15 and Enoch 20, who are Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel. These are the angels that John sees given the trumpets that will signal the coming series of judgments. The trumpet was used to get people's attention.

In this series of judgments we see some similarity to the ten plagues sent to the Pharaoh in Egypt, who refused to let the enslaved Israelites go. The Romans represent the new Egypt, since they have also enslaved the Israelites; but God is about to deliver them from their oppressors.

The first four trumpets signal natural forces, and the second two trumpets signal the demonic forces used by God to carry out his judgments. The intention of these trumpets is to bring people, including the Romans, to repentance.

The first four trumpets are accompanied with the peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. While the devastation is extensive, it is not total. Only one-third of the objects are destroyed by these upheavals of nature.

1. Hail and Fire (8:7)

The first trumpet signals the coming of hail and fire, mixed with blood. One-third of the earth, one-third of the trees, and all of the green grass are burned up. Why all of the green grass has been burned is not clear.



The Seven Trumpets are given to the Angels; The Results of the First Four Trumpet Calls
Revelation 8:12-13

2. The Burning Mountain (8:8-9)

With the blowing of the second trumpet we see a burning mountain thrown into the sea, turning one-third of the sea into blood, killing one-third of the sea creatures, and destroying one-third of the ships. As with the hail, the destruction is not total.

3. The Falling Star (8:10-11)

Following the sound of the third trumpet, a star named “wormwood” fell into one-third of the rivers and waters, and it made one-third of the waters bitter. *Wormwood* was a drug, which symbolized bitterness, and refers to the spirit of bitterness (sin) which is brought about by human sin. This bitterness resulted in the divine chastisement of Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15. Its effects at this time are not total.

4. The Sun, Moon, and Stars (8:12-13)

In all of these trumpet blasts we have seen a series of convulsions caused by nature. In the fourth blast people are thrown into partial darkness. The eagle that flew through the heavens crying, “Woe, Woe, Woe,” was announcing that the judgments to follow would be even more devastating (8:13). They are repeated three times indicating that the final blasts of the trumpets will be especially grievous. They cannot however hurt those who have the right seal on their foreheads. Charles and Beckwith say that the tribulations will only fall on non-Christians, but Parvis says that the tribulations will fall on everyone. The Christians alone will come through it victoriously, but not without enduring suffering.

5. The Locusts (9:1-11)

A star falls from heaven to earth. This might symbolize Satan’s fall from heaven as described in Luke 10:18, for Satan is thought of as a fallen angel. This fallen angel is given a key to the bottomless pit, and when he opens it, smoke pours out like the smoke from a great furnace. The pit is the abode for fallen angels, demons, the beast, false prophets, and eventually becomes Satan’s prison. As the shaft is opened, locusts come out and are told that they can only harm those who do not have the seal, and that they can only be tortured for five months. Why five months? Some say that this is the normal period of activity for locusts; but for the author, it is a description of the intensity of the horror at the close of the age. The intent is to warn unbelievers so that they will repent, but still they do not repent.



The Battle of the Angels
Revelation 9:13-19

The locusts wear crowns of gold and have human faces. They have women's hair and lion's teeth. The noise of their wings is like the sound of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. Their king is named Abaddon (Hebrew), which means "destruction." (See Psalm 88:11 and Job 26:6) In Greek it becomes Apollyon, which means "destroyer." Is this Satan or the Devil? It seems to be, but his power is still less than God's.

6. The Four Angels and the Horses (9:12-21)

The four angels are chained at the Euphrates River. The threat to unbelievers comes not from the king of the locust (Satan), but from God. The Euphrates River was the eastern most boundary of the Roman Empire, and it divided Rome from its rival, the Parthian Empire. A Parthian invasion was expected during the end of Domitian's reign, and John indicates that these four angels will initiate it.

The Parthians were well known for their crack cavalry forces. "Twice ten thousand times ten thousand" equals "two hundred million." This number is not to be taken literally, but it does symbolize an overwhelming military force. One-third of humanity will be destroyed. The destruction intensifies, but now we encounter another interlude.

AN INTERLUDE (10:1—11:14)

Two brief visions are given between the sixth and seventh trumpets, which prepare us for a description of the characters whom will be involved in the final conflict and the beginning of the seven bowls of wrath. As those bowls are poured out, there will be no more interludes.

1. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)

The emphasis is clearly on the little scroll in the angel's hand, which is a prophecy of doom; but we should also notice the symbolism of this angel. A rainbow, which surrounds his head, and his face, shines like the sun. He is an angel of glory and light. His feet are planted over land and sea, symbolizing his power over and relationship to the earth. When he speaks he does so with authority, and so he speaks like a lion with the sound of thunder. Up to this point John has been an observer, but as the angel commands him to eat the little scroll, he becomes a participant. The eating of the little scroll may be a rewriting of Ezekiel 2:8—3:3. The vision concerns itself with John's authority for proclaiming what may sound like a message of doom. Ezekiel had the same problem. It tastes sweet in the

mouth because it is God's Word, and those who respond positively will be part of God's Kingdom; but it leaves a bitter taste in the stomach because one cannot find joy in proclaiming terrible judgments to those who resist and reject God. One ought not to find joy in having to make such pronouncements, necessary as they are.

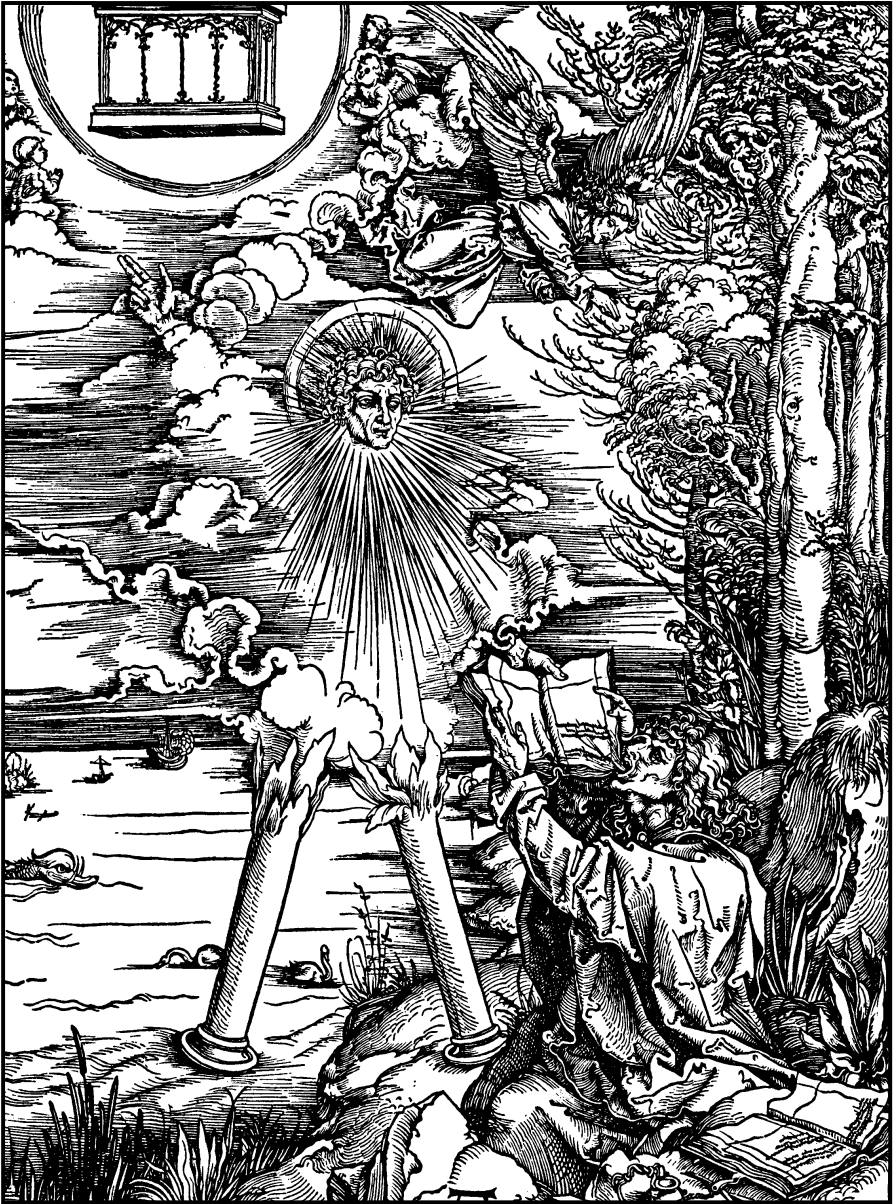
2. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

John is commissioned now to a second task. He is given a measuring rod (reed in Greek), and told to measure the Temple and the altar and all those who worship there. Measuring symbolizes the judgment of God in both the positive and negative senses. First, it symbolizes God's protection and care for his people; and secondly, it symbolizes the condemnation of those who are not his people. The only thing to be excluded is the outside court, which is to be given over to the nations, who will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.

At the same time, two witnesses, the two lampstands and two olive trees, will be given power to prophesy for 1,260 days (three and one-half years) clothed in sackcloth. The two lampstands symbolize the churches, and the two olive trees symbolize the people of God. What is important is that the two witnesses are to bear their witness during the time of great persecution and suffering.

The three and one-half years is derived from traditional apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel 9:27 and 12:7, which refers to the defilement of the Temple by the "abomination that desolates." This is a historical reference to Antiochus' domination of the Temple in 167-164 B.C.E., which lasted for three and one-half years or 1,260 days. Two witnesses will exercise their ministry during this time, but who are these two witnesses?

Most interpreters refer to these two witnesses as *Moses* and *Elijah*. References such as "to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall" and the ability to turn water into blood (11:6) brings *Elijah* (2 Kings 1:10) and *Moses* (Exodus 7:17, 19) to mind. The two are to be killed by the beast, who comes up from the bottomless pit. Their dead bodies are to be exposed unburied in the streets of Jerusalem (called Sodom and Egypt) for three and one-half days. John compares Jerusalem to *Sodom* and *Egypt*, which represent "immorality" and "slavery." The martyrdom of these two witnesses is compared to what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, where he faced public humiliation on the cross.



St. John devours the Book
Revelation 10:1-5 and 8-10

God's people, especially their leaders, would read these words and think of themselves and their own fate. They would identify themselves with these two witnesses. Was this to be their tragic end? No! After three and one-half days, a breath of life from God would enter into them and they would stand upon their feet (11:11). At the same time there will be a great earthquake, which will destroy a tenth of the city and 7,000 people. This marks the end of the sixth trumpet, preparing us for the blast of the final trumpet. This chapter contains without a doubt some of the most obscure and difficult imagery that we find in the Book of Revelation.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (11:15-19)

We are expecting to hear a third woe at the blast of the seventh trumpet, but instead, loud voices in heaven announce the consummation of God's Kingdom and the twenty-four elders fall before God in worship and praise. God's Temple in heaven is opened, and we can see the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolizes his holy presence. It is the imagery of this seventh trumpet that gave inspiration to Handel to compose the Hallelujah Chorus in his Messiah.

Above the High Altar of Westminster Abbey, where Kings and Queens are crowned, there is an inscription above a mosaic of the Last Supper, which was erected in 1866. The Inscription is taken from Revelation 11:15: "THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD AND OF HIS CHRIST."⁹

WHAT IS GOD UP TO?

Martin Luther once said, "If I were as our Lord God, and these vile people were as disobedient as they now be, I would knock the world in pieces."¹⁰ The Seven Trumpets leave us with the impression that this is precisely what God intends to do. But is this really the case? The seven seals and the seven trumpets show that sending plagues of wrath against the world is futile. Revelation 9:20-21 concludes that no one repented.

The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and

⁹ Christine Reynolds, Westminster Abbey e-mail.

¹⁰ Quoted in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume VIII. (Table Talk, CXI), p. 510.

wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

God is not out to destroy his world. He wants to save it. How can he save the world? He knows he can't do it with violence. Who would even want to worship a violent God? John is contrasting the difference between a roaring lion and a sacrificial lamb. Craig Koester, in light of all the violence, asks, "What has changed?"

The answer is that nothing has changed in humanity's relationship to God or to one another. And if we think about it, why should anything change? Why should people turn to a God who seems bent on destroying the world? The trumpet visions reveal that God could send plagues of wrath against a sinful and wicked world, but such action would be ineffectual.¹¹

God is not interested in destroying the world he created and called good. He only wants to destroy the destroyers of the world. This is why an angel appears with a scroll offering it to John to eat. It tastes both bitter and sweet. It's sweet because it's God's Word and it's bitter because of the human response. John is told to prophesy like Moses and Elijah (the two witnesses) did. It won't be easy, but God is in control.

In chapter 11, John sees a temple in which true worship takes place. What does he mean by temple? The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E., and the final chapters of the Book of Revelation indicate that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem. For John, the word "temple" was a vivid metaphor for the worshipping community. When the final trumpet sounds, it does not bring disaster; rather, it signals a time for celebration. A chorus of voices declares that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who controls the four horsemen?
2. If you were God, how would you handle evil?
3. Why do you think God keeps putting off judgment?

¹¹ Craig R. Koester, *The Apocalypse: Controversies and Meaning in Western History* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Great Courses, 2011), p. 25.



St. Michael fighting the Dragon
Revelation 12:7-9

7. THE WOMAN AND THE BEASTS

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Woman	The Red Dragon	The 1st Beast	The 2nd Beast
12:1-6	12:7-18	13:1-10	13:11-18

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON (12:1-18)

The Woman and the Child

Who is this woman? Could she be Mary the mother of Jesus, or does she represent Israel, who gave birth to the Messiah? The twelve stars on her head seem to indicate that she represents the twelve tribes of Israel. Although some have suggested that they are the signs of the Zodiak, which does not make much sense in this context. The point is that Israel has given birth to Jesus the Messiah (12:5). In the latter part of this chapter, the woman is the mother of the child, who can be identified not only as Jesus, but also as the Body of Christ, the Church, or the New Israel.

The Woman's Flight from the Dragon

The wilderness experience represents the conflict between good and evil. Evil is symbolized by the dragon, who has seven heads crowned with diadems and ten horns. The seven heads symbolize the seven-hills of Rome, and the diadems and horns symbolize Rome's power. The Church can expect to be persecuted, but through it all, she will be protected. God promises to protect her for three and one-half years or 1,260 days.

Michael and the Dragon

The dragon is finally named. He is both the devil and Satan. Devil comes from the Greek word *diabolis*, which means "slanderer;" and Satan is a transliteration of a Hebrew word, which means "adversary." Michael and his angels fought the dragon and his angels in heaven, and this war resulted in the dragon and his angels being thrown out of heaven. In fact they land on earth, where they continue their evil deeds. This is an explanation of why evil is so rampant on earth.

The Dragon's Pursuit of the Woman

Finding himself on earth, the dragon pursues the woman who now, along with her offspring, clearly symbolizes the Church. The earth itself will swallow up the river of water used by the dragon to threaten her. The persecution will continue against her offspring, who represent all true believers. In spite of the dragon's immense power, it is still operating under limitations. Its tail, for example, was only able to sweep down one-third of the stars from heaven.

THE TWO BEASTS (13:1-18)

By now it should be clear that the Revelation of John assigns the source of evil, persecution, and suffering in the world to the dragon; and the dragon is none other than that old serpent, Satan or the Devil (Revelation 12:9). The Church should always be in the middle of the fight against evil, and this is what Jesus had in mind when he pictured the Church beating down the gates of Hades (Matthew 16:18).

The Beast from the Sea (13:1-10)

This section is divided into two parts: a description of the beast and his power.

The Description of the Beast (13:1-4)

The dragon gave his power to these two beasts, the first of which comes out of the sea, which was an evil place to the Jews. This beast represents the evil power of Rome. The description is based on Daniel 7:2-7, where four beasts are seen. The first was like a lion. The second resembled a bear. The third was similar to a leopard, and the fourth differed from the others and had ten horns. In Revelation these features are combined and we have a single beast with ten horns that was "like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth." (Revelation 13:2) There are at least two different opinions as to what Daniel meant by the four beasts. According to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the lion stands for Babylon, the bear for Media, the Leopard for Persia, and the ten horned beast for Greece. The New International Version of the Bible comes up with a different scheme. It equates the lion with Babylon, the bear with Media/Persia, the Leopard with Greece, and the ten-horned beast with Rome. Which is correct does not matter. By combining the four into one,

John's beast includes all the evils of these pagan kingdoms. Rome is the absolute worst.

The ten horns (crowns) in Revelation refer to the ten Roman Emperors who had ruled in the first century. The seven heads¹² represent the seven outstanding ones. Three of the ten, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, ruled for only short periods of time.

Ten Horns	Seven Heads
1. Tiberius [1]	14-37 C.E.
2. Caligula (Gaius) [2]	37-41 C.E.
3. Claudius [3]	41-54 C.E.
4. Nero [4]	54-68 C.E.
5. Galba	68-69 C.E.
6. Otho	69 C.E.
7. Vitellius	69 C.E.
8. Vespasian [5]	69-79 C.E.
9. Titus [6]	79-81 C.E.
*10. Domitian [7]	81-96 C.E.

The blasphemous name upon its heads refers to the titles of deity ascribed to them.

In describing the beast John notes that one of its heads has a mortal wound, but that its mortal wound was healed. This is a reference to the Nero legend. A popular superstition suggested that Nero, who committed suicide or went into hiding among the Parthians, would, one day, return to take over the throne. It could be interpreted to say that whoever takes over the throne will outdo Nero in persecution. One writer probably thought of Domitian as either Nero returned from the dead or the one who took Nero's place in persecuting the Church. The mortal wound (Nero), which was healed (Domitian), helps us to identify the first beast as Roman Imperial Power.

The Work of the Beast (13:5-10)

This beast is identified with the antichrist, which came out of the sea (13:1) and killed the two witnesses (Revelation 11:7). He is also the "scarlet

¹²The seven heads can also symbolize the seven-hills of Rome.

beast” upon whom the woman, called *Babylon*, rides (Revelation 17:3). The work of the antichrist includes blasphemy and making war on the saints (13:5-7), and his rule and authority extend over every tribe and people and tongue and nation (13:7b). This presents us with a little problem. In God’s foreknowledge the lamb was to be slain from the beginning of time. God formulated a plan in his own mind (1 Peter 4:12ff and Matthew 26). Are we to accept this persecution and not try to resist it? For John, the rulers are not ordained of God, but are agents of Satan himself. God permits evil to reign. If it had not been so, God could have put an end to Rome long ago. He could do it. The question remains for us: “Does he expect us to do it?”

The Beast from the Earth (13:11-18)

This second beast is the cult of emperor worship. Emperor worship was enforced through the Roman priesthood and the Roman religious structure. It was a political move to unify the nation and secure loyalty to the emperor and his government. Refusing to perform this worship was the same as committing an act of treason. After engaging in an emperor worship ritual, one was free to worship other gods. Emperor worship was done in order to gain primary allegiance to the State. How could they be sure of such loyalty? They did it by requiring everyone to throw a pinch of incense on the altar (burning brazier). Those who did this would then be marked on the right hand or the forehead. The mark may only have been a certificate of loyalty, but it was important. Without this mark, citizens could neither buy nor sell (Revelation 13:17). What kind of a life could they lead if they were not marked? They would be castaways, cut off from their social and economic contacts. Anyone would think it extremely unwise to have an unmarked person for a friend.

It is clear that this beast symbolizes emperor worship. Emperor worship reached its height during the reign of Trajan (112 C.E.). While Trajan did not seek Christians out, once they were charged, he gave them three chances to recant. They had to throw incense on the altar and say, “Caesar is Lord.” Anyone demanding such worship in history has been referred to as this beast, even if he only exercised power selfishly or with evil intentions. At least three attempts to name this beast are worth mentioning. Early manuscripts use two different numbers, the more popular one being 666 and the less popular one being 616. The fact that this threefold number comes short of the perfect number, which would be 7, seems to symbolize a limitation on the power of this beast in the Devil’s army. Naming the

beast has to do with assigning numerical values to letters. Below are three possibilities:

Kaiser (Kaiser Wilhelm)

Kaiser Wilhelm was suggested during World War I. This was determined by giving each letter a numerical value, such as: A=1; B=2; C=3; etc. If you then place a 6 to the right of each number, the total comes to 666.

K	116
A	16
I	96
S	196
E	56
R	186
	666

Hitler

Another person accused of being the beast was Adolph Hitler. In this scheme you have to give the letters values in hundreds. Examples would be: A=100; B=101; C=102; etc. When you follow this method, Hitler becomes the beast.

H	107
I	108
T	119
L	111
E	104
R	117
	666

Nero(n) Caesar

Christians in John's day played the numbers game as well. Since we know the numerical values Christians applied to the letters, we can follow their thought patterns. Here are two different schemes used to identify Nero as the beast.

The first is based on the Latin alphabet:

N	50
E	6
R	500
O	60
	616

The second was based on the Hebrew alphabet:

nun	50	50
res	200	200
waw	6	6
nun	50	
Neron	306	256
qoph	100	100
samekh	60	60
res	200	200
Caesar	360	360

$$306 + 360 = \mathbf{666} \qquad 256 + 360 = \mathbf{616}$$

While 306 plus 360 equals 666 and spells Neron Caesar, we could leave the n (nun) off and get a total of 616, which would be the alternate spelling and number of the beast. Since Nero was already dead when the Book of Revelation was written, Domitian would have been considered as Nero returned from the dead. John may well have thought of Domitian as this beast, the antichrist. Most scholars favor this third method, and do not think much of labeling Kaiser or Hitler as the beast. Martin Luther even suggested that the Pope in his time was really the beast of Revelation. It is too easy to manipulate numbers to reach a preconceived conclusion.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Four characters are introduced. They are the pregnant woman, the red dragon, who is Satan or the Devil, and his two allies, the Beast from the Sea, representing Roman Power, and the Beast from the Earth, representing Emperor worship. Evil has always been on the earth, but now it confronts the birth of God's Messiah, to whom the pregnant woman gives birth. The child suffers, as a sacrificial lamb, and is killed and resurrected.

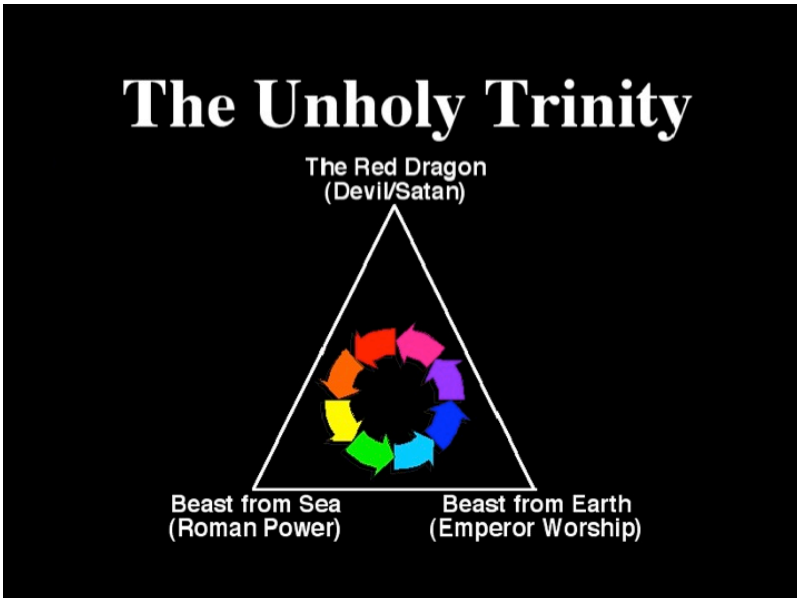


The Sea Monster and the Beast with the Lamb's Horns
Revelation 13:1-13 and 14:14-17

Michael, the archangel casts the dragon out of Heaven, severely limiting his power, but the dragon is incarnated into the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Earth. Evil still has some power, but it is severely limited. It was not able to destroy the Messiah, so now it aims at destroying the woman's children, who follow the Messiah. The woman's children symbolize the faithful in the Church. The woman, at this point, may also symbolize Israel, who gave birth to the Messiah; and consequently, the Church.

God is involved in a second creation. The Unholy Trinity, having been deprived of his power in Heaven, is now out to destroy the earth. At the same time, God is out to destroy the destroyer of the earth (Revelation 11:18). It has never been God's intent to destroy the earth. The Unholy Trinity is like a cancer, which must be destroyed. In the rest of the Book of Revelation, we will see the Red Dragon and his allies defeated and cast first in the pit and then in the lake of fire. The destruction of evil will then be complete.

Previously the angels marked God's people, and now we discover the mark of the Beast, which is 666 or 616. The task of the readers is to avoid the Beast and commit themselves to God and his second creation. This means resisting evil in all of its forms. Being deprived of its power, evil will become desperate, but it cannot win. Its time will run out, but out of desperation, it can still cause significant damage in the world.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does God allow evil, even for a limited period of time?
2. Does evil exist in Government, the Church?
3. Can you think of any movies that highlight the cosmic struggle between good and evil?



The Adoration of the Lamb and the Hymn of the Chosen
Revelation 14:1-3; 17:9-13; and 19:1-4

8. THE 144,000

ASSIGNMENTS		
The Lamb	The Three Angels	The Son of Man
14:1-5	14:6-13	14:14-20

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB AND BEAST (14:1-20)

Chapter fourteen is rather complex, and can be divided in different ways. There are seven visions for example, and they would be as follows:

1. The Saints on Mount Zion. (14:1-5)
2. The Proclamation of the Gospel. (14:6-7)
3. The Announcement of Babylon's Doom. (14:8)
4. The Consequences of worshipping the Beast. (14:9-12)
5. The Beatitude for the Faithful. (14:13)
6. The Grain Harvester. (14:14-16)
7. The Grape Harvester. (14:17-20)

These visions deal with both judgment and blessing and they also support John's anticipation of victory. The victory of the redeemed is highlighted against the suffering of the evil ones who worship the beast and receive the mark of its name. Another way in dealing with the chapter is in terms of a threefold division, which emphasizes the characters in the drama of the seven visions.

The Lamb and His People (14:1-5)

In this vision we discover the outcome for those believers who are faithful to Christ. Mount Zion is an apocalyptic term used to symbolize the seat of the new Kingdom. As used here it stands for both the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem. The 144,000 is a symbolic expression of the whole number of the faithful. They are all chaste, but this does not mean sexual purity. It means that they have not turned to idolatry. Through idolatry one becomes guilty of adultery against God.

The Three Angels (14:6-13)

These visions anticipate the end. The first angel (14:6-7) proclaims the Good News in the midst of the period of tribulation. The second angel (14:8) announces the fall of Babylon (Rome), which is an anticipation of Chapter 18. Babylon is the symbol for Rome. The phrase “made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” suggests a prostitute seducing a youth by first getting him drunk so that he will lose his will to resist.

In like manner Rome involved other nations in her evil practices. The third angel (14:9-12) warns those who would follow the beast, that is, to worship the emperor. Worshipping the beast would be like drinking pure wine (unmixed or undiluted), which was considered immoral in Roman culture. Such an act would bring God’s wrath down upon those who do it, but blessing awaits those who resist. Such people may have to die for their resistance, but they will receive rest from their labors and their deeds will follow them. They will be appropriately blessed (14:13).

The Son of Man (14:14-20)

Seated on a white cloud is the Son of Man, Jesus’ favorite reference to himself. On his head is a golden crown, the symbol of power and authority, and in his hand is a sickle, the symbol of judgment. Judgment is described here in terms of a harvest, and there are two separate visions of the harvest. They have to do with harvesting grain and grapes. Angels appear with sickles in their hands to assist in the harvest, which consists of the ingathering of the saints and the assembling of the wicked for destruction. The negative side of harvesting grain is the burning of the chaff. The awfulness of the impending judgment is illustrated by the wine press, which symbolizes the flowing of blood five feet deep (up to a horse’s bridle) for two hundred miles.

THE SAVED

The number 144,000 stands, not for limitation, it stands for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12—the perfect square—and then rendered even more inclusive and complete by being multiplied by 1000. So far from being a limited and selective number this number in Jewish imagery is the number, which is all inclusive, perfect and complete. This does not tell us that the number of the saved will be very small; it tells us the precise opposite, that the number of the saved will be very great.

The enumeration in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel does not at all mean that this is to be read in purely Jewish terms. One of the basic thoughts of the New Testament is that the Church is the true Israel, and that the national Israel will have to share its privileges and promises with the Church.

This is the second time we have seen the number 144,000. The twelve tribes of Israel are named in Revelation 7:4-8, but two tribes are missing: Dan and Ephraim. No explanation is given for why they are not listed. In the Old Testament Dan does not hold a high place, and is often connected with idolatry. In Jacob's dying speech to his sons, it is said of Dan: "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that the rider shall fall backward" (Genesis 49:17). In Judges the children of Dan are said to have set up a graven image (Judges 18:30). The golden calves, which became a sin, were set up in Bethel and in Dan (1 Kings 12:29). In Rabbinic symbolism Dan began to stand for idolatry. But still more was to follow.

There is a curious saying in Jeremiah 8:16: "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they have come and have devoured the land and all that is in it." That saying came to be taken as referring to the Antichrist, the coming incarnation of evil; and it came to be believed among the Jewish Rabbis that the Antichrist was to spring from Dan. Hippolytus (Concerning Antichrist 14) says: "As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan."¹³

The above seems to indicate that while a great multitude might be saved, not everyone will be saved. Circumcision was the mark of the Jew and Baptism was the mark of the Christian. We might not be able to discern who has the Father's name written on their forehead or who knows how to sing the new song before the throne with the four living creatures and the twenty four elders, but God knows and the angels will help in the harvesting when the wheat is separated from the weeds.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If someone asked you if you were saved, what would you say?

¹³ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (The Saint Andrew Press: Edinburgh, 1962), pp. 29-31.

2. Should the church attempt to keep the wheat separated from the weeds?
3. What does it mean to be held accountable?

9. THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Song	Seven Angels	Bowls 1-4	Bowls 5-7
15:1-8	15:5-8	16:1-9	16:10-21

SEVEN ANGELS WITH SEVEN PLAGUES (15:1-8)

There are two visions in this chapter, which precede the pouring (judgment) of the seven bowls. The Greek word for *bowls* refers to shallow saucer-like vessels, the contents of which can be emptied quickly. The nature of these bowls and the two visions of this chapter point to a quickened pace in the drama of the final judgment and consummation against evil.

The Redeemed in Heaven (15:2-4)

The risen saints, standing beside the celestial sea, sing a song of deliverance. As the children of Israel under Moses crossed the Red Sea, so the followers of Christ have crossed their own sea under the guidance of the Lamb. Revelation 15 can be compared to Exodus 15. The only difference is that the redeemed in heaven have had to die to taste victory. This adds a new dimension to the drama of deliverance.

The Seven Angels (15:5-8)

In the second vision seven angels, reminiscent of the seven archangels of Jewish angeology, are commissioned by one of the four living creatures to pour out the seven bowls of wrath on those who bear the mark of the beast.¹ Judgment finally falls on all who worship the beast. While this takes place, smoke fills the Temple, making it impossible for anyone to enter it. There is no access to the Temple while these bowls are being poured out. Judgment time has finally come.

¹The seven archangels of Jewish angeology are Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, and Remiel.

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH (16:1-21)

The pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God symbolizes the judgment of God, which is more serious and extensive than previously experienced. It is directed at those who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. Some of the same plagues used against Egypt in Moses' time are used here, but they do not follow the same order nor are all of them present. The plagues used in Exodus 7-12 are as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Pollution (Exodus 7:17-21) | 6. Boils (Exodus 9:10-11) |
| 2. Frogs | 7. Hail and Thunderstorm (Exodus 9:23) |
| 3. Gnats | 8. Locusts |
| 4. Flies | 9. Darkness (Exodus 10:21) |
| 5. Cattle Plagues | 10. Death of the first-born |

1. On the Earth (16:2)

The first bowl of wrath was poured out in the form of foul sores (boils) on all those on earth who bore the mark of the beast.

2. Into the Sea (16:3)

The second bowl of wrath turned the sea into blood, and no restraint was exercised: "...every living thing in the sea died."

3. Into the Rivers (16:4-7)

Along with the sea, the rivers and fountains also turn into blood. Previously, blood had been used to symbolize life, but now it symbolizes death. What is the blood of a dead man like? It is cold, coagulated, etc. It symbolizes everything in the sea that has died. The sources of all water have become blood, and those who poured out the blood of the saints will now be forced to drink blood.

4. On the Sun (16:8-9)

When the fourth bowl is poured out on the Sun, the Sun scorches men with fire. The purpose was to evoke repentance, but men cursed God instead. While restraint has been lifted in the pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath, there does remain one restraint. God does not destroy human freedom. Those whom he made in his own image are allowed to resist him, and even to curse him. As in the time of Moses, they failed to repent.

5. On the Throne of the Beast (16:10-11)

The Kingdom of the Beast is reduced to darkness, anguish, and suffering; but it does no good, for its citizens curse God and refuse to repent. Hell is a self-imposed isolation from the realm of God. It is the place in which the only voice people hear is their own.

6. On the Euphrates (16:12-16)

With the pouring out of the sixth bowl of God's wrath, the Euphrates River dries up. This reference to the Euphrates is a hidden reference to Rome and its sources of life and power. It was the Euphrates River that nourished ancient Babylon. Such nourishment is ending, preparing the way for the end.

The end will take place in the Battle of Armageddon (16:13-16). Armageddon is usually thought of as the Hill of Megiddo on the Plain of Jezreel, which is located about sixty miles north of Jerusalem, but it is much more than a place. In the history of Judah, it was the place where Josiah fought against Neco of Egypt (609 B.C.E.), who had come to join forces with the last remnants of the Assyrian Empire against the emerging Babylonian Empire. Josiah interfered and was killed in the process. This set the stage for an eventual Babylonian victory. The New Babylon would be defeated where the old Babylon had conquered. Armageddon is not simply a place. It represents the final battle between the forces of God and evil. The forces of evil are the dragon (Satan), the two beasts (the Roman Empire and Cultus), and all who join forces with them. Armageddon precedes what is known as the millennium and the final judgment. Armageddon is a mystical expression designating the scene of the final battle.

7. Into the Air (16:17-21)

With all the warnings, one would think that there would have been a massive repentance and turning back to God, but nothing of the sort happens. Thus we have the final convulsions of nature resulting in God's final victory. It comes with lightning, thunder, and hail. The great city of Babylon (Rome) falls and is split into three parts. Her evil ways were not forgotten, and she must pay the price for her sins. Such is the moral nature of the universe and the righteousness of God. The delay up to this moment has symbolized the patience and mercy of God.

ARMAGEDDON?

The Seven Bowls of God's wrath prove to be more destructive than either the Seven Seals or the Seven Trumpets. Is this Armageddon? It is at least the beginning of Armageddon. The Seven Bowls of Wrath are compared to the Ten Plagues in Moses' time. God is about to deliver his people from sin and evil as surely as he delivered the Hebrew slaves from their taskmasters in Egypt. The cancer of sin and evil is about to be removed. As this removal takes place, humanity's free will remains intact, but nothing changes. Those who cast their lot with sin and evil exercise their free will, and they refuse to repent and give (God) glory."¹⁴ Their destruction is about to begin, but even as God begins to conquer the destroyers of the earth, he moves very slowly, hoping that humanity will change its mind and let the cancer be destroyed.

Those that repented and resisted sin and evil, gather by a sea of glass with fire, where they sing the song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb, awaiting final deliverance from sin and evil. The song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb are the same song. In the song they acknowledge God as the King of all nations and await his amazing deeds of deliverance.

The deliverance won't be easy. Many innocent people will die before the Battle of Armageddon ends. We can compare the beginning of this battle with D-Day on June 6, 1944, when 160,000 Allied troops landed along a 50-mile stretch of the heavily-fortified French coastline to fight Nazi Germany on the beaches of Normandy. General Dwight D. Eisenhower called the operation a crusade in which "we will accept nothing less than full victory." More than 5,000 Ships and 13,000 aircraft supported the D-Day invasion, and by day's end on June 6, the Allies gained a foothold in Normandy. The D-Day cost was high—more than 9,000 Allied Soldiers were killed or wounded—but more than 100,000 Soldiers began the march across Europe to defeat Hitler.

The Great Red Dragon and his beastly allies will not surrender. They do not have as much power as God has, but this makes them fight all the harder. God will not rest until sin and evil have been cast into the lake of fire. The second creation cannot be completed as long as sin and evil exist.

¹⁴ Revelation 16:9-11

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why doesn't God just destroy the Great Red Dragon and his beastly allies?
2. Does God expect us to destroy sin and evil?
3. What is the difference between resisting evil and destroying it?

10. THE MYSTERIOUS BABYLON

ASSIGNMENTS		
The Great Harlot	The Fall of Babylon	The Great Hallelujah
17:1-18	18:1-24	19:1-10

THE FALL OF BABYLON (17:1—19:10)

The Great Harlot (17:1-18)

The great harlot is the city of Rome itself and the scarlet beast (from the sea) is Roman Imperial Power (17:3). Since it would have been treasonous to say this, John compares Rome to Babylon, Israel's worst enemy in the past. Jews and Christians would have understood, but Romans would not, unless of course they were familiar with Jewish history.

The beast was full of blasphemous names (divine names given to emperors) and has seven heads (the seven hills of Rome and the seven emperors) and ten horns (local governors). The seven kings represent the full cult of emperor worship (17:10-11).

The Five Kings who have died

- 1 Augustus (B.C.E. 27 to 14 C.E.)
- 2 Tiberius (14 to 37 C.E.)
- 3 Caligula (37 to 41 C.E.)
- 4 Claudius (41 to 54 C.E.)
- 5 Nero (54 to 68 C.E.)

The King who is on the throne

6. Vespasian (69 to 79 C.E.)

The King who is yet to come

7. Titus (79 to 81 C.E.)

The King who is coming back

8. Domitian (81 to 96 C.E.)

Galba, Otho, and Vitellius are not mentioned because they did not rule long enough to matter. The difficulty with the above scheme is that it does not agree with the time period in which most scholars think the Book of Revelation was written. It seems to date the book during the time of Vespasian. Most scholarship agrees that it was written during the time of Domitian.

There seems to be a war between the harlot and the beast (17:15-18). What does this mean? Very conservative writers identify the harlot as the apostate church. Historically, this scene must be understood against the background of the belief that Nero would invade the empire he once ruled with an army of Parthians to ravage and destroy it. This imagery also lifts up the fact that many great empires fall from within rather than by means of some external enemy.

The Fall of Babylon (Rome) (18:1-24)

Rome shall fall in less than one hour (18:10, 17, and 19), and all her provinces with her. The events of this fall are described in the following parts:

The angel announces the fall (18:1-3)

God's people are warned to flee (18:4-5)

The Spirits of retribution are commissioned (18:6-8)

Kings, merchants, and seamen weep over her (18:9-19)

Rome suddenly disappears (18:21-24)

The death of this city meant the death of a great civilization, which had become corrupt. Many great cultures have had their day and then ceased to be. Sodom and Gomorrah lie in ruins beneath the Dead Sea; Babylon was destroyed in the time of Alexander the Great; Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in 70 C.E.; and now it is Rome's turn. This should sober us into becoming a responsible, God-fearing nation. We have absolutely no guarantee that our civilization will last.

If we were to summarize the reasons for Rome's demise, they would be three:

The Propagation of the Imperial Cult
The Oppressing power of Rome's economy
The Martyrdom of the Christians

Tacitus, a non-Christian writer in the first century, described the cruelty with which early Christians were martyred:

...a vast multitude of Christians were not only put to death, but put to death with insult. They were either clothed in the skins of wild beasts and then exposed in the arena to the attacks of half-famished dogs, or else dipped in tar and put on crosses to be set on fire, and, when the daylight failed, to be burned as lights by night.¹

John believed that this kind of imperial behavior would lead to Rome's demise even though Rome was at its height when he wrote about it. Such immoral behavior would act like a poison eating away at the integrity of the nation until everything collapsed. When the end came, the fall was indeed swift. Rome fell like an overripe plumb. About the fall of Rome, Bruce Metzger writes:

As with so many judgments of God, the fulfillment actually came slowly, but at last suddenly. For centuries Rome decayed and degenerated, moral poison infecting her whole life. Then during a fateful week in August of the year C.E. 410, Alaric, with his northern hordes of Goths, pillaged Rome and laid it waste.²

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the famous historian Gibbon gives five reasons for Rome's fall:

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.
2. Higher and higher taxes; spending of public moneys for bread and circuses.
3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.

¹Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 86.

²*Ibid.*, p. 87.

4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy is within; the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion; faith fading into a mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide the people.¹⁵

The Great Hallelujah (19:1-5)

Suddenly there is a shift from earth to heaven, and a great multitude begin to sing “Hallelujah.” While Hallelujah appears in the Old Testament, this is the only place the word appears in the New Testament. This multitude praises God for the demise of Rome. In addition to Hallelujah, such words as *salvation*, *glory*, and *power* enliven the outburst. The theme of the song is the justice of God, which has been illustrated by the downfall of Rome. Everyone praises God for acting decisively, including the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, who prostrate themselves before the throne.

The Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)

The climax of the celebration in heaven is the announcement of the coming marriage of the lamb (Christ), whose bride is to be the Church. The multitude lets out another burst of praise, which inspired Handel to write the “Hallelujah Chorus” in his *Messiah*. Both Revelation 11:17 and 19:6 anticipate the celebration of God’s victory and the inauguration of his Kingdom. That Kingdom begins with the marriage of the lamb and the marriage feast, which follows. The marriage relationship between God and his people was already described in Isaiah 54:1-6; Jeremiah 31:32; and Ezekiel 16:8. Jesus talked about the Messianic Age beginning with a banquet in Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13; and Revelation 3:20. John was so inspired that he fell down at the feet of the angel who was showing him this vision and worshiped him, but the angel would not allow it. This is clearly a statement against angel worship, which had been practiced in Asia Minor (Colossians 2:18).

WEALTH AND VIOLENCE

This horrific scene offers one of Revelation’s most pointed comments on the nature of evil. It is inherently self-destructive. Rome may have been wealthy, but she built her wealth with violence, just as she built her empire.

¹⁵ *Pulpit Resource*, Apr-May-June, 1982, p. 43.

Two early Christians sounded the alarm. The first was St. Basil the Great (329 or 330 C.E.), who warned:

Why are you rich and that man poor? You make your own things given you to distribute. The coat which you preserve in your wardrobe belongs to the naked; the bread you keep belongs to the hungry. The gold you have hidden in the ground belongs to the needy.¹⁶

Another early Christian who sounded the warning was John Chrysostom (347-407), who said:

The wealth is common to thee and to thy fellow servants, just as the sun is common, the earth, the air and all the rest. To grow rich without injustice is impossible.¹⁷

Where there is wealth, there is also injustice and violence. But what is wealth? Jesus warned us about the dangers of wealth. In Mark 10:25, he said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Frederick Buechner agreed and warned, "...for a rich man to get into Heaven is about as easy as for a Cadillac to get through a revolving door."¹⁸

John Wesley was one of the last great theologians to take seriously the injunctions of Scripture and the church fathers against luxury. Following the church fathers, he argues that what we have above the necessities (for life) and convenience (for vocation) already belong to the poor. God owns everything. We are but stewards of all that God has given us, and we should live simply without adornments in dress or in church buildings.¹⁹

Does this mean that we all have to become poor? When is enough enough? Jacques Ellul struggles with this question:

¹⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 91.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 467.

¹⁹ John Wesley, *The Danger of Riches*, Sermon 87.

A rich man who becomes ashamed of his wealth might burn all his titles and certificates and join the indigents on skid row, but while this might be very edifying, the latter would not thank him for coming to share their meager supplies of food and wine; he would just be another mouth to feed.²⁰

No one is saying we all have to be poor, although, poverty is one of the spiritual gifts. It is extreme wealth that creates the problem. The greater the injustice, the more likely violence will break out. Extreme wealth and injustice self-destruct.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the causes of poverty?
2. What are the causes of violence?
3. What would a just society look like?

²⁰ Jacques, *The Ethics of Freedom* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 467.

11. THE DEFEAT OF SATAN

ASSIGNMENTS			
The White Horse	The 1000 Year Reign	The Final Conflict	The Final Judgment
19:1-21	20:1-6	20:7-10	20:11-15

The Rider on the White Horse (19:11-21)

Revelation 16:12-16 announces the Battle of Armageddon. Does it begin with the rider on the white horse and end with the casting of Satan into Hell? As we proceed with the defeat of Satan we must recognize how confusing it is to organize the sequence of events. The best we can do is to lift up what is to happen. The rider on the white horse is most certainly Christ, who leads the final battle against human evil, but is this the Battle of Armageddon?

Armageddon symbolizes the final conflict between good and evil. Where will this battle be fought? Several suggestions have been made. The first is that it will be fought on the plains of Megiddo (Judges 5:19) or near Mount Megiddo (Hill of Victory). Another suggestion points to the outskirts of Jerusalem (Daniel 11:45). Many have asked whether this battle will be a real physical battle in one of the above places, or whether it will be a moral and spiritual encounter with evil? Most commentators believe that the reference is to more than geography. Wherever good and evil have their final conflict, that is Armageddon. The battle will be short and the victory decisive. No power can hold out against God. The battle described here in Chapter 19 is between the Kings of the earth and Christ and the martyrs. The beast (Roman Empire) and the false prophet (Roman cultus) are finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire, which is called Gehenna. Human evil is finished, even though Satan has not yet been dealt the final blow. Armageddon continues until Satan has been cast into the lake of fire.

The Thousand-Year Reign (20:1-6)

The idea of the millennium was an attempt to merge two Jewish sources. The first was the Messianic Hope. The Jews believed that the Messiah

would come and establish a new age on earth in which Israel would be supreme. Jerusalem would be restored, the Temple rebuilt, and death would end. Those who died in the past would be resurrected. The second was the Apocalyptic Hope. According to this source there would be two distinct ages or worlds. The attempt to merge the two suggested an intermediate Kingdom established on the earth in which Jerusalem would be its capital and the Messiah its ruler. Beyond this would be the final eternal age or world which would be very different from this world; hence, the idea of a thousand year reign is not new. It appears in many Hebrew, Egyptian, and Persian writings. Apocalyptists among the Jews pictured the Messiah as having a limited rule on earth with the righteous. (See 2 Esdras 7:26-28; 12:31-34)

Two things are not clear. First, is Christ to be physically or spiritually present; and secondly, is his rule to take place on earth or in heaven? The only thing that is clear is that John expected it to take place soon, and that Christ would reign with the martyrs. The rest of the dead will not be raised until the end of the thousand years. If the thousand years was to be taken historically, the anticipated time period would be from 100 to 1100 C.E. If no other numbers are taken literally or historically in the Book of Revelation, why should this one? One thousand years symbolize a significant period of time, which is far beyond any human life span. The symbol is used in two other places in the Bible. Psalm 90:4 is the first example: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night." The second is 2 Peter 3:8, which was used to comfort people who wondered why the Lord had not yet returned: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." While a thousand years may be a long time to us, it is a very brief span of time to God.

All of the above uncertainties left room for at least three interpretations of the thousand year reign, which we call the Millennium.

Premillennialism is the most common view. It says that Christ will return before the thousand years. He will reign along with the saints. Following the thousand-year reign, there will be a general resurrection, a final judgment and a second creation.

In Postmillennialism Christ returns after the thousand-year reign. Following this earthly reign of God, there will be a short conflict between good and evil, and then Christ will return and resurrect the dead. The

general resurrection and the final judgment will be followed by the second creation..

Amillennialism is the denial that there will ever be any thousand-year rule of Christ on the earth and suggests that Christ's coming will usher in the new heaven and the new earth. Augustine was the first major theologian to allegorize or spiritualize the millennium. He said that there would be no coming of Jesus before the final judgment. His coming occurs continually in the Church and its members. The thousand-year reign of Christ on earth began with Jesus himself. The saints will reign in the Church.

While the above positions on the millennium are very different, they all point to the common truth that Christ will come again to destroy all the forces of evil and establish the Kingdom of God.

The Binding of Satan (20:1-3)

Before the thousand-year reign could begin, there had to be a binding of Satan. Following his binding, he is cast into the "bottomless pit" for a thousand years. Why he was not cast into the Lake of Fire along with the beast and his false prophet remains a mystery. The thousand-year reign symbolizes a brief interruption of Satan's work. His total destruction is reserved for the end.

The First Resurrection (20:4-6)

The martyrs are to be raised up to share in Christ's millennial reign. This is not for everyone. It is only for those who were loyal unto death, those who refused to worship the beast and to receive his mark. They would be the "martyrs."

The Final Conflict (20:7-10)

At the end of the thousand-year reign, Satan will be loosed. Notice that he was set free, he did not escape. He will only be free for a short time; however, for evil can never be fully overcome while earthly conditions remain. Satan will gather together all the forces of evil (gog and magog) in a final conflict against God, but Satan will lose and be cast into the Lake of Fire. This final conflict seems to be a rephrasing of the Battle of Armageddon, symbolizing now the final destruction of supernatural evil. In Revelation 19:11-21 human evil was destroyed, but Satan seems to rally some more forces.

Who are *gog* and *magog*? Gog was the prince of Magog (a country), the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal (Ezekiel 38:2). He marched into the mountains of Israel, but his attack failed and he was destroyed. (See Ezekiel 39:17-20.) When *gog* and *magog* are mentioned, it is like saying Hitler and his Germany. The words symbolize the attack that the forces of evil make upon God; and in this case, it is their final attack. John wants to symbolize God's final triumph. This time Satan is cast into the eternal Lake of Fire. John takes the imagery of *gog* and *magog* much farther than did Ezekiel. John expands the idea into cosmic proportions. Satan and evil are destroyed. The *final* battle has been fought and won.

The Final Judgment (20:11-15)

Three important things are mentioned in this final judgment scene.

The Great White Throne (20:11)

Everyone will stand before the Great White Throne for judgment. No distinctions will be made. The people of all nations will be there. This was clearly stated by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46.

The General Resurrection (20:12-13)

Both the wicked and the righteous shall appear before the great white throne for judgment. Only the martyrs were raised in the first resurrection, but everyone will be raised in the general resurrection.

The Final Judgment (20:14-15)

This judgment will be final. There will be no second chances. Being thrown into the lake of fire is the second death. While the first death is physical, the second death is spiritual. The second death however consists of eternal punishment. The fire, according to Jesus, is eternal (Matthew 25:41) and unquenchable (Mark 9:48). For those whose names have been written in the book of life, eternal bliss is their reward. Those cast into the lake of fire did not have their names in the book. Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 10:20: "...rejoice that your names are written in heaven." This book does not list our good and bad deeds, weighing one against the other; rather, it is a list of all who respond to God's grace by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a record of the faithful.



**The Angel with the Key hurls the Dragon into the Abyss,
and another Angel shows St. John the New Jerusalem.
Revelation 20:1-3; 21:9-12; and 22:8**

ARMAGEDDON

The Battle of Armageddon shouldn't frighten us. It is not a battle against human beings. It is a battle against human and supernatural evil. It begins with rider on the white horse, who is clearly the Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The only weapon he uses is the sharp sword that comes out of his mouth, which is the Word of Truth. He is clothed in a robe, dipped in blood. The blood is his own, which he shed on behalf of all humanity. His Word and his Blood are his only weapons, and they are not used to destroy the world, for which he gave his life; rather, they are used to destroy the destroyers of the world. God's goal in the Battle of Armageddon is to liberate the world from all the forces that diminish life. Craig R. Koester summarizes this battle as follows:

The scenes of Armageddon do not picture one group of human beings slaughtering another. Rather, they emphasize the power of Christ's path of sacrifice, symbolized by the robe stained with his own blood. The power of Christ's word brings tyranny and deception to an end.²¹

The first thing that happens is the casting of the Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Land, who represent human evil, into the Lake of Fire. The Dragon, who represents supernatural evil, is only thrown into the pit or the abyss. Why he isn't thrown into the Lake of Fire with the other two Beasts is not made clear. What it does is to make possible the reign of Christ and the martyrs for a thousand years. Is this reign supposed to take place on earth or in heaven? The millennium symbolizes Christ's power over human evil, but it takes longer to defeat supernatural evil. At the end of the thousand years, Satan (the Dragon) will be released from his prison. He will gather what forces he has left, symbolized by Gog and Magog, and make a final assault on the world, but he will lose and be cast into the Lake of Fire. The Battle of Armageddon is now over, and the second creation is about to begin.

Before the second creation can begin, the sheep need to be separated from the goats in the Last Judgment.²² Two books are opened—the book of deeds and the book of life. These two books symbolize accountability and

²¹ Craig R. Koester, *The Apocalypse: Controversies and Meaning in Western History* (The Great Courses, 2011), p. 62.

²² See Matthew 25:31-46

divine grace. People are accountable for what they do, but they are not saved by what they do. They are saved only by the grace of God. Scripture assumes that the future can only be a gift from the Creator, whose purposes will culminate in the second creation. Even John Newton, the author of one of the most beloved hymns ever written, “Amazing Grace,” expressed doubts about his own worthiness, when he said, “If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there.”

In the second creation, there will be no place for any kind of evil. Those who hang on to evil will find themselves in Hell, even if they think they are in Heaven. Rabbi Harold Kushner explains this with the following story:

There is a story told of a man who died after having led a thoroughly selfish, immoral life. Moments later, he found himself in a world of bright sunlight, soft music, and figures all dressed in white. “Boy, I never expected this,” he said to himself. “I guess God has a soft spot in His heart for a clever rascal like me.” He turned to a figure in a white robe and said, “Buddy, I’ve got something to celebrate. Can I buy you a drink?” The figure answered, “If you mean alcoholic beverages, we don’t have any of that around here.” “No booze, huh? Well then, what about a game of cards? Pinochle, draw poker, you name it.” “I’m sorry but we don’t gamble here either.” “Well, what do you do all day?” the man asked. “We read the psalms a lot. There is a Bible class every morning and a prayer circle in the afternoon.” “Psalms! Bible study all day long! Boy, I’ll tell you—heaven isn’t what it’s cracked up to be.” At which point the figure in white smiled and said, “I see that you don’t understand. We’re in heaven; you’re in hell.”²³

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why should we look forward to Armageddon?
2. How can God destroy evil without hurting people?
3. Contrast your concept of Hell with the Biblical concept of Hell?

²³ Harold Kushner, *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986), pp. 156-157.



**The Angel with the Key hurls the Dragon into the Abyss,
and another Angel shows St. John the New Jerusalem.
Revelation 20:1-3; 21:9-12; and 22:8**

12. THE SECOND CREATION

ASSIGNMENTS		
The New Creation	The New Jerusalem	The Coming of Jesus
21:1-8	21:9—22:5	22:6-21

THE NEW CREATION (21:1-8)

In the Kingdom of God everything is new. “See,” says God in Revelation 21:5, “I am making all things new.” All the old things, including the old sinful relationships, are gone. Scattered throughout these last two chapters are a number of things that disappear. They are: (1) the Sea (21:1); (2) death and suffering (21:4); (3) the Temple (21:22); (4) the sun and moon (21:23); (5) the night (21:25 and 22:5); and (6) sin (21:27 and 22:3).

In this new Kingdom, God will be present. “See,” says Revelation 21:3, “the home of God is among mortals.” This is a restatement of Ezekiel 37:27 and the fulfillment of the promise of Jeremiah 32:38 and 40. It is God’s presence that makes all things new (21:5), and, “Those who conquer will inherit these things....” (21:7) John used this phrase in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. Two choices have always been available to us, from Genesis to Revelation. They were symbolized in Genesis by the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.²⁴ Here they are symbolized by the “fountain of the water of life” and the “lake that burns with fire and sulfur.” The choice between life and death has always been our own.

THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:9—22:5)

One of the seven angels showed the holy city to John from a high mountain. The main purpose of this vision is to demonstrate that the Church is an expansion of the people of Israel. The vision demonstrates the connection between Israel’s history and all who believe in Israel’s Messiah.

²⁴ See Genesis 2:8-17

The Walls of the City (21:9-14)

A high wall, with twelve gates surrounds the city. The walls are 215 feet (144 cubits) high (21:17). Twelve angels were in charge of the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The wall was built on twelve foundation stones, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles. While one might expect to see the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the foundation stones, we discover the reverse. The names of the twelve apostles are written there. Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-20; and 1 Peter 2:5 should have prepared us for this. The New Jerusalem is not only an expansion of the Old Jerusalem; it is built on an entirely new foundation.

The Measurement of the City (21:15-21)

The city was a perfect cube, which symbolizes perfection. The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and the Temple was also a perfect cube. In the Old Covenant the Holy of Holies contained the Ten Commandments; but in the New Covenant, the City of God contains the presence of God himself. With God's presence, no Temple is needed.

While the measurements are symbolic, they are nevertheless immense. The city is a 1,500-mile cube (1,200 stadia or 12,000 furlongs). That is a large city, even in this day of jet travel; but we must still recognize that it is symbolic. These are not the literal dimensions of the New Jerusalem. The precious stones symbolize the city's beauty. Many of them are the same as those placed in Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28:17-21 and 39:10-14). Josephus (Ant 3:186) and Philo (Vit Mos 2:124-6) associates these same stones with the signs of the zodiac, by which the ancient world traced the times and the seasons of the year. In addition to beauty, they may also symbolize a new authority.

Building	Materials
The Wall:	Jasper
The City:	Translucent Gold
The Gates:	Pearls
The Streets:	Translucent Gold
Foundation:	Twelve Different Precious Jewels

Aaron's Breastplate The Jewels

Sardius	Jasper
Topaz	Sapphire
Carbuncle	Agate (Chalcedony)
Emerald	Emerald
Sapphire	Onyx (Sardonyx)
Diamond	Carnelian (Sardius)
Jacinth	Chrysolite
Agate	Beryl
Amethyst	Topaz
Beryl	Chrysoprase
Onyx	Jacinth
Jasper	Amethyst

The Light of the City (21:22-27)

God gives off light. There is no need for the sun and moon. God's glory will make all other sources of illumination unnecessary (22:5). Although Revelation 3:12 and 7:15 alluded to a Temple, there is no Temple in the New Jerusalem. There is no need for one, for God is present everywhere. As there is no need for a hospital when everyone is healthy, there is no need for a Temple when everyone is with God. The secular is absent, and the sacred is everywhere. That's why the goal of the Christian life is holiness.

The Blessings of the City (22:1-5)

Fallen humanity was previously denied access to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24). Redeemed humanity will be given eternal access to the sacred river flowing from the throne of God with a tree of life on both sides, bearing twelve different kinds of fruit and leaves that heal. The water and trees will be available at any time, and human freedom will never again be abused.

THE COMING OF JESUS (22:6-21)

This final epilogue is somewhat disjointed, but informs us about the imminent coming of Jesus, his invitation to all, and the Church's prayer that he come soon.

A Testimony (22:6-9)

John concludes by giving a testimony to the truth of the vision he has just shared. The latter portion of the Beatitude of Revelation 1:3b is repeated in Revelation 22:7. Those who keep the words contained in this book (the Book of Revelation) will find blessedness. John was so inspired by the vision that for the second time he fell down in adoration of the angel who gave it to him. (See Revelation 19:10.) The angel discouraged him. Worshipping an angel would be a violation of the first commandment and a violation of the intent of the Book of Revelation.

A Distinction (22:10-15)

There is no hint of universal salvation. We are told not to hide the prophetic warnings contained in this vision. There are still “evildoers” around, but they will not be able to enter the New Jerusalem. Only those who “wash their robes” will gain entry (22:14). Other ancient texts read “do his commandments” instead of “wash their robes.” The meaning would be similar, but we should not get the idea that we gain entry by means of obeying the commandments. While we might be able to obey the letter of the commandments, we would not be able to obey the spirit of the commandments. Even John had difficulty, and on the two occasions mentioned, fell down to worship an angel. What distinguishes God’s people from the evildoers is faith, and true faith results in a love of God’s commandments.

An Invitation (22:16-17)

The invitation is to the “water of life” from which one can drink without price. One responds to this invitation not by works or the ability to obey the law, but by simple faith. The invitation itself is simple: “COME!” The word is repeated three times. There is no excuse for not being able to understand this invitation.

A Warning (22:18-19)

These verses have been modeled after Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. They are a warning to heed the message of this Book. Every reader had better heed the warning.

A Prayer (22:20)

Christ has warned three times that he will come soon (22:7, 12, and 20). Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* offers some good advice: “We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there were to be a great future.” With this kind of an attitude, we are ready to offer our final prayer. The final prayer of the Bible contains three words: “Come, Lord Jesus!” This prayer is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and in the Didache (10:16):

May grace come and may this world pass away.
Hosanna to the God of David.
If any man is holy, let him come;
If any man is not, let him repent;
Maranatha. Amen.

The Greek word *Maranatha* simply means, “Our Lord has come,” or “Our Lord, come!” It can be either a statement or a prayer. At the close of the Book of Revelation it is a prayer, which indicates that we are ready for his coming.

A Benediction (22:21)

In describing the Christian’s relationship to Scripture, Karl Barth concludes with John’s final benediction: “Christians are the people under the Gospel. We are biblical Christians. Finally, ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.’” This final reference to the grace of God, his unearned love, makes a fitting conclusion to the Bible.

FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO THE HOLY CITY OF GOD

One thing is clear. John is not describing a return to the Garden of Eden, nor is he describing a city created by humankind. “The city of God,” says Jacques Ellul, is not at the end of human progress, at the end of history by a sort of accumulation of the works of man; at this end there is found only Babylon.”²⁵ The Holy City of God descends from heaven rather than being built up from earth. This does not mean that we should do nothing in the interim. “We must act for justice and peace and liberty,” continues Ellul, “but it is relative. We will never create the absolutely just, peaceful, and

²⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Apocalypse* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 214-215.

fraternal society; to believe that is a modern idolatry.”²⁶ At the beginning of the Book of Revelation, judgment falls upon the lukewarm, which is to say, precisely, on those who do nothing. We face two dangers: to do nothing and to think that we are creating the new heaven and the new earth—the New Jerusalem, the Holy City of God.

The second creation is the work of God. In his first creation, God created a garden. In his second creation he is creating a city. God is not taking us back to any golden age; rather, he is moving us forward towards the Holy City of God. Ellul describes it best:

Thus we do not observe a return to the origin. It is not the preservation of God’s primitive plan. The biblical God is not the abstract God who, having had an idea at the beginning, maintains it over against everything and again makes a garden because it was his plan at the beginning. Here we are in contradiction to all other religions: for all those, without exception, which have a view of the future, of a paradise, of an “afterlife,” there is uniquely a return to a lost primitive age of gold. Here the situation is radically reversed.²⁷

This city is so beautiful that all John can do is to use symbolic imagery to describe it. There is no Temple or Sanctuary in this city. This is a Holy City which functions as a Temple in itself. Bruce Metzger put it as follows:

There is no temple or sanctuary in the holy city, for, in one respect, the city itself is all sanctuary. Its dimensions, being in the form of a cube, are like the Holy of Holies in the Mosaic tabernacle of old.²⁸

All the gates are wide open all the time. Normally the gates of a city were closed at night, for reasons of security, but that’s not necessary here. There will be no night in this city, and God will be present everywhere. The cherubim no longer need to guard the gate.

In struggling with understanding this Holy City of God, Augustine asked, whether when we close our eyelids, we would shut out the beatific vision? He concluded that this could not be true, for to see God means more than

²⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Apocalypse* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. 218.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁸ Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 102.

to look at God, to gaze at God. In heaven, he says, “God will be seen by the eyes of the heart, which can see realities that are immaterial.”²⁹

The Book of Revelation ends with the simplest of all invitations. The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” Let everyone who hears, say, “Come.” The final prayer is the simplest of all prayers: “Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:17 and 20)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What image of the Holy City of God impresses you the most?
2. What did you like most about the Book of Revelation?
3. Would you have voted to include or reject the Book of Revelation in the Bible? Why?

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Appendix

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

INTRODUCTION (1:1-8)

THE VISION OF CHRIST (1:9-20)

THE SEVEN CHURCHES (2:1—3:22)

THE SEVEN CHURCH-	Ephesus (2:1-7) Lost Love Love	Smyrna (2:8-11) Suffering Poverty	Pergamum (2:12-17) Tempted Truth	Thyatira (2:18-29) Too Tolerant Discernment	Sardis (3:1-6) Asleep Life in	Philadelphia (3:7-13) Open Door Faithfulness	Laodicea (3:14-22) Luke-Warm Hope
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VISION OF GOD THE CREATOR (4:1-11)

VISION OF THE CHRIST THE REDEEMER (5:1-5)

THE SEVEN SEALS (6:1—8:5)

White Horse (6:1-2) Bow & Crown War of Conquest	Red Horse (6:3-4) Sword Civil War	Black Horse (6:5-6) Balance Famine	Pale Horse (6:7-8) Hades Death	Martyrs (6:9-11) White Robe Complete Number	Day of Wrath (6:12-17) Sun, Moon, Stars & Sky	Interlude 144,000 (7:1-8) Multitude (7:9-17)	Silence (8:1-5) 7 Angels given 7 Trumpets
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THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (8:6—11:19)

Hail (8:6-7) 1/3 of Earth	Mountain (8:8-9) 1/3 of Sea	Star (8:10-11) 1/3 of Rivers	Sun (8:12) 1/3 of Sun	Locusts (9:1-12) Led by Apollyon	Angels/Horses (9:13) 200,000,000	Interlude Angel & Scroll (10:1-11) Sweet Bitter	Messiah (11:15-19)
1/3 of objects destroyed by the upheavals of nature				1/3 of the people killed		2 Witnesses (11:1-14) Olive Trees Lamp Stands	

THE CHARACTERS (12:1—15:8)

The Woman and the Dragon (12:1-17)	Beast from the Sea (13:1-10) Roman Empire	Beast from the Earth (13:11-17) Roman Cultus	Number of the Beast (13:18) 666 or 616	The Lamb & His People (14:1-5) 144,000	The Three Angels (14:6-13)	Son of Man (Crown/Sickle) (14:14-20) Harvest: Grain/Wine	7 Angels with 7 Plagues (15:1-8)
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THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH (16:1-21)

Earth (16:2)	Sea (16:3)	Rivers (16:4-7)	Sun (16:8-9)	Throne of the Beast (16:10-11)	Euphrates River (16:12)	Interlude (16:13-16) 3 Demons at Armageddon	Air (16:17-21)
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THE JUDGMENT (17:1—20:15)

The Great Harlot (17:1-18)	The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)	The Great Hallelujah (19:1-5)	The Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)	Rider on the White Horse (19:11-21)	The 1000 Year Reign (20:1-6)	The Final Conflict (20:7-10)	The Final Judgment (20:11-15)
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THE SECOND CREATION (21:1—22:5)

The New Creation (21:1-8)

The New Jerusalem (21:9—22:5)

THE COMING OF JESUS (22:6-21)

OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION

1. THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES

(Jesus in the midst of the lamp stands (churches))

- a. Ephesus
- b. Smyrna
- c. Pergamum
- d. Thyatira
- e. Sardis
- f. Philadelphia
- g. Laodicea

2. JUDGMENT ON EARTH

(Vision of God as Creator and of Jesus as Redeemer)

a. The Seven Seals (1/4)

(The 144,000 and the Great Multitude)

b. The Seven Trumpets (1/3)

(John eats the Little Scroll and measures the Temple and the Altar)

The Characters

The Women and the Dragon

1st Woman: Israel

2nd Woman: Church

Dragon: Satan

The Two Beasts

Beast of the Sea: Roman Power

Beast of the Earth: Emperor Worship

(Identity: 666 or 616)

Followers of the Lamb

The Faithful: 144,000

The Redeemed in Heaven and the Seven Angels

c. The Seven Bowls of Wrath

3. VICTORY IN HEAVEN

a. The Fall Of Babylon

Roman Power and Cultus cast into the Lake of Fire
Satan bound in the pit for 1,000 years

b. The Defeat Of Satan

The Millennium
Satan freed from the pit
The Final Battle with gog and magog
Satan cast into the Lake of Fire

c. The Kingdom of God

The New Jerusalem
(Israel and the Church)

4. THE COMING OF JESUS: Maranatha: "Our Lord, come!"

CHART OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

THE SEVEN CHURCHES (2:1 – 3:11)								
	THE SEVEN CHURCHES	EPHESUS (2:1-7) Doctrinal Purity, but lost love	SMYRNA (2:8-11) Facing Poverty and Suffering	PERGAMUM (2:12-17) Doctrinal and Moral Compromise	THYATIRA (2:18-29) Moral Compromise and too Tolerant	SARDIS (3:1-6) Spiritual Deadness	PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13) Holding Fast to Jesus' Word	LAODICEA (3:14-22) Luke-Warm Attitude
IMAGES FROM THE VISION OF CHRIST		7 Stars 7 Lampsstands (1:12-13) (2:1)	First/Last Death/Life (1:17-18) (2:8)	The Two-edged Sword (1:16) (2:12)	Flaming Eyes Bronze Feet (1:14b & 15a) (2:18)	7 Spirits 7 Stars (1:16a) (3:1)	The Key of David (1:18) (3:7)	Amen (Jesus Christ) True Witness Creation (3:14)
THE COMMEN-DATION		Good Works (Morality) True Teachings (Orthodoxy) (2:2, 3 & 6)	Poverty Suffering (2:9)	Faithfulness (Antipas) (2:13)	Works: Love and Faith Service Endurance (2:19)	Nothing Good but there are a Faithful Few (3:4)	Kept the Word and Refused to deny the Lord (3:8)	Nothing Good They live an Illusion (3:17)
THE NEGATIVE IMAGES		Nicolaitans	Synagogue of Satan Tribulation	Satan's Throne Balaam/Balak Nicolaitans	Jezebel		Synagogue of Satan	
THE CONDEMNATION		Lost Love (2:4)		Idolatry Immorality (2:14-15)	Tolerate People who practice idolatry and immorality (2:20)	Apathy Indifference (3:1b)		They are Lukewarm Neither cold nor hot (3:15-16)
THE EXHORTATION		Repent (2:5)	Be Faithful (2:10b)	Repent (2:16)	Hold Fast (2:25)	Repent (3:3)	Hold Fast (3:11)	Repent (3:19-20)
USE YOUR EARS		Listen (2:7a)	Listen (2:11a)	Listen (2:17a)	Listen (2:29)	Listen (3:6)	Listen (3:13)	Listen (3:22)
THE PROMISE		CONQUER: Tree of Life God's Paradise (2:7b)	CONQUER: Crown of Life Second Death (2:10 & 11b)	CONQUER: Manna White Stone (2:17b)	CONQUER: Rod of Iron Morning Star Power/Presence (2:27-28)	CONQUER: White Garments Book of Life God/Angels (3:5)	CONQUER: Pillar New Name (3:12)	CONQUER: God's Throne (3:21)

CHART OF THE SEVEN SEALS

THE SEVEN SEALS (6:1 – 8:5)									
THE VISIONS		THE SEVEN SEALS							
God as Creator (4:1-11)	God as Redeemer (5:1-14)	1	2	3	4	5	6	Interlude	7
God (Gems and Rainbow)	7 Horns (Omnipotence)	The White Horse (6:1-2)	The Red Horse (6:3-4)	The Black Horse (6:5-6)	The Pale Horse (6:7-8)	The Faithful Martyrs (6:9-11)	The Day of Wrath (6:12-17)	Comfort and Assurance (7:1-17)	Silence in Heaven (8:1-5)
24 Elders (12 Patriarchs and 12 Disciples)	7 Eyes (Omniscience)	Bow/Crown	Sword	Balance	Death/Hades	Patience	Judgment	One-Half Hour	
Seven Torches or Spirits	7 Traits (5:12)	Lion	Ox	Man	Eagle	Under Altar	Sun	144,000 (7:1-8) New Israel	
Four Living Creatures	1. Power 2. Wealth 3. Wisdom 4. Might 5. Honor 6. Glory 7. Blessing	Invasion and Conquest	War and Bloodshed	Inflation and Famine	Pestilence and Death	White Robes (Resurrection)	Moon	Prayers for the Saints	
Man/Matthew Lion/Mark Ox/Luke Eagle/John		Wheat and Barley	Oil and Wine	One-Fourth Killed by ... Sword Famine Pestilence Wild Beasts	Complete Number	Stars	Great Multitude (7:9-17) All Nations		Censers with Fire
						Sky	Thunder Lightning Earthquake		
							White Robes (Righteousness)		
							Palm Branches (Victory)		

CHART OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (8:6—11:19)							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1st Trumpet <i>The Earth</i> (8:7)	2nd Trumpet <i>The Sea</i> (8:8-9)	3rd Trumpet <i>The Water</i> (8:10-11)	4th Trumpet <i>The Heavens</i> (8:12-13)	5th Trumpet (9:1-11)	6th Trumpet (9:13-21)	7th Trumpet (11:15-19)
	Hail and Fire mixed with Blood	Mountain burning with fire thrown into the Sea	Star fell from Heaven like a Blazing Torch	1/3 of the Sun, Moon and Stars Struck	Star (Satan) falls from Heaven	Four Angels released at the Euphrates to lead 200,000,000 Cavalry Troops (Fire/Smoke/Sulphur) to kill 1/3 of Humanity	The Messiah placed on the Throne (11:15-18)
	Destroyed 1/3 of the Earth 1/3 of the Trees All of the Green Grass	Destroyed 1/3 of the Sea changed into blood 1/3 of Sea Life 1/3 of Ships	Star fell on... 1/3 of Rivers 1/3 of Fountains Water became Bitter (Wormwood)	1/3 of the Day/Night kept from Shining The Eagle (8:13) <i>Woe! Woe! Woe!</i>	Locust Emerge from the Pit and harm People for 5 Months	Temple measured! 2 Witnesses Beast Kills them, and God Raises Them (11:1-14)	The Ark of the Covenant finally is Seen (11:19)
	1/3 of Objects Destroyed by the Upheavals of Nature		1/3 of People Killed in Battle				
	<p>* 9:1 The Fallen Star might be Satan (Isaiah 14:12)</p> <p>* 10:4 Seven Thunders equals the Voices of God (Psalm 29)</p> <p>* Abaddon (Hebrew) = Destruction</p> <p>* Apollyon (Greek) = Destroyer</p> <p>* Sodom = Immorality</p> <p>* Egypt = Slavery</p> <p>* The main point is that history is moving towards the inevitable triumph of God, and all the forces of evil will not be able to stop it.</p>						
	<p>* Measuring the Temple = Sealing God's People</p> <p>* Two Witnesses: (11:6) (Malachi 4:5)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">1. Moses (Law) and the Plagues</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">2. Elijah (Prophets) and the Rain</p> <p>* Antiochus Epiphanes (Syrian Tyrant)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Occupation of Jerusalem: (June 168 to December 165 B.C.E.)</p>						

CHART OF THE CHARACTERS AND PLAGUES

CHARACTERS AND PLAGUES (12:1 — 16:21)			
THE CHARACTERS (12:1 — 15:8)			
The woman and the Dragon (12:1-17)	The Two Beasts (13:1-18)	The Followers (14:1-20)	The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
The Woman and the Child	The Beast from the Sea (13:1-10) [Roman Empire]	The Lamb and His People (14:1-5) [144,000]	The Redeemed in Heaven (15:2-4)
The Woman's Flight	The Beast from the Earth (13:11-18) [Roman Cultus] Nero(n) Caesar: 616 or 666	The Three Angels (14:6-13) (1) Proclaims good news in the Tribulation (2) Announces the fall of Babylon (Rome) (3) Warns those who worship the emperor and follow the beast	The Seven Angels (15:5-8) Michael Raphael Gabriel Uriel Raguel Sariel Remiel
Michael and the Dragon			
The Dragon's Pursuit			
THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH (16:1-21)			
On the Earth (16:2)	On the Sea (16:3)	Into the River (16:4-7)	On the Sun (16:8-9)
Sores or Boils will cover all who follow the Beast	The Sea will turn into Blood and all life in it will die	The River will turn into Blood and all life in it will die	The Sun will scorch everyone but they will not repent
		On the River (16:10-11)	On the Euphrates (16:12-16)
		The Throne of the Beast will be reduced to darkness	The River of Babylon (Rome) will dry up [Armageddon]
			Into the Air (16:17-21)
			The Final Convulsions of Nature

CHART OF THE JUDGMENT AND SECOND CREATION

THE JUDGMENT AND THE SECOND CREATION (17:1—22:21)					
THE FALL OF BABYLON (17:1—19:10)					
The Great Harlot (17:1-18)	The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)	The Great Hallelujah (19:1-5)	The Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)		
The Harlot: “The City of Rome”	ONE HOUR	“PRAISE THE LORD”	The Marriage (19:6-8) The Fourth Beatitude (19:9) Don’t Worship Angels (19:10)		
The Scarlet Beast: “The Roman Empire”					
THE DEFEAT OF SATAN (19:11—20:15)					
The Rider of the White Horse (19:11-21)	The Thousand Year Reign (20:1-6)	The Final Conflict (20:7-10)	The Final Judgment (20:11-15)		
The Rider: Christ (19:11-16) Human Evil Defeated (19:17-21) The Beast: Roman Empire False Prophet: Roman Cultus	Binding of Satan in the Pit (20:1-3) The First Resurrection (20:4-6) The Fifth Beatitude (20:6)	Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38:2; 39:17-20) Supernatural Evil Destroyed: Satan cast into the Lake of Fire	The Great White Throne (20:11) The General Resurrection (20:12-13) The Final Judgment (20:14-15)		
THE SECOND CREATION (21:1—22:5)					
The New Creation (21:1-8)			The New Jerusalem (21:9—22:5)		
Things that Disappear Sea (21:1) Death/Suffering (21:4) Temple (21:22) Sun/Moon (21:23) Night (21:25 & 22:5) Sin (21:27 & 22:3)	The Choice Between The Fountain of Life (21:6-7) The Lake of Fire (21:8)	The Walls (21:9-14) 215 Feet High 12 Gates (Tribes) 12 Foundations (Apostles) The City (21:15-21) 1500 Miles Long 1500 Miles Wide 1500 Miles High	The Light (21:22-27) Eternal Presence of God The Blessing (22:1-5) Two Trees of Life		
THE COMING OF JESUS (22:6-21)					
A Testimony (22:6-9)	A Distinction (22:10-15)	An Invitation (22:16-17)	A Warning (22:18-19)	A Prayer (22:20)	A Benediction (22:21)
Sixth Beatitude (22:7; 1:3b) Don’t Worship Angels (22:8-9)	Good and Evil The Seventh Beatitude (22:14)	COME! COME! COME!	Do not Add! Do not take Away!	MARA- NATHA “Come,	GRACE to THE SAINTS

APOCALYPTICISM

The Source of Apocalypticism

The prophetic movement gave rise to Apocalypticism. It was the result of unfulfilled prophecy. While prophecy is more concerned with spiritual and moral values, Apocalypticism concerns itself with prediction and a more continuous view of history. History is divided up into ages and each age is marked by its own spirit and character.

A Definition of Apocalypticism

“Apocalypticism is the eschatological belief that the power of evil (Satan), who is now in control of this temporal and hopelessly evil age of human history in which the righteous are afflicted by his demonic and human agents, is soon to be overcome and his evil rule ended by the direct intervention of God, who is the power of good, and who thereupon will create an entirely new, perfect, and eternal age under his immediate control for the everlasting enjoyment of his righteous followers from among the living and the resurrected dead.”³⁰

Characteristics of Apocalypticism

Eschatological. Apocalypticism is always concerned with last things, the end of this age and life in the age to come. All Apocalypticism is Eschatological, although not all Eschatology is Apocalyptic.

Dualistic. Dualism of two ages and two worlds is characteristic of all Apocalypticism. There exist two opposing supernatural powers, both of which are personal and cosmic. It is not however dualism of spirit and matter, soul and flesh. It has more to do with the powers of good and evil, and what lies behind them.

Deterministic. All that has happened or will happen is the result of God willing it to happen. This does not mean that God is responsible for evil. He has allowed both angels and human beings freedom to choose, but he is

³⁰ Martin Rist, “The Revelation,” *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume XII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 347.

not willing to accept the consequence of their choices. God moves things towards a resolution. There is a pre-determined time schedule, and he insures victory over all the forces of evil.

Esoteric. The Apocalyptic writer, with the help of God, seals up his or her vision in symbolic terms. The writer frequently writes in the name of some person who gained popularity in the past, and he speaks in such a way that only a select group of people can understand. They must understand the historical context out of which all the symbolism comes.

Comforting. Apocalyptic writing aims at comforting those who represent the faithful remnant. It does not support nationalistic or political aspirations of the status quo, but predicts God's victory over evil, which it usually predicts as being just around the corner. This makes it easier for the faithful to deal with persecution, suffering, and death. They can face these things knowing that God's ultimate victory is not only certain, but near.

THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Revelation 2:8-11

What were the slanders, which were leveled against the Christians? There were six ever-recurring slanders.

1. On the basis of the words of the Sacrament—This is my body, and this is my blood—the story went about that the Christians were cannibals.
2. Because the Christians called their common meal the *Agape*, the Love Feast, it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust and immorality.
3. Because Christianity did, in fact, often split families, when some members of them became Christians and some did not, the Christians were accused of breaking up homes and “tampering with family relationships.”
4. The heathen accused the Christians of atheism because they could not understand a worship which had no images of the gods, such as they themselves had.
5. The Christians were accused of being politically disloyal citizens and potential revolutionaries because they could not say: “Caesar is Lord.”
6. The Christians were accused of being incendiaries because they foretold the end of the world in flames and disintegration.

It was not difficult for maliciously-minded people to disseminate dangerous rumours and slanders about the Christian Church.³¹

³¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), p. 98.

THE ROMAN EMPERORS

The worship of Roman Emperors did not begin with the deification of the Emperor, but with the deification of Rome itself. The first temple dedicated to Rome was erected in Smyrna in 195 B.C.E. It was no great step to think of the spirit of Rome being incarnated in the Emperor, and so the worship of the Emperor began with the worship of Julius Caesar following his death. In 29 B.C.E. the Emperor Augustus granted Asia and Bithynia permission to erect temples in Ephesus and Nicaea for the joint worship of the goddess Roma and the deified Julius Caesar. To provincials who were not Roman citizens Augustus gave permission to erect temples in Pergamum in Asia, and in Nicomedia in Bithynia, for the worship of Roma and himself.

Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.E.)

Augustus (44 B.C.E.-14 C.E.) allowed the worship of Julius Caesar. He also allowed non-citizens in the provinces to worship himself, but he did not permit citizens to do so. He made no attempt to enforce this worship.

Tiberius (14-37 C.E.) entered into a situation in which he could not halt worship of the Emperor. He forbade temples to be built and priests to be appointed, for his own worship. He actively discouraged Emperor worship.

Caligula (37-41 C.E.) was an epileptic, a madman, and a megalomaniac. He insisted on divine honors. He attempted to enforce Emperor worship even on the Jews, who had always been exempt from it. He planned to place his own image in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem, a step, which would have provoked rebellion. Fortunately, he died before he could carry out his plans.

Claudius (41-54 C.E.) completely reversed the insane policy of Caligula. He wrote to the governor of Egypt, where a million Jews lived in Alexandria, and approved of the Jewish refusal to call the Emperor a god, granting them full liberty to practice their own religion. On his accession to the throne, he discouraged the appointment of a High Priest to himself and the erection of temples for Emperor worship. While Claudius didn't eliminate Emperor worship, he did seek to control it and he didn't encourage it.

Nero (54-68 C.E.) did not take his own divinity seriously and did nothing to insist on Emperor worship. While he did persecute Christians, he did not persecute them because they would not worship him. He persecuted them because he had to find a scapegoat for the great fire of Rome, for which, he was most certainly responsible.

Galba did not deal with Emperor worship in this time of chaos.

Otto did not deal with Emperor worship in this time of chaos.

Vitellius did not deal with Emperor worship in this time of chaos.

Vespasian (69-79 C.E.) was a wise ruler who made no insistence on Emperor worship.

Titus (79-81 C.E.) was a wise ruler who made no insistence on Emperor worship.

Domitian (81-96 C.E.) was a devil. He was a cold-blooded persecutor. With the exception of Caligula, he was the first Emperor to take his divinity seriously and to demand Emperor worship. He began a campaign of bitter persecution against all who would not worship the ancient gods, calling them atheists. In particular he launched his hatred against Jews and Christians. He declared himself a god. The Book of Revelation was written during Domitian's reign as Emperor.

Nerva (96-98 C.E.) repealed the savage and penal laws of Domitian, but the damage was done. Christians were seen as outlaws. The Book of Revelation became a clarion call to Christians to be faithful unto death in order to win the crown of life.¹

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume I (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 20-24.

SYMBOLS

Babylon:	Rome
Beast from the Sea:	Roman Imperial Power resulting in Evil Government (666 or 616)
Beast from the Earth:	Roman Cultus resulting in a False Religion in which, the Emperor was worshiped
Blasphemous Names:	Divine Titles given to Emperors
Dragon:	Satan (Hebrew) or the Devil (Greek)
Eyes:	Insight and Wisdom
Gehenna:	Lake of fire or Hell
Great Harlot:	City of Rome or the Apostate Church
Gog	A Prince
Hades:	Death
Horns:	Power
Lamb:	Jesus
Lampstands:	Churches
Magog	A Country
Numbers:	Symbolic
666/616	Nero(n) Caesar (Beast from the Sea/False Prophet)
7 & 12:	Perfection
3 & 1/2:	Imperfection or Brevity
144	Completion
Olive Trees:	People of God
Scarlet Beast:	Roman Empire
Seven Heads:	Seven Kings or Emperors
Stars:	Angels or Leaders
Sword:	Scripture
Ten Horns:	Power or in some cases, Local Governors
Woman:	Israel and/or the Church
Whore:	Rome or any city that requires its citizens to worship it
Witnesses, Two:	Moses (Slavery) and Elijah (Immortality)

THE NAMES AND SYMBOLS OF EVIL

The main names are Satan, the Devil, and Lucifer. *Satan* is a Hebrew word which means “accuser” or “adversary” in the Old Testament, and by the time the term finds its way into the New Testament, it means “tempter.” Job, for example is accused in the midst of affluence; and Jesus is tempted in the wilderness. The other major term of course is *Devil*, which comes from a Greek word, which means “slanderer.” This word only appears in the New Testament.

The name *Lucifer* has been mistakenly given to Satan. The term comes from Isaiah 14:12, where it means “day star” and gets applied to something Jesus said about Satan in Luke 10:18. Since we have become so familiar with this name for Satan, it might be best to look at these two verses of Scripture:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star (Lucifer), son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (Isaiah 14:12)

He (Jesus) said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” (Luke 10:18)

Making the connection between “Day Star” and “Satan” takes quite a stretch of the imagination. We do better to stay with Satan and the Devil. In addition to names, we also encounter a host of images symbolizing Satan and the Devil, beginning with the “Serpent” in *Genesis*, the first book of the Bible, and concluding with the “Dragon” in *Revelation*, the last book of the Bible.

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

Revelation 4:6b-8

It was not long before the early Church found certain symbolisms in the living creatures. In particular they found in the living creatures symbolisms of the four gospels; it was held that each of the living creatures was the symbolic representation of one of the Gospels. More than one scheme was worked out and there is no agreement between the schemes. The special interest of this is that the symbolism of representing the four Gospels by the four living creatures is often to be found in stained-glass windows in churches.

The earliest and the fullest identification was made by Irenaeus about C.E. 170. He held that the four living creatures represented four aspects of the work of Jesus Christ, which in turn are represented in the four Gospels.

The **lion** symbolizes the powerful and effective working of the Son of God. His leadership and His royal power. The **calf** signifies the sacrificial and priestly side of His work, for the calf is the animal of sacrifice. The **man** symbolizes His incarnation, His advent as a human being. The **eagle** represents the gift of the Holy Spirit, hovering with His wings over the Church. Now John represents "the original, effective and glorious generation of the Son from the Father," and tells how all things were made by Him. **John** is, therefore, symbolized by the **lion**. **Luke** begins with the picture of Zacharias the priest, and tells the story of the fatted calf killed for the finding of the younger son. **Luke** represents the priestly side of the work of Christ; and is, therefore, symbolized by the **calf**. **Matthew** begins by giving the human descent and genealogy of Jesus, thus stressing his humanity. "The character of a humble and meek man is kept up throughout the whole gospel." **Matthew** is the gospel of the humanity of Christ; and is, therefore, symbolized by the **man**. **Mark** begins with a reference to the Spirit of prophecy coming down from on high upon men, for he begins with a reference to the prophet Isaiah. "This points to the winged aspect of the Gospel." He shows us Christ made man, and then sending His divine Spirit over all the earth, protecting us with His wings; and, therefore, the **eagle** symbolizes Mark.

Irenaeus goes on to say that the fourfold form of the beasts represents the four principal covenants which God made with the human race. The first covenant was made with Adam, prior to the flood. The second was made

with Noah, after the flood. The third consisted of the giving of the Law to Moses. The fourth is that which renovates man in Christ, “raising and bearing men upon its wing into the heavenly kingdom.”

So, then, in Irenaeus the identifications are:

Matthew = the man
Luke = the ox

Mark = the eagle
John = the lion

But, as we have said, there were a variety of different identifications, and we list the others.

The scheme of Athanasius was:

Matthew = the man
Luke = the lion

Mark = the calf
John = the eagle

The scheme of Victorinus was:

Matthew = the man
Luke = the ox

Mark = the lion
John = the eagle

The scheme of Augustine was:

Matthew = the lion
Luke = the ox

Mark = the man
John = the eagle

It may be said that on the whole Augustine’s identifications became the most commonly accepted, because they fit the facts. *Matthew* is best represented by the *lion*, because in it Jesus is depicted as The Lion of Judah, the One in whom all the expectations and dreams of the prophets came true. *Mark* is best represented by the *man*, because it is the nearest approach to a factual report of the human life of Jesus. *Luke* is best represented by the *ox*, because it depicts Jesus as the sacrifice for all classes and conditions of men and women everywhere. *John* is best represented by the *eagle*, because of all birds the eagle flies highest and is said to be the only living creature which can look straight into the sun; and *John* of all the gospels reaches the highest heights of thought.³²

³² William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 202-204.

THE 144,000

Revelation 7:4-8

The number 144,000 stands, not for limitation, it stands for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12—the perfect square—and then rendered even more inclusive and complete by being multiplied by 1000. So far from being a limited and selective number this number in Jewish imagery is the number which is all inclusive, perfect and complete. This does not tell us that the number of the saved will be very small; it tells us the precise opposite, that the number of the saved will be very great.

The enumeration in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel does not at all mean that this is to be read in purely Jewish terms. One of the basic thoughts of the New Testament is that the Church is the real Israel, and that the national Israel has lost all its privileges and promises to the Church.

Judah comes first, thus supplanting Reuben, who was the eldest son of Jacob. That is simply explained, because it was from the tribe of Judah, that the Messiah came. Much more interesting is the omission of Dan. But there is also an explanation of that. In the Old Testament Dan does not hold a high place, and is often connected with idolatry. In Jacob's dying speech to his sons, it is said of Dan: "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that the rider shall fall backward" (*Genesis* 49:17). In Judges the children of Dan are said to have set up a graven image (*Judges* 18:30). The golden calves, which became a sin, were set up in Bethel and in Dan (1 *Kings* 12:29). In Rabbinic symbolism Dan began to stand for idolatry. But still more was to follow. There is a curious saying in Jeremiah 8:16: "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they have come and have devoured the land and all that is in it." That saying came to be taken as referring to Antichrist, the coming incarnation of evil; and it came to be believed among the Jewish Rabbis that Antichrist was to spring from Dan. Hippolytus (*Concerning Antichrist* 14) says: "As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan." That is why Dan is missed out

from this list, and why the list is completed by the including of Manasseh, who is normally included in Joseph.³³

³³ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 29-31.

THE ANTICHRIST

Revelation 10:8-11

An Ancestor of the Antichrist Idea. The Babylonians had a myth in regard to the creation of the world, which they shared with all the Semitic peoples, and with which the Jews must have come into contact. This myth painted the picture of creation in terms of a struggle between Marduk the creator and Tiamat the dragon, who stands for primaeval chaos. Marduk is the force of order and of creation; Tiamat is that chaos and disorder against which Marduk had to struggle and wrestle and which he had to subdue, before creation was possible. There was a further belief that this struggle, as it were, between God and chaos would be repeated before the world came to an end. This old belief in the struggle between the creating God and the dragon of chaos found its way into the Old Testament, and is the explanation of certain obscure passages there. Isaiah tells of the day when God will slay the leviathan, and the crooked serpent, and the dragon that is in the sea (*Isaiah 27:1*). In Jewish thought this ancient dragon of chaos came to be known as Rahab. Isaiah says: “Art Thou not He that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?” (*Isaiah 51:9*). When the Psalmist is recounting the triumphs of God, he says: “I will make mention of Rahab” (*Psalms 87:4*). “Thou has broken Rahab in pieces,” he says, “as one that is slain” (*Psalms 89:10*). Clearly the primaeval struggle between God and chaos is a myth which has left its mark in the Old Testament; and that was a struggle which was, it was expected, to be repeated in the last days. Here is one of the ancestors of the Antichrist idea, and that is one of the reasons why the dragon idea reappears in the *Revelation* (12:9).¹

Satan as the Antichrist? There is a sense in which the obvious Antichrist is Satan, the Devil. Sometimes Satan is identified with Lucifer, the son of the morning, the angel who in heaven rebelled against God, and was cast down to hell. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (*Isaiah 14:12*). It is easy to find instances in which Satan—the very name means the Adversary—acted in such a way as to overturn the plan and purpose of God, for it is his very nature to do so. . . . But though Satan is the direct opponent of God, there is a difference. Satan remains an

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 70-71.

angel, though an evil angel, whereas Antichrist is a visible figure upon earth in which the very essence of evil has become incarnate.²

Nero as the New Testament Antichrist? To the Christians, Nero was a figure of concentrated evil. It was he who had put the blame of the great fire of Rome on to the Christians. It was he who had initiated persecution. It was he who had found the most savage methods of persecuting. He had clothed the Christians in the skins of wild animals and let loose his savage hunting dogs upon them to tear them in pieces; he had put them in sacks with great stones and flung them into the Tiber; he had rolled them in pitch and, while they were still alive, had used them as living torches to light his gardens. Nero had left a memory to the Romans of a monster of iniquity and to the Christians of an incarnate devil of cruelty. Many of the Christians accepted and believed in the *Nero redivivus* myth; and frequently—and we shall see that it is so in certain parts of the *Revelation*—*Nero redivivus* and Antichrist were identified, and the Christians thought of the coming of Antichrist in terms of the return of the wicked Nero.³

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 77-78.

CHAPTER 11

Revelation 11

It has been said that this chapter is at one and the same time the most difficult and the most important chapter in the *Revelation*. Its difficulty is obvious, and it contains problems of interpretation, about the solution of which there can be no real certainty. Its importance lies in the fact that within its compass it contains a deliberate summary of the substance of the rest of the book.¹

(i) Verses 1-2. Here there is the picture of the measuring of the Temple. As we shall see, the measuring is closely parallel to the sealing, and the measuring is for the purposes of protection, when the demonic terrors descend upon the world.

(ii) Verses 3-6. Here there is the preaching of the two witnesses, who are heralds of the end.

(iii) Verses 7-10. Here is the first emergence of Antichrist in the form of the beast from the abyss, and the temporary triumph of Antichrist, which results in the death of the two witnesses.

(iv) Verses 11-13). There follows the restoration to life of the witnesses, and the consequent repentance and conversion of the Jews.

(v) Verses 14-19). Finally, there is the first sketch of the final triumph of Christ, the thousand years of his initial reign, the final rising of the nations, the defeat of the nations and the judgment of the dead, and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God and of His Anointed One.²

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (The Saint Andrew Press: Edinburgh, 1962), p. 79.

² William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (The Saint Andrew Press: Edinburgh, 1962), p. 80.

THREE AND A HALF YEARS

Revelation 11:1-2

The origin of the phrase comes from the most terrible time in Jewish history. About the year 168 B.C.E. Antiochus Epiphanes was King of Syria. He loved all things Greek, and he regarded himself as a missionary of Greek culture. He, therefore, decided to introduce the Greek language, Greek culture and Greek worship among the Jews. He was met with the most violent and stubborn resistance. The matter was complicated by the fact that Palestine lay exactly between Syria and Egypt, who were deadly rivals, and Antiochus knew well that the Jews might well be driven into the arms of his enemies the Egyptians as a consequence of what was happening to them. What he could not do by peaceful penetration he decided to do by sheer violence and force. In the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes we see an almost unique deliberate attempt to annihilate a nation and their religion. He invaded Jerusalem. Almost eighty thousand Jews were either killed or sold into slavery. To possess a copy of the Law was a capital crime; houses were entered and searched for copies of the Law. To circumcise a child was punishable by death. The Temple was desecrated. A great altar to Olympian Zeus was erected; sacrifices of swine's flesh were offered up; and the Temple chambers became official brothels where sacred prostitutes were installed. He was met with stubborn resistance; the roll of the martyrs was immense. The Jews chose to die and they died. The dreadful process was finally halted by the rising of the gallant and heroic Judas Maccabeus and his men.

Judas and his heroic followers waged a guerilla warfare, and won the most amazing victories. Finally Antiochus and his forces were driven out, and the Temple was restored and cleansed. And the point is that this dreadful period of suffering, and this terrible period when the Temple was desecrated lasted from June 168 B.C.E. to December 165 B.C.E. To this day the Jews celebrate in December the Festival of Hanukah which commemorates the restoration and the cleansing of the Temple. That is to say this dreadful time lasted almost exactly three and a half years, a time, times and half a time. It was during that time that *Daniel* was written, and in that book the phrase was coined; and ever afterwards that phrase was stamped on the Jewish mind as the phrase which expressed and stood for a period of terror and suffering and affliction and martyrdom and death.

Here then is the meaning of the period three and a half years, and the phrase a time, times and half a time.¹

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (The Saint Andrew Press: Edinburgh, 1962), pp. 84-85.

THE TWO BEASTS

Revelation 13

The first beast, the beast from the sea, stands for the Roman Empire. To John the Roman Empire was the incarnation of evil and satanic power. This beast is described in terms which come from *Daniel*. In *Daniel* 7:3-7 there is a vision of four great beasts who come out of the sea. In *Daniel* these beasts are the symbols of the great empires which have held world power, and of an empire which, when *Daniel* was written, was holding world sway. The beast like a lion with an eagle's wings stands for Babylon. The beast like a bear stands for Media. The beast like a leopard with four wings stands for Persia. And the fourth great beast stands for the empire of Alexander the Great. As the writer of *Daniel* saw these world powers, they were so savage and cruel and inhuman that they could be typified and symbolised by nothing but beastly and bestial figures. It was only natural for any Jew to go back to this picture of the beastly empires, when he wished to find a picture of another satanic empire which was threatening God's people in his own day.

It is to be noted that John's picture in the Revelation puts together in the one beast the features of all the four beasts. John's beast is like a leopard with bear's feet and a lion's mouth. That is to say, for John the Roman Empire was so satanic and terrible that in itself it included all the evil terrors of the evil empires which had gone before. It was, as it were, the sum total of all evil.

This beast has *seven heads* and *ten horns*. These heads and horns stand for the rulers and the emperors of Rome. Since the time of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, up to the time of the *Revelation* there had been seven emperors; the list, with the dates of each one of them, is as follows: Tiberius, C.E. 14-37; Caligula, C.E. 37-41; Claudius, C.E. 41-54; Nero, C.E. 55-68; Vespasian, C.E. 69-79; Titus, C.E. 79-81; Domitian, C.E. 81-96. These seven emperors are the seven heads of the beast. But in addition it is said that the beast had *ten* horns. The explanation of this second figure lies in this. After the death of Nero there was a short period of almost complete chaos. In eighteen months three different men briefly occupied the imperial power; these three were Galba, Otho and Vitellius. Their combined reigns lasted for less than two years. They are, therefore, not included in John's list of the seven heads, but they are included in the list of the ten horns for they did for a brief time exercise the imperial

power. So, then, the seven heads and the ten horns of the beast together stand for those who were the rulers of the Roman Empire from the death of Augustus down to the time when John was writing.

The second beast, the beast from the land, exercises all the power of the first beast. The second beast is the organisation of Caesar worship; it is the whole provincial organisation of magistrates and priesthoods designed to enforce Caesar worship; it is the organisation which confronted the Christians with the choice of saying, “Caesar is Lord,” or death.

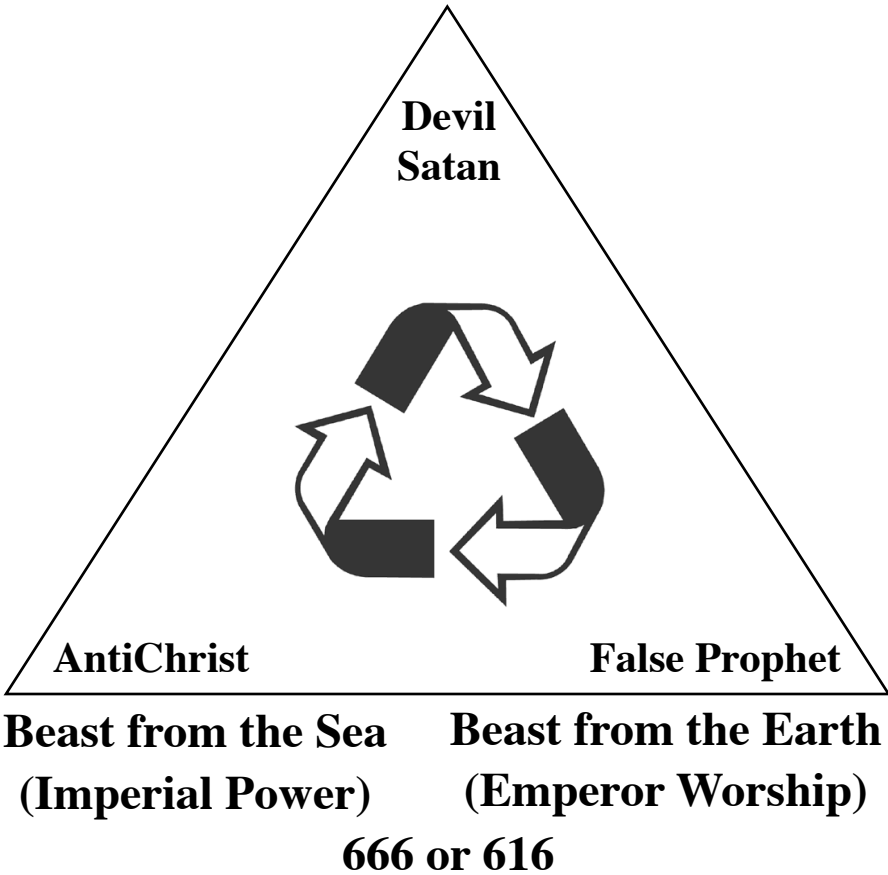
So, then, our picture falls into place. The beast from the sea is the Roman Empire with its Satanic power. The beast from the land is the organisation of Caesar worship, the organisation which brought persecution and death to every loyal Christian. These two savage beasts, the might of Rome, and the organisation of Caesar worship, launched their combined attack on the Christians—and no nation had ever withstood the might of Rome. What hope had the Christians—poor, defenceless, without influence, outlaws—when the merciless might of Rome was unleashed against them?¹

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 109-110, and 115.

THE UNHOLY TRINITY

The Unholy Trinity

The Red Dragon



COMPARING THE IMAGES

Comparing the Images in Revelation	
<p style="text-align: center;">The Pregnant Woman gives birth to the Messiah and the Church</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Harlot gives birth to idolatry and paganism</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Holy Trinity Father Son and Holy Spirit</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Unholy Trinity Satan (Hebrew) or the Devil (Greek) Beast of the Sea and Beast of the Earth 7 Heads and 10 Horns 2 Lamb's Horns Roman Power Roman Cultus</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">New Jerusalem Image of Heaven</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Babylon Image of Hell</p>

Revelation 13:18

It must be remembered that the ancient peoples had no figures for numbers, and that the letters of the alphabet did duty for numbers as well. This is as if in English we had no figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on, but as if we used A for 1, and B for 2, and C for 3, and D for 4, and so on. Now since that is so every word, and in particular every proper name, can also be a number. The letters in it do not only spell the name; if they are given their numerical value they add up to a sum in figures as well. One charming and romantic way in which use was made of the fact that letters have also a numerical value is quoted by Deissmann. On the walls of Pompeii a lover wrote: "I love her whose number is 545," and thereby he at one and the same time identified and concealed his loved one!

Very early we saw that the Revelation is written in code; it is written in such a way that its message will be clear to the initiate, but will baffle the outsider. Now it is clear that nowhere will the code be more closely and carefully guarded than in regard to this number. The number stands for the arch-enemy of the Church, the incarnation of an evil and devilry; clearly this will be a most carefully guarded secret. The strange thing is that the clue to this number must have gone lost very early; for even so great a Christian scholar as Irenaeus in the second century did not know what the number stood for and could only guess.

In the chapter there recurs again and again the mention of the head that was wounded to death and then restored. That is the head which in the end is going to be worshipped; and it is the worship of that head which the beast is going to spread and to enforce. Now we have already seen that that head symbolises the legend that Nero would be resurrected and would come back in power and in terror. We might well, therefore, act on the assumption that the number has something to do with Nero. Before we go further we may note that many ancient manuscripts, as the American Revised Standard Version indicates in a footnote, give the number as 616. If we take the word Nero in *Latin* and give it its numerical equivalent, we get this:

N = 50
E = 6
R = 500
O = 60
N = 50

The total is 666; and the name can equally well be spelled without the final N, and, if we omit the final N, the number will be 616. It is of interest and significance to note that in Hebrew the letters of Nero Caesar also add up to 666.

There is little doubt that the number of the beast stands for Nero; and that John in it is forecasting the coming of Antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to this world.¹

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 131-133.

NUMEROLOGY

Numerology		
A	=	1
B	=	2
C	=	3
D	=	4
E	=	5
F	=	6
G	=	7
H	=	8
I	=	9
J	=	10
K	=	20
L	=	30
M	=	40
N	=	50
O	=	60
P	=	70
Q	=	80
R	=	90
S	=	100
T	=	200
U	=	300
V	=	400
W	=	500
X	=	600
Y	=	700
Z	=	800

In the Hebrew alphabet (which consists of consonants only), the tenth letter has the numerical value of 10, but the eleventh letter represents 20, and the following letters carry on by tens until 100. Thereafter, the letters carry on by hundreds (200, and so on). Thus, the "full" spelling of "Nero Caesar" in Hebrew letters is N, R, W, N, Q, S, R. These letters have the following numerical values: N = 50, R = 200, W = 6, N = 50, Q = 100, S = 60, and R = 200. (Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, p. 77.) The above letters and numbers follow the Hebrew pattern in English. Calculate your own number.

CHAPTER 14

The Three Characters	Judgment and Blessing
1. The Lamb and His People (14:1-5)	1. Stands on Mount Zion (14:1-5)
2. The Three Angels (14:6-13)	
The First Angel (14:6-7)	2. Proclaims the Gospel
The Second Angel (14:8)	3. Announces Fall of Babylon (14:8)
The Third Angel (14:9-12)	4. Declares Necessity of Choice (14:9-12)
Interlude: The Second Beatitude	5. Beatitude for the Faithful (14:13)
3. The Son of Man (14:14-20)	6. Harvesting the Grain (14:14-16)
	7. Harvesting the Grapes (14:17-20)

THE ORDER OF EVENTS

Revelation 19:19–22:21

1. **The Battle of Armageddon (19:19-21).** This battle is to be fought at Mount Megiddo (Hill of Victory), but it is more than an idea in geography. Any place where God and evil do battle can be called Armageddon. The final battle will be short, and victory is certain.

The following are the powers that struggle against God:

The Devil: He will only be temporarily defeated in this battle. He will be cast into the PIT. His final destruction will take place when he is cast into the LAKE OF FIRE.

The Beast: The Roman Government

The False Prophet: Pagan Culture and Emperor Worship

2. **The First Resurrection (20:4-6).** This is the resurrection of the Martyrs, who will reign during the Millennium. They are those who have been loyal to death, who refuse to worship the beast and receive his mark. They have died for their faith, and they will be rewarded for their sacrifice during the Millennium.

What is not clear is where this Millennium will take place.

Will it be physical or spiritual?

Will it take place on earth or in heaven?

3. **The Thousand Year Reign (The Millennium).** The Millennium was thought to begin very soon. The overthrow of the beast and the false prophet would mark its beginning. The early Church thought of it beginning around 100 C.E., which means that it would end around 1100 C.E. There was great optimism on the part of some that this was happening within history.

A serious question remains: What about the resurrection of the Martyrs?

4. **The Loosing of Satan (20:7).** Following the Millennium, Satan will be set free. He does not escape.

5. **The Destruction of Satan (20:10).** This marks the climax of the Book of Revelation. Satan is finally destroyed not with Armageddon, but with the Battle of Gog (the Prince) and Magog (the Nation). Satan is consigned to the Lake of Fire. (One might call the Battle of Gog and Magog the final battle of Armageddon.)

6. **The Final Judgment (20:11-15).** The Final Judgment consists of three images.
 - a. The Great White Throne (20:11)
 - b. The General Resurrection (20:12-13)
 - c. The Last Judgment (20:14-15)

7. **The New Jerusalem (21:1-4)**
 - a. The New Creation (21:1-8)
 - b. The New Jerusalem (21:9—22:5)
 - 1) The Descent (21:9-11)
 - 2) The Wall (21:12-14) [216 feet high]
 - 3) The Dimensions (21:15-17) [1500 miles square]
 - 4) The Fabric (21:18-21)
 - 5) The Holiness and Glory (21:22-27)
 - 6) The Blessedness (22:1-5)
 - a) The Tree of Life (22:2)
 - b) The River (22:2)
 - c) The Throne of God (22:3)
 - d) The Servants of God (22:3)
(Deuteronomy 10:12; Matthew 5:8; Romans 12:1; and Philippians 3:3)
 - c. Some Things that won't be Present
 - 1) The Sea (21:1) (The antichrist and the beast came from the sea (13:1ff))
 - 2) Death and Suffering (21:4)
 - 3) The Temple (21:22)
 - 4) The Sun and the Moon (21:23)

5) Night (21:25; 22:5)

6) Sin (21:27; 22:3)

d. The Epilogue (22:6-21)

1) The Curse (22:18-19)

2) The Prayer (22:20) *Maranatha* means “Come, Lord Jesus.”
Maranatha can be found in 1 Corinthians 16:22
and the Didache (10:16)

May grace come and may this world pass away.

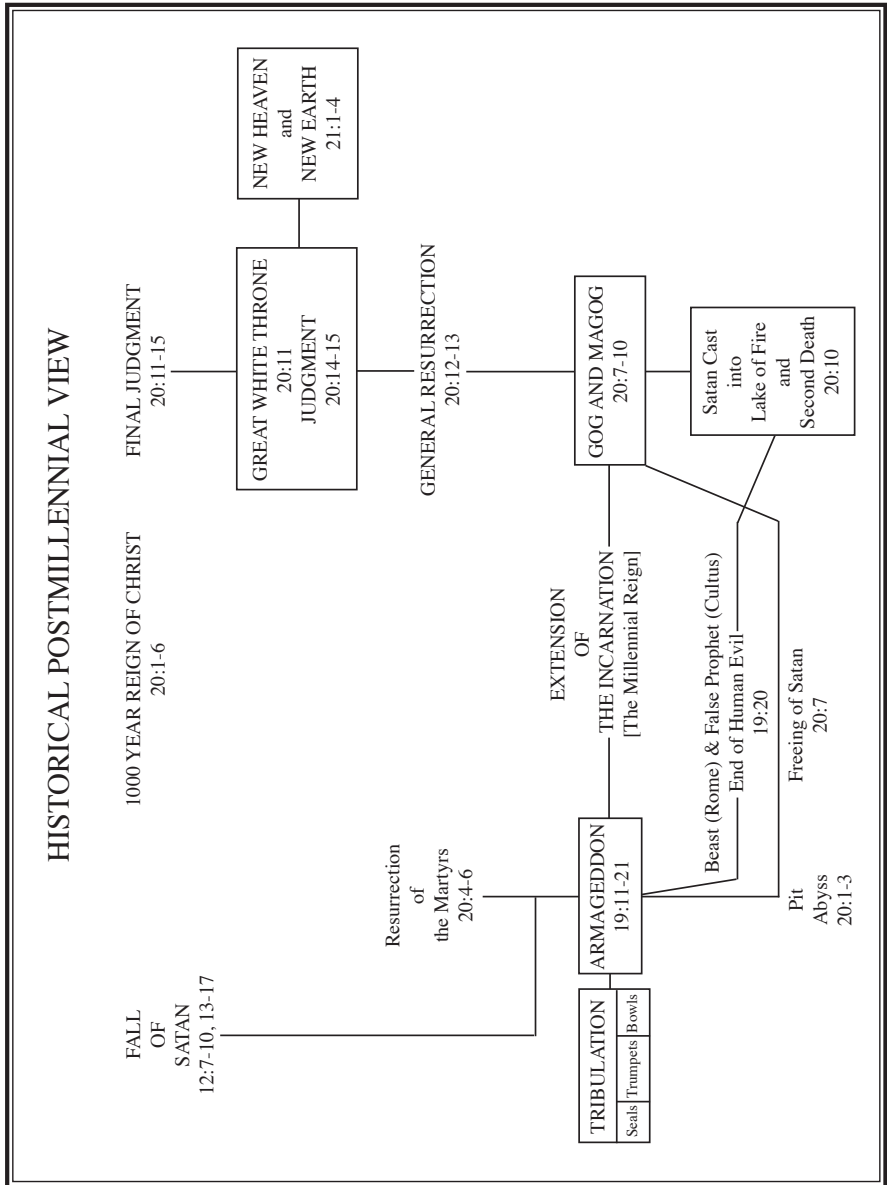
Hosanna to the God of David.

If any man is holy, let him come;

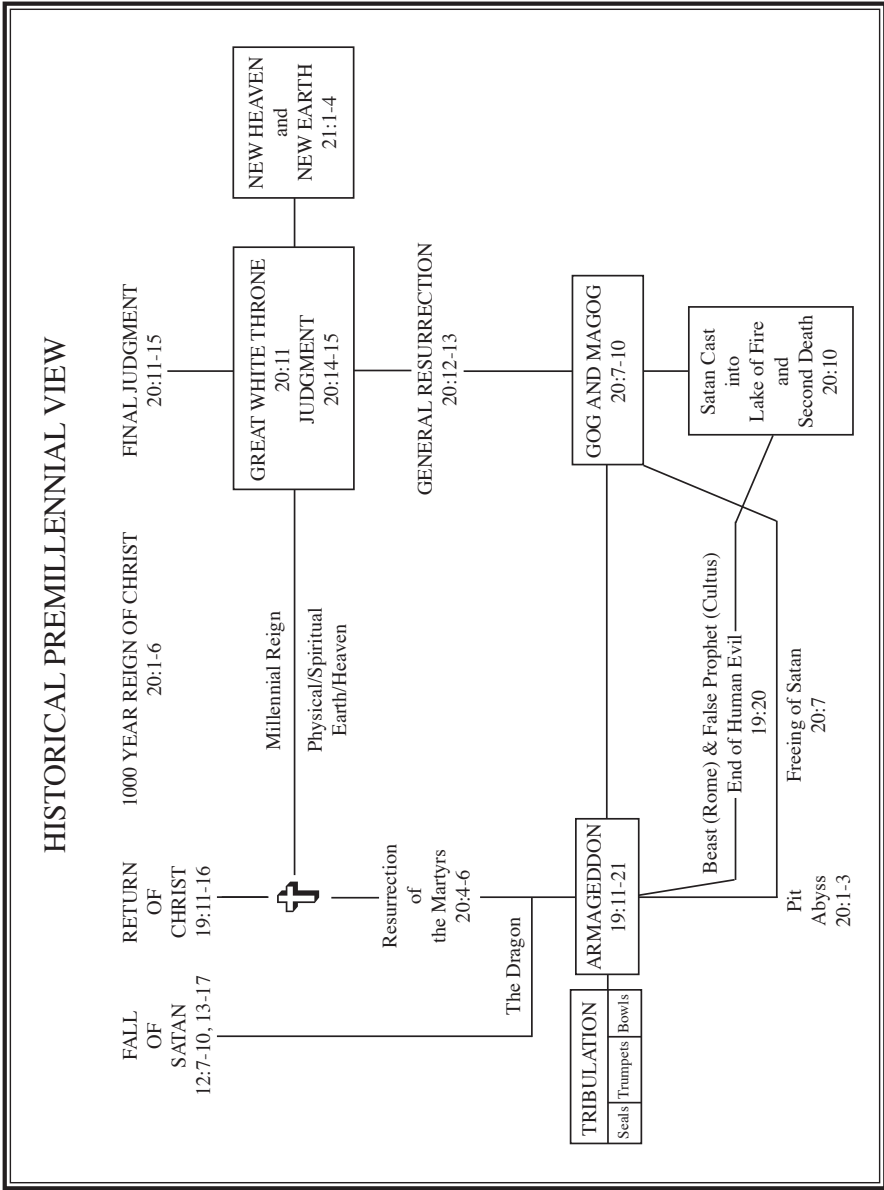
If any man is not, let him repent;

Maranatha. Amen.

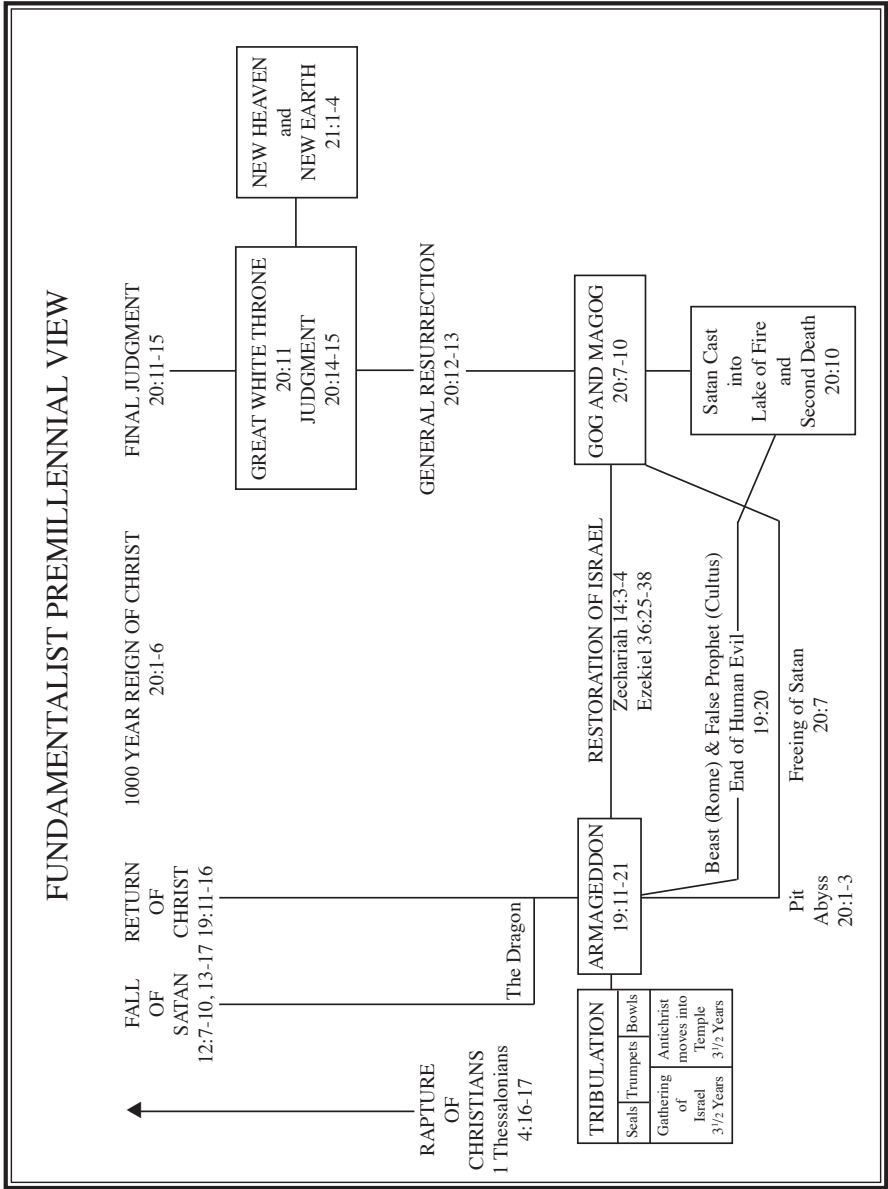
HISTORICAL POSTMILLENNIAL VIEW



HISTORICAL PREMILLENNIAL VIEW

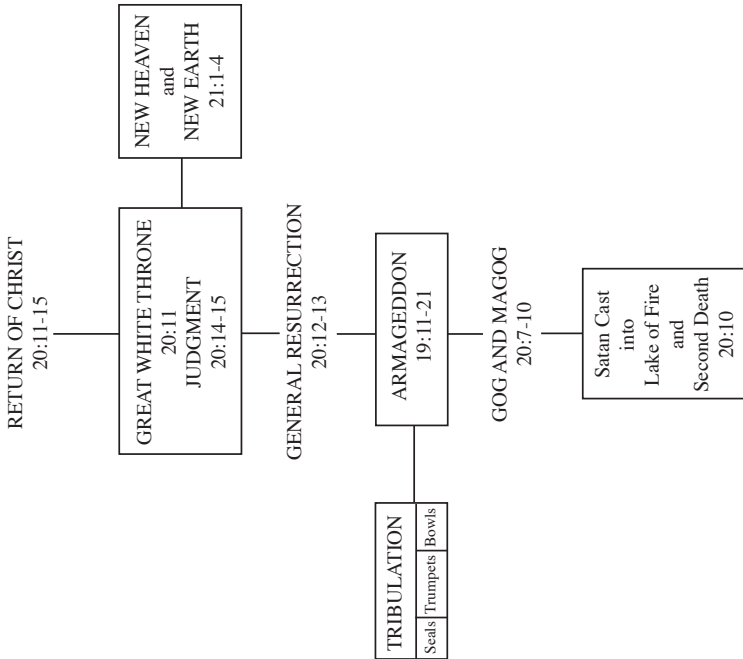


FUNDAMENTALIST PREMILLENNIAL VIEW



HISTORICAL AMILLENNIAL VIEW

HISTORICAL AMILLENNIAL VIEW



GOG AND MAGOG

Revelation 20:7-10

Gog and Magog have been used in many different ways. Gog, the chief prince of Meschech and Tubal, came from the land of Magog. In Ezekiel he leads the evil forces which rise up against Yahweh in a climactic battle. In Revelation 20:8, Magog, by some strange process, is no longer a country, but a fellow culprit with Gog in the Battle of Armageddon.

Many have tried to identify Gog in history. Magog, for example is identified as one of Japheth's sons, the others being Meshech, Tubal, and Gomer. Japheth, of course, was one of Noah's three sons. (See Genesis 10:2) Other sources that have been used to identify Gog would be as follows:

1. He might be Gyges, the founder of a great Kingdom, perhaps Lydia, in Asia Minor (670 B.C.E.), of which Croesus was the last ruler. The only evidence for this however is the similarity in the names.
2. The name might have been drawn from Goshga or Gaga, the Sumerian god of darkness. Here he would represent the evil darkness set against the light of God.
3. Another possibility that has been suggested is Alexander the Great, whose homeland, Macedonia, has been identified with the Magog of Genesis 10:2.

There has also been an attempt to identify Gog with an apocalyptic future. Although the Hebrew word for Gog, which means "chief," has no relationship to Russia, some have suggested that Gog refers to "Russia" and Meschech refers to "Moscow." None of this can be proven.

When we look at Ezekiel's historical situation the imagery refers to an attack from the north, where Israel's major enemies always came from, but it is more than just from the north. Revelation 20:8 rightly interprets this as "the four corners of the earth." What Ezekiel pictures is "the ends of the earth" rising up against Yahweh. These enemies included Persia, Cush [Ethiopia], Put, Gomer, Togarmah, Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish. These were the Kingdoms of the world which would rise up against the Kingdom

of God as established in a restored Israel, but according to Ezekiel, the attack was doomed to failure. None of this is to be understood as past or future literal history; rather, it involves the profound insight that ultimately the tension between good and evil will be resolved.

Ezekiel describes the events as follows:

1. Foretelling of the Conflict (38:1-6)
2. Attack on Israel (38:7-13)
3. Triumph of God (38:14-23)
4. Defeat of Gog (39:1-6)
5. Burning of the Weapons (39:7-10)
6. Burial of the Destroyed Army (39:11-16)
7. Sacrifice of the Mighty (39:21-24)
8. Glory of Yahweh (39:21-24)
9. Return from Captivity (39:25-29)

So vast was Gog's army that it took seven years to burn all the weapons (39:9-10) and so many were killed, that it took seven months to clean up the mess (39:12). The number seven here refers to perfection and completeness. The sacrificial feast which follows is difficult to understand, but is again referred to in Revelation 19:17-18. The fact that this last battle occurs just prior to Ezekiel's vision of the New Temple makes the imagery very useful to John as he describes the final battle instigated by Satan at the end of time (Revelation 20:8).

THE SECOND COMING

Martin Luther

When Luther was asked, “What would you do if the end of the world would come tomorrow?” he replied, “I would plant my little apple tree today.”

John Wesley

A lady once asked John Wesley, “If you knew that the Lord would come at 12:00 tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?” Wesley answered, “I would spend the intervening time just as I intend to spend it. I would preach tonight at Gloucester, and again tomorrow morning. After that I would ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the society in the evening. I would then go to friend Martin’s house, as he expects to entertain me. I would converse, pray with the family, retire to my room at ten o’clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, go sound asleep, and wake up in Glory.”¹

Genesis to Revelation

Genesis tells us **who** created the world.

Revelation tells us **what** the destiny of the world will be.

God, not the stars, holds our destiny in his hands.

¹ D.A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles* (Baker Book House).

IMAGES OF HEAVEN AND HELL

GRETTA PALMER

“Five years ago I was a prisoner in a bright, bleak, narrow cell which I called the universe. Things were very tidy there—it is easy for the poor to keep their possessions neat. Mine was a bare, modern, antiseptic universe with colorless, windowless walls and the strong, astringent smell of modern science. It had neon lights to read by, but it never admitted the sun. For forty years I had lived, with ups and downs inside the cell called atheism.

There are virtues inside the modernist’s narrow world, for no human being ever born could live entirely removed from grace. But we atheists were living on a subnormal plane; our virtues were devitalized, and they glowed with no superhuman glory. We had faith—but faith in Freud and in a mystical, unproven principle of life called “progress.” Since the brain does not thrive on prison fare, my believing mind was filled with a hundred contradictory fallacies, a thousand sloppily contrived assumptions. Because doctors had been able to wipe out smallpox, I thought it followed that they would shortly find a virus for man’s hostility to man. Because the engineering sciences had been a great success, I expected social engineers to produce, within a hundred years, the principles on which a society of perfect men would operate as smoothly and with as little friction as a really good Diesel engine.

One of the most horrible things about the atheist’s cell is that it is a fairly comfortable place in which to live. The inmates are not clamoring loudly for someone to free them; each of them is working very busily to exchange his present cell for another exactly the same, only a little larger and more enviably placed. The man in the five-thousand-dollar hopes, in a few years, to move into the twenty-five-thousand-dollar cell; then, he is sure, his troubles will be at an end.

I was not unhappy four years ago. I did not have pain or frustration or failure in my little cell with me, as goads to finding the way out. My life was a success according to the formula laid down by the psychiatrists. If anyone had suggested that I needed a god, I should probably have asked, “What for?”

Things were going well. My life was orderly. My thoughts were neatly ranged.

And then I became confused. Thank God, I became confused!

The war confused me. It showed, rather shockingly, that mankind was not getting along as well with its job of perfecting itself as I had hoped. The scientists were not delivering the goods. pp. 50-51

So I have been miraculously fortunate in escaping from that atheist's cell in which only fungus thoughts can grow. I have also discovered, *Deo gratias*, that there is a simple, quite accurate name for the cramped and narrow universe in which I lived my life until a year ago. The name of it is Hell.

The new world into which I have entered is flooded with the sunshine of god's love. His divine artistry is mirrored in the running brook; the smiling meadow, and the tall trees which lift verdant fingers in prayer and praise to their Creator. I glimpse His artistry as He paints the wayside flowers and lights the evening star. All nature, tremulous with His presence, is articulate in His homage.. Books, people, the experiences of every day also echo Him, so that I can best describe the new world into which I have come as at least the foothills of Heaven.

Gretta Palmer, "Escaping from an Atheist's Cell," pp. 55-56
Published in, John A. O'Brien, *The Road to Damascus*, pp. 29-55

WENDELL WHITE

A certain man reached the next world suddenly and prematurely because of an unfortunate explosion. When a pleasant attendant asked for the third time in a few hours if he could do anything for the new arrival, the man answered:

"No, no," and then suddenly, "well—yes, I believe I would like to play some golf now. Will you show me the golf course?"

"We have no golf course here."

"Oh," the man replied, and added, "what are those men at the end of my cottage doing?"

"They are just completing work on it. We weren't expecting you yet."

"I'll go over and help them."

"No," said the attendant, "they will complete it for you."

"Well, then, I'll plant my vegetables now. I always grew some of the finest on earth."

"I know you did, but here your vegetables will be cultivated and gathered for you."

"All right," the man replied, "I'll grow flowers. I have always enjoyed doing so."

"We have a flower gardener for you."

“Why, of course, I should have realized that up here there is something else for me to do. What is it?”

“Nothing.”

“I don’t understand. No golf, and I’m not to do any work. If I’m not to do anything here, what’s heaven for?”

“Oh, mister,” said the attendant, “you’re not in heaven.”

Printed in *Psychology in Living*
Reprinted in *Pulpit Digest*, April-June, 1987, p. 35.

HEAVEN AND HELL

Heaven is life with God.
Hell is life without God.
Heaven and hell
are not rewards.
They are consequences
of the choices we make.

Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Faith*, pp. 116-117

SWAPPING DREAMS

The Master told Ike: “I dreamed I went to Nigger Heaven last night, and I saw there a lot of garbage, some torn-down houses, a few old broken down, rotten fences, the muddiest, sloppiest streets I ever saw, and a big bunch of ragged, dirty Negroes walking around.” Ike responded: “Umph, umph, Massa, yah sho’ musta et de same t’ing Ah did las’ night, ‘cause Ah dreamed Ah went up ter de white man’s paradise, an’ de streets wuz all ob gol’ an’ silvah, and dey was lots o’ milk an’ honey dere, an’ putty pearly gates, but dey wuzn’t uh soul in de whole place.”

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, pp. 159-160

HEAVEN AND HELL

There is a story told of a man who died after having led a thoroughly selfish, immoral life. Moments later, he found himself in a world of bright sunlight, soft music, and figures all dressed in white. “Boy, I never expected this,” he said to himself. “I guess God has a soft spot in His heart for a clever rascal like me.” He turned to a figure in a white robe and said, “Buddy, I’ve got something to celebrate. Can I buy you a drink?” The

figure answered, “If you mean alcoholic beverages, we don’t have any of that around here.” “No booze, huh? Well then, what about a game of cards? Pinochle, draw poker, you name it.” “I’m sorry but we don’t gamble here either.” “Well, what do you do all day?” the man asked. “We read the psalms a lot. There is a Bible class every morning and a prayer circle in the afternoon.” Psalms! Bible study all day long! Boy, I’ll tell you—heaven isn’t what it’s cracked up to be.” At which point the figure in white smiled and said, “I see that you don’t understand. We’re in heaven; you’re in hell.”

Harold Kushner, *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*, pp. 156-57

JOHN NEWTON

If I ever reach heaven I expect to find
three wonders there:
first, to meet some
 I had not thought to see there;
second, to miss some
 I had expected to see there;
and third, the greatest wonder of all,
 to find myself there.”

THOMAS A KEMPIS

I would rather choose
 to be a pilgrim on earth
 with Thee
 than without Thee
 to possess heaven.
Where Thou art,
 there is heaven;
and where Thou are not,
 there is death and hell.

Book III, p. 59

C.S. LEWIS

I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense,
successful, rebels to the end;
that the doors of hell are locked
on the inside.

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 127

I have been warned not even to raise the question of animal immortality, lest I find myself in company with all the old maids. Where will you put all the mosquitoes? —a question to be answered on its own level by pointing out that, if the worst came to the worst, a heaven for mosquitoes and a hell for men could very conveniently be combined.

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp. 136-137

LEONARD I. SWEET

Do you know the difference between Heaven and Hell? I heard recently that...

Heaven is where the cooks are French,
the police are English,
the mechanics are German,
the lovers are Italian,
and everything is organized by the Swiss,
Hell is where the English are the cooks,
the Germans are the police,
the French are the mechanics,
the Swiss are the lovers,
and everything is organized by the Italians.

Homiletics, April-June, 1994, P. 13

ANN LANDERS

A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, "Come, I will show you hell." They entered a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished, desperate and starving. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a

handle so much longer than their own arm that it could not be used to get the stew into their own mouths. The suffering was terrible.

“Come, now I will show you heaven,” the Lord said after a while. They entered another room, identical to the first—the pot of stew, the group of people, the same long-handled spoons. But there everyone was happy and well-nourished.

“I don’t understand,” said the man. “Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?”

The Lord smiled. “Ah, it is simple,” he said. “Here they have learned to feed each other.”

AFTERWORD

I happen to like the Book of Revelation, but I realize that it is a dangerous book. It belongs in the New Testament. Without it, we would not have those wonderful words of comfort of the New Jerusalem, where there will be no more tears. There may still be tears, but they will be tears of joy. The Book of Revelation helps us move from the Garden of Eden to the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem.

The Book of Acts prepares us for the Book of Revelation. In the Book of Acts we see the birth of the Church and we see the problems all those new congregations faced. Those problems and successes are illustrated for us by John in the letters to the seven churches. Of course, there were more than seven churches by this time, but these seven churches represent all churches, including those in the twenty-first century. If we look carefully, we can see our own church in one or more of them.

The difficult parts of the Book of Revelation are in chapters 6 through 20. Here is where the real danger lurks. I did my best to understand the context in which these chapters were written, and I read conservative and liberal commentaries. In my opinion, the best books covering these chapters are as follows:

- Barclay, William, *The Revelation of John* (The Saint Andrew Press: Edinburgh), 1962. (Two Volumes)
- Ellul, Jacques, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (The Seabury Press: New York), 1977.
- Koester, Craig, *The Apocalypse: Controversies and Meaning in Western History* (The Great Courses), 2011.
- Metzger, Bruce, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Abingdon Press: Nashville), 1993.
- Mulholland, M. Robert, *Journey Through the Bible: Revelation* (The United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville), 1996.
- Panofsky, Erwin, *The life and Art of Albrecht Durer* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey), 1955. (Woodcuts of the Revelation)

Parvin, Samuel F. and Byrum, C. Stephen, *Unlocking the Mysteries: 150 FAQs About Revelation and the End of the World* (Abingdon Press: Nashville), 1999. (Questions about the Book of Revelation)

At least, the books above, were most helpful to me. I'm open to reading other books on the Book of Revelation, and I have read many. Please feel free to recommend books to me. The Book of Acts is not as complicated, but I am always open to suggestions on the Book of Acts as well.

My intension has not been to write a detailed commentary on the Books of Acts and Revelation, but to offer a guide to those who want to become Biblically literate. Biblical literacy will take a lifetime of reading the Scriptures, but we all have to start some place. My hope is that my meager efforts will help someone move towards Biblical literacy. The Bible is the best seller of all times, but I'm afraid it is also the least read of best sellers. I'd like to see that change. The Books of Acts and Revelation are two of the most important books in the Bible, and I'd like to see them read and understood.

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THE COVENANT PRAYER

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

John Wesley

OTHER STUDY GUIDES AND BOOKS

For the latest list, go to the web site at: www.jim.reuteler.org. You have permission to examine the content of any work and download any book on the list.

BIBLE STUDY GUIDES WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR

1. **The Bible as Sacred History:** A Survey of the Bible
2. **The Struggle with God:** Genesis through Deuteronomy
3. **Sacred Stories:** Joshua through Esther
4. **Time is Running Out:** The Major and Minor Prophets
5. **Between the Testaments:** The Books of the Apocrypha
6. **The Messengers:** The Four Gospels
7. **An Explosion of Faith:** The Books of Acts and Revelation
8. **The First E-Letters:** The Letters to Churches and Individuals
9. **The Second Creation:** The Book of Revelation (Formatted in 6x9)
10. **A Vision of Hope:** The Book of Revelation (Formatted in 8.5x11)
11. **Photos of New Testament Sites 1**
12. **Photos of New Testament Sites 2**

BOOKS WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR

1. **Ignited for Mission:** Looking at a Damascus Road Experience
2. **Reformulating the Mission of the Church:** A Theology of Missions
3. **Our Spiritual Senses:** Looking at Five Spiritual Senses
4. **Our Spiritual Disciplines:** Looking at Six Spiritual Disciplines
5. **The Ordinary Christian Experience:** 14 Religious Experiences
6. **Faith is a Choice:** Making Decisions about Faith and Morality
7. **A Brief Story of the Christian Church:** A Survey of the Church
8. **The Heart of Methodism:** Building a Covenant Community

BOOKS EDITED BY THE AUTHOR

1. **Foundational Documents:** Basic Documents of Methodism
2. **The Essentials of Methodism:** 10 Lessons on Methodist Beliefs
3. **Instructions for Children:** An Edited Book written by John Wesley
4. **Speaking Iban:** An Edited Iban Grammar by Burr Baughman

