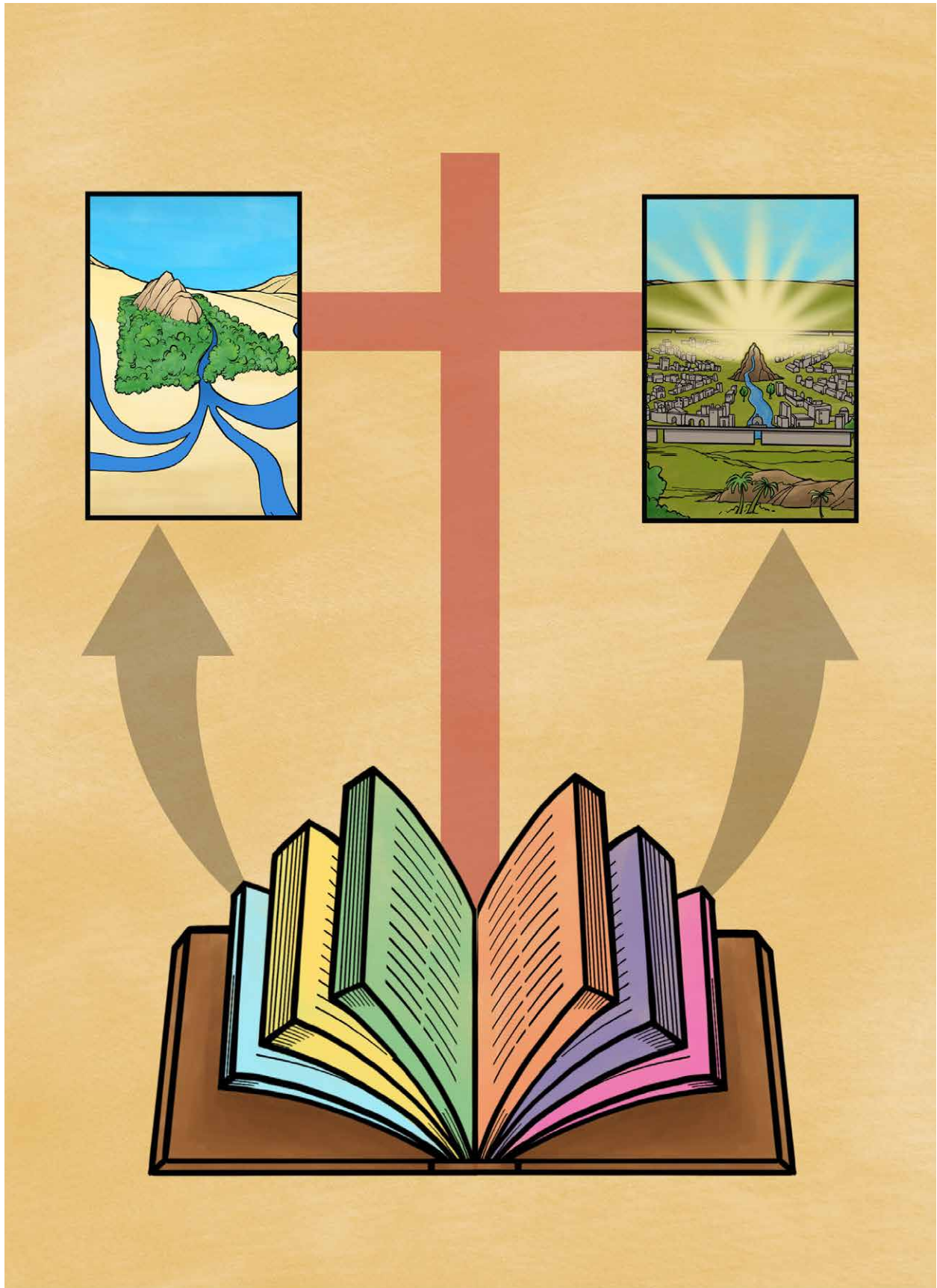


DEVELOPING LEADERS

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

REVELATION



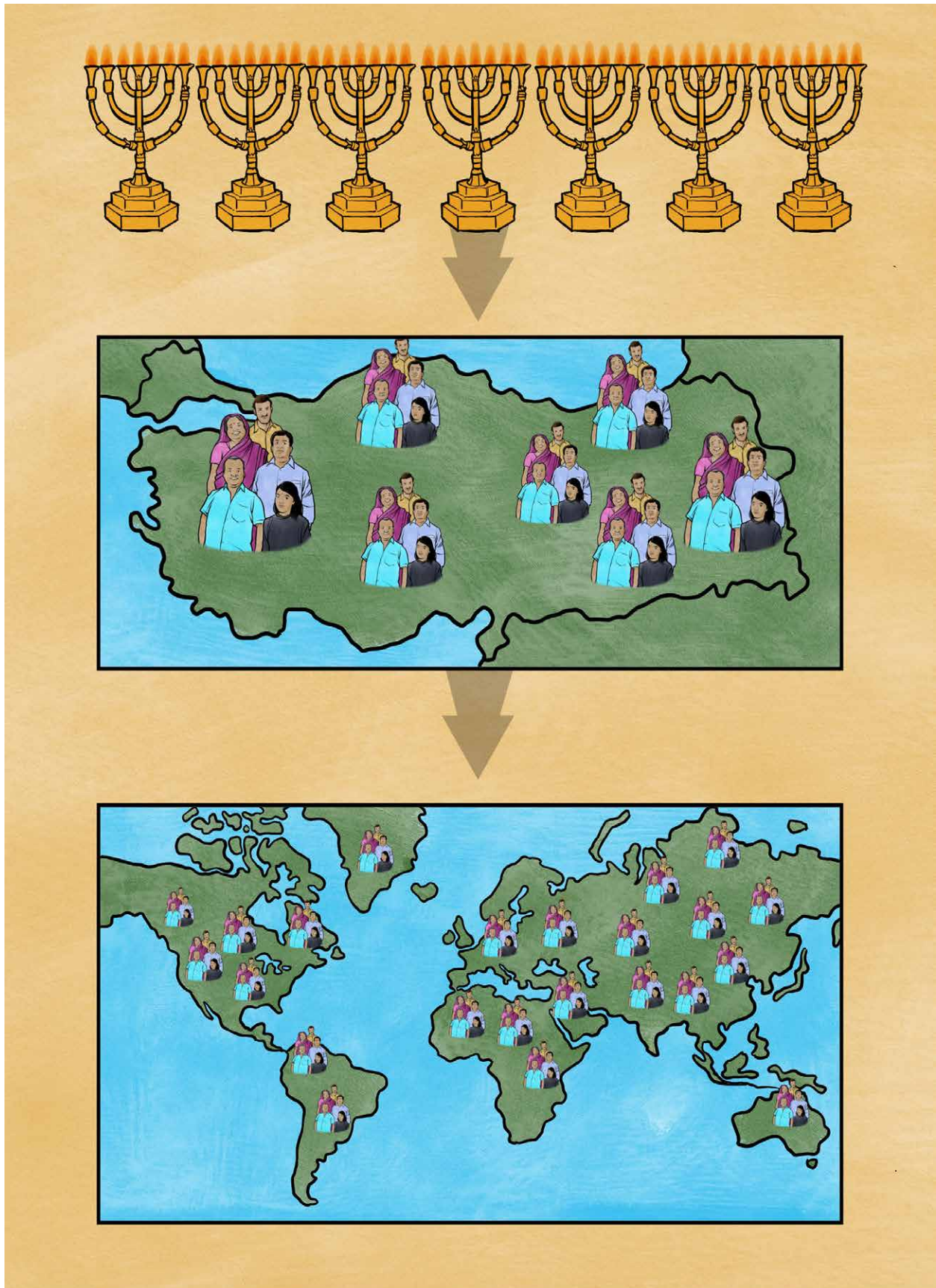
1. The greatest “tool” to help a person understand the book of Revelation is a solid understanding of “biblical theology.”

If a person understands the story being told in the Bible he or she will have a much better understanding of Revelation. The story being told in the Bible is the story of Jesus Christ (and all those in him) fulfilling God’s plans God so that God’s image might fill the earth (see **Genesis 1:26-28**)! The first Adam did not fulfill God’s plans. The second Adam, the Lord Jesus (and those who are in him) is fulfilling God’s plans. Revelation is the perfect conclusion to this story. The story told in the Bible starts in a garden and it ends in a garden. The story begins with tragedy. It ends in triumph. **The book of Revelation is not too complicated for the average pastor or the average church.** God’s people should not avoid Revelation. It is not intended to be difficult. It is intended to be powerful. A proper understanding of the book of Revelation will not frighten the church. Instead, it will give courage to the church.



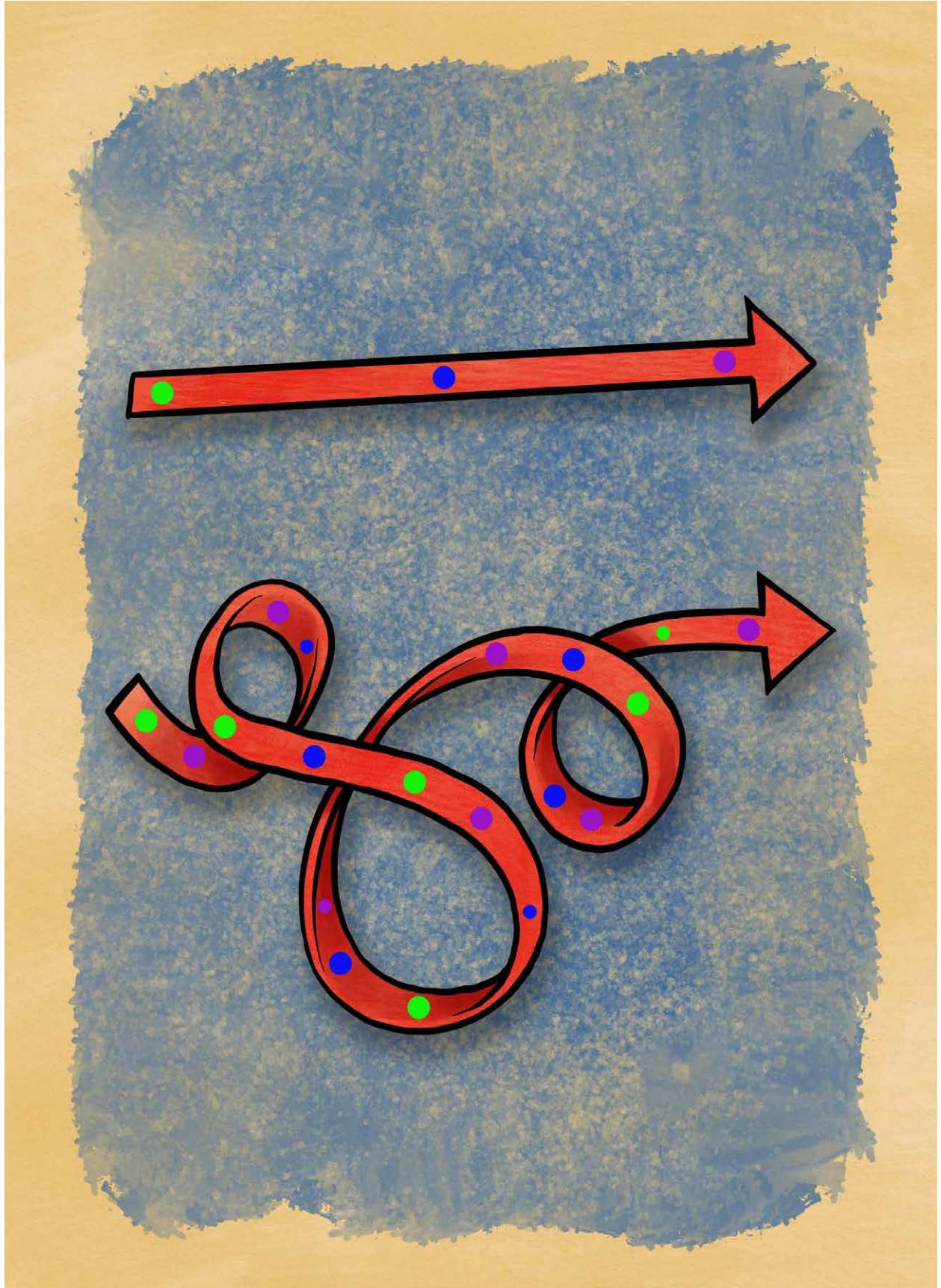
2. Revelation is apocalyptic literature.

Like music played at a volume so it loud shakes the walls, this type of literature is associated with extremes. The symbols in apocalyptic literature are like the symbols in “normal” prophetic books, but at an extreme level. Punishment and wrath are at an extreme level. Beauty is at an extreme level. Courage is at an extreme level. Like an epistle (Romans or 1 Peter) and like a narrative (Joshua), apocalyptic literature has its own rules and its own ways. The rules and ways of apocalyptic literature must be learned in order to understand it. The rules and ways of apocalyptic literature must be learned in order to prevent misinterpreting it. This does not mean that this type of literature is overly difficult. Other examples of apocalyptic literature in the Bible include Numbers 23 and 24, Daniel 7- 12, and Zechariah.



3. A “literal” interpretation of Revelation will be different from a “literal” interpretation of another type of literature.

The “literal” interpretation of Revelation is the interpretation that was intended by the author. This means the reader needs to carefully think about the names, numbers, and descriptions John chooses to use. For instance, John speaks of “the seven spirits” who are before God’s throne (see Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6). However, the literal interpretation of “the seven spirits” who are before God’s throne is not that there are seven actual spirits of God. This is not John’s intended meaning. There is one Holy Spirit. It is clear that John knows this (see Revelation 1:10, 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:1, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22, 4:2, 14:13, 17:3, 21:10, and 22:17). But why did John **choose** to speak of the one Spirit of God in this particular way? Clearly, he wants his readers to think about the Holy Spirit in a particular way. It is probably significant that there are seven churches in Revelation. By describing the Holy Spirit as the “seven spirits of God,” John is probably emphasizing that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is at work in each church. Small churches should not be afraid that they do not have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. John’s use of creative use of symbols and numbers require the reader to think carefully about what the author might be saying.



4. The 22 chapters in Revelation are not arranged like the chapters in a book of narrative.

In a book of narrative, each chapter normally describes the next event that has happened. In a book of narrative, each chapter moves the storyline forward. However, in apocalyptic literature, chapters do not work in this way. The chapters in a book of this sort are not necessarily intended to demonstrate the “next event that has happened”. Often, a new chapter may be retelling the same story from a different perspective. In this way, the book of Revelation is a little like the book of Psalms. It tends to repeat the same story in different ways.



5. Revelation is a letter to the church. It should be used by the church.

Revelation is addressed to the seven churches in Asia (modern day Turkey), but this number, like other numbers in Revelation, is probably symbolic of something else. In this case, the number seven seems to be a symbol of fullness or completeness. Thus, the seven churches are representative of the full number of churches. This is a letter for the churches in every place, in all circumstances, in all stages of spiritual health, and for all time. The letters to the churches make up the first section of this book after the introduction because they are of critical importance. Churches must not miss the message being delivered to them in these letters. The seven letters to the seven churches make it clear that Revelation was written so that local churches might “conquer”.

Local churches may not appear to be the focus after Revelation 3. However, this is not because local churches are no longer in the book of Revelation. The entire book concerns the local church.

The fact that the church is not in full view in many of the chapters is because John is describing visions of other things or events that in one way or another relate to the local church. The reader needs to constantly keep the local church in mind as he or she reads the events of each chapter, for, again, all events described in this book directly concern the local church!

Sometimes people avoid Revelation because it seems to be strange and too difficult to use. It is not strange and it is not too difficult for the average preacher or the average church. The fact that this book is to be actively used by the churches is evident from the very beginning of the book (see 1:3) to the end of the book (see 22:16).



6. A proper understanding of Revelation should result in certain actions and in certain beliefs.

Again, Revelation is a book for the church. It tells the church what to do.

A proper understanding of Revelation should result in greater worship of Jesus Christ. This book, as with every book of the Bible, is a celebration of Jesus Christ. A proper understanding of this book should result in great praise directed to him.

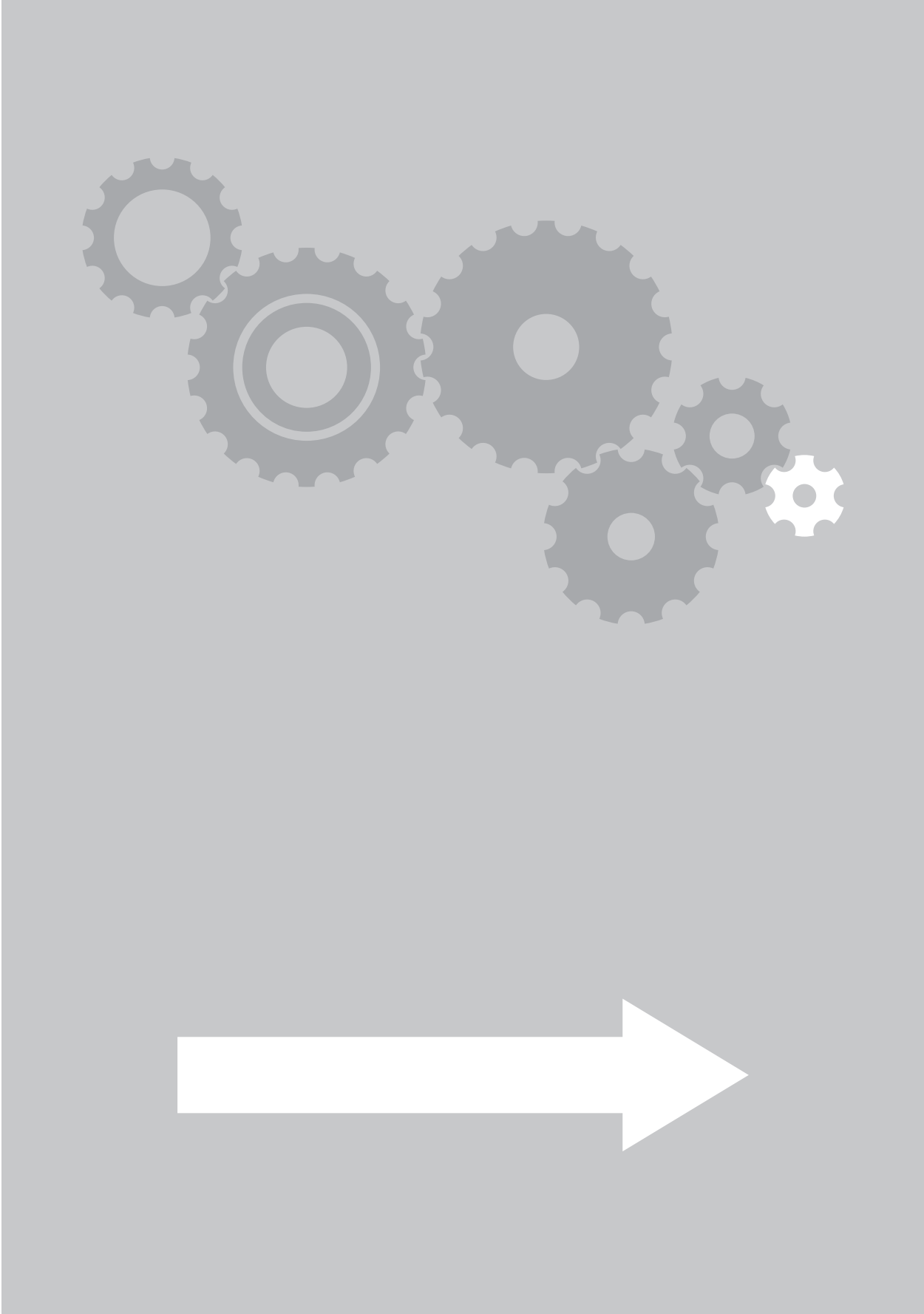
A proper understanding of Revelation should cause local churches to repent from sin and to walk in ever-increasing holiness.

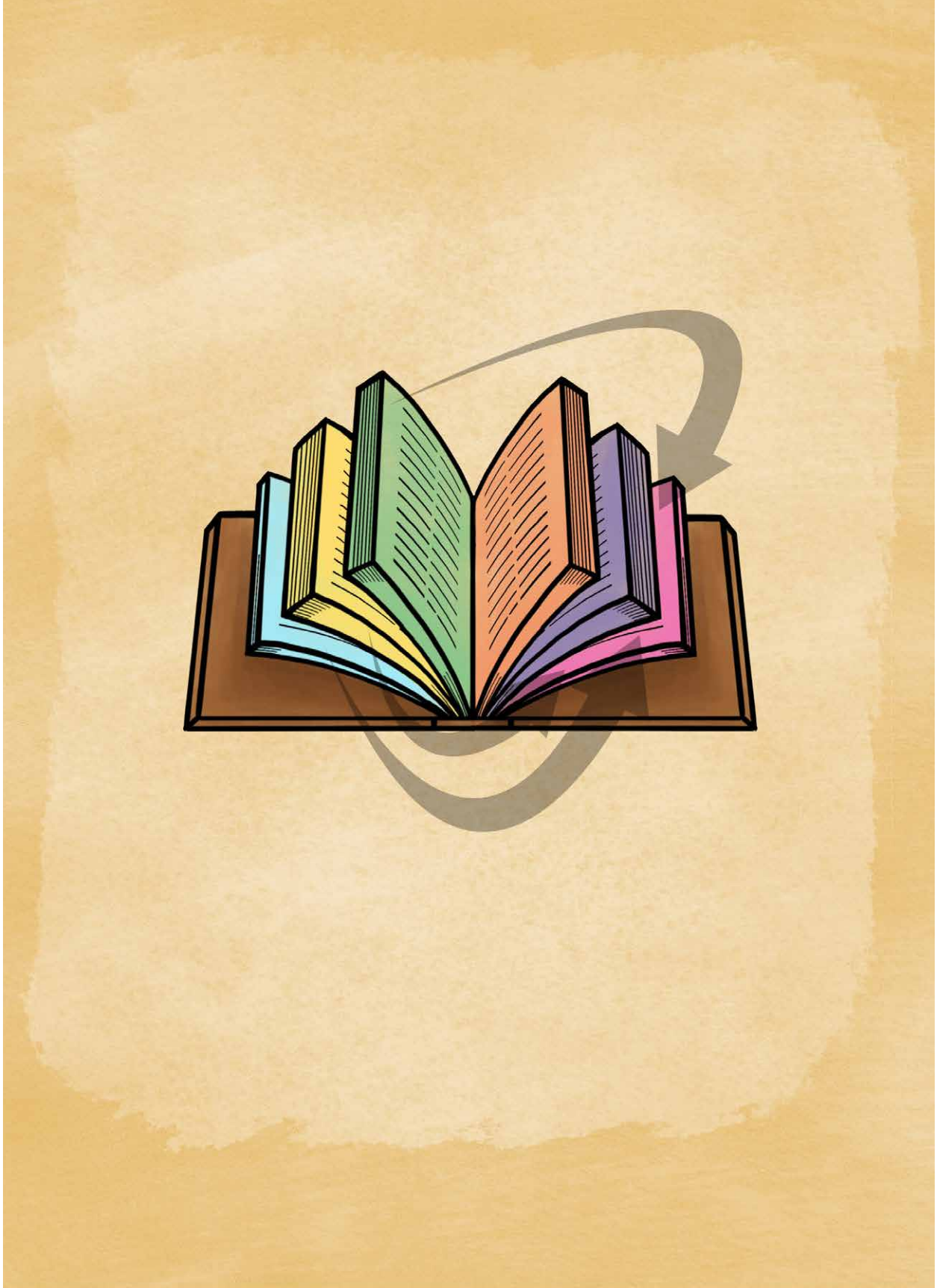
A proper understanding of Revelation should result in beliefs that agree with the message found in the rest of the Bible. The message of Revelation fits with the message of the entire Bible. Any interpretation of Revelation that doesn't match with the beliefs outlined in the rest of Scripture is incorrect.

The preaching and teaching of Revelation should produce faith and hope. Many believers are fearful of the message of Revelation. A proper understanding of this book will not produce believers who are fearful. Instead, it will produce obedient, joy-filled believers who function well in the local church and who do not deny Christ in times of severe testing.

A proper understanding of Revelation produces people who understand the current times. This means that people who understand Revelation will also understand the age in which they live and how they are to live within it. These people will not be surprised by persecution and will not be fearful of the days ahead. Those who understand the book will not, however, focus all of their attention on current

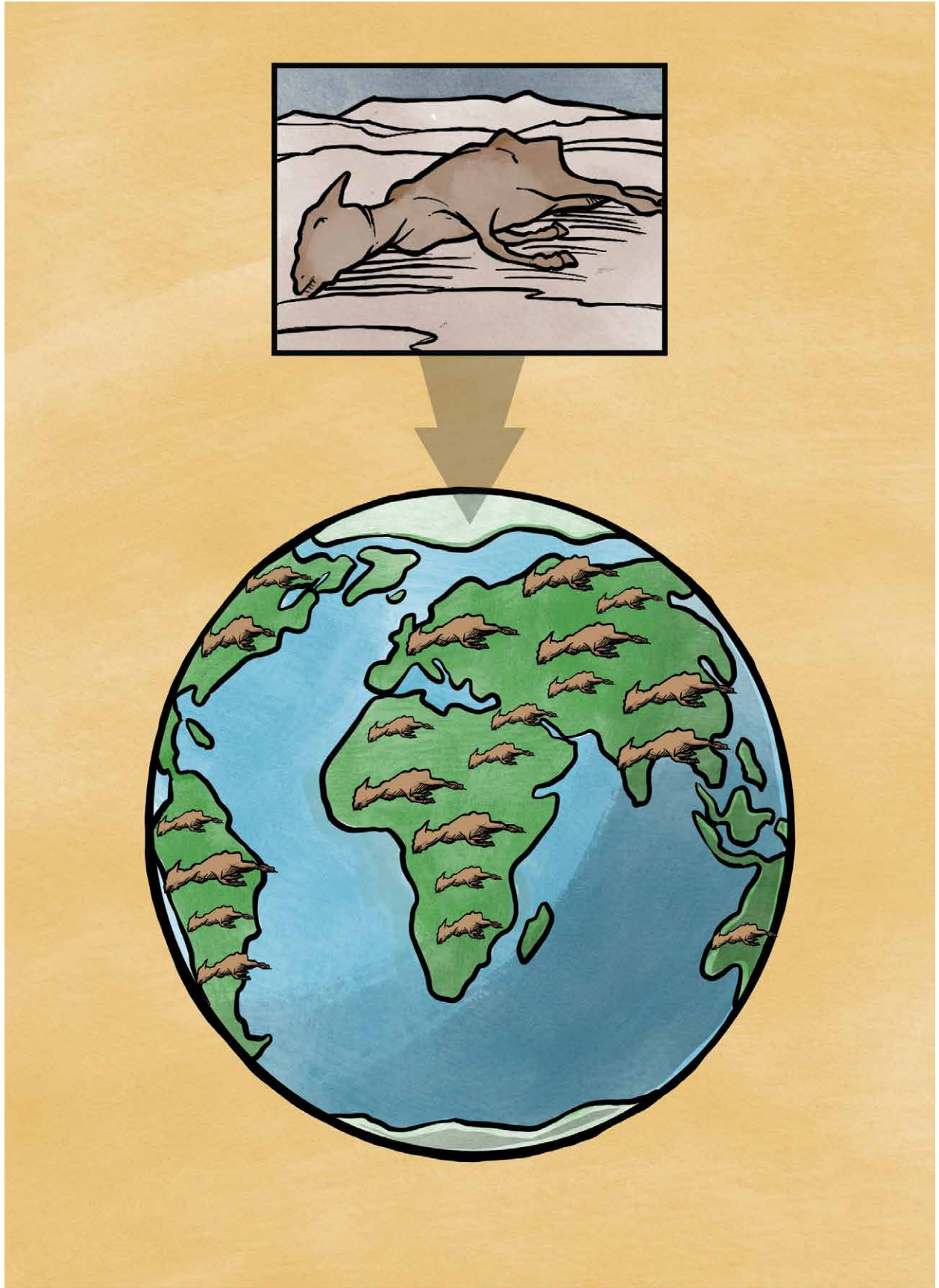
events in the world news. Nowhere does this book instruct believers to do this. The book is intended to produce courage so that believers might be able to stand in the midst of every test. It was not intended to be a map detailing how all of these tests might come.





7. The book of Revelation is filled with references to the Old Testament.

Revelation uses the Old Testament more than every other New Testament book. Revelation especially makes use of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Psalms. It is important to note that John does not quote the Old Testament in the same way as the gospel writers or the writers of the epistles. He never, for instance, mentions the name of the prophet he is quoting. In other words, John never says, “This is to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Daniel”. And John doesn’t quote entire verses or passages from the Old Testament. This does not mean, however, that John’s use of the Old Testament is meant to be hidden. Every chapter includes many clear (and some less-clear) connections to the Old Testament. John frequently quotes significant words and phrases. He uses many images that are directly taken from Old Testament books. But John isn’t content with using just one image to make his point. He frequently combines images from several Old Testament passages. John’s creative combinations of Old Testament imagery result in new images that are overwhelming to the senses. It is as if John has taken the “music” of the Old Testament prophets and has “turned up the volume” to a new, deafening level! He has taken the pictures the prophets painted and has combined them in ways that are intended to be shocking to the senses. John expects the church to carefully consider the Old Testament passages he is using. It is the joy and obligation of the preacher to carefully examine the Old Testament passages being used in Revelation.



8. Revelation takes Old Testament symbols or events and greatly magnifies them.

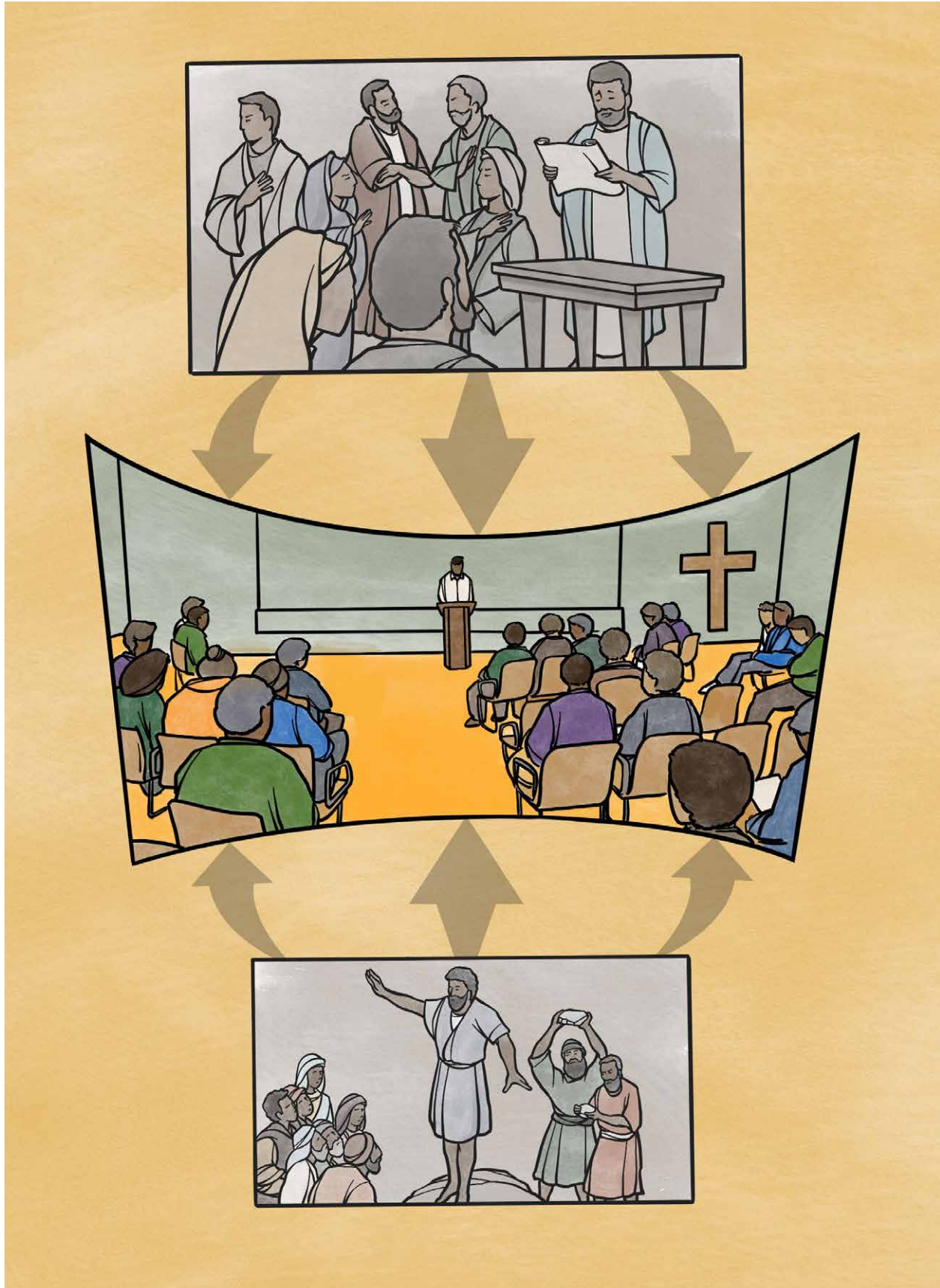
For instance, the plagues in Egypt “reappear” in Revelation. However, instead of covering a small portion of the earth and impacting only a few people, the plagues in Revelation cover the earth. Things that were promised to Israel are applied to all the people of God whether Jews or Gentiles.

There is a difference between symbols used in Revelation (and other books of apocalyptic literature) and between the symbols used in other books of prophecy and poetry. In a book of poetry (like the Psalms) or in a non-apocalyptic book of prophecy, the images are generally of things that are at least possible. David writes that he can “bend a bow of bronze” (see Psalm 18:34). Even though a bow made of bronze would be highly unusual, it is still something that can be easily imagined. It is not “unearthly”. In fact, because it is so close to reality, readers may confuse the symbol with reality and think that David owned and used a bronze bow and that this is what he was speaking about in Psalm 18. In apocalyptic literature, however, symbols are “unearthly”: dragons with many heads, prostitutes riding many-headed beasts, and a person with a sword coming out of his mouth.



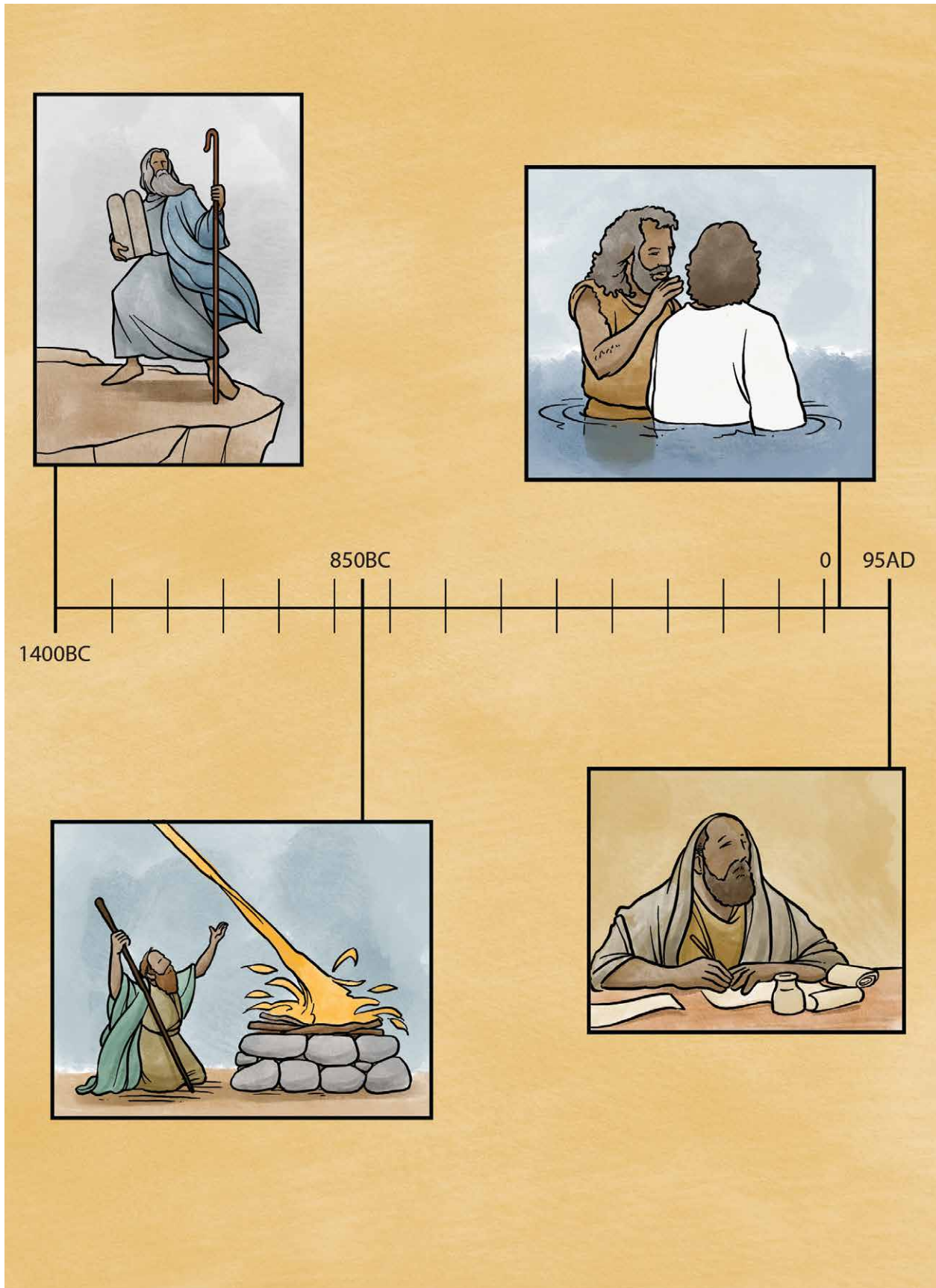
9. The instructions to the churches are not given in symbolic language.

Symbols are used abundantly in apocalyptic literature. Symbols are appropriate for this type of literature, because of the powerful effect they have on the emotions. Again, it is as if God has “turned up the volume” and everything is heard at a much higher level. Symbols are not chosen for their precision. They will always remain somewhat fuzzy. This is not the case with instructions to the churches. These instructions are given in very clear language. Repentance, for instance, is not a symbol. It means the same thing in Revelation as it does in any other book of the Bible.



10. Revelation teaches local churches they will face persecution.

The letters to the seven churches (see Revelation 2 and 3) make it clear that persecution against the church was taking place at the time when Revelation was written. This persecution was both from within the church and from outside of the church. However, this persecution was not total. The book of Revelation sends a message to all churches that they should expect persecution. The book of Revelation also sends a message that this persecution will tend to increase rather than decrease in the days ahead. Another book written at the time of Revelation was 1 Clement. Clement, writing from Rome, wrote of “the sudden and repeated calamities and reverses that have befallen us” (see 1 Clement 1:1). Revelation demonstrates that “sudden and repeated calamities and reverses” are not signs of God’s weakness or signs that he has abandoned the church. Revelation teaches the churches that God will give them strength to endure all calamities and reverses!



11. In Revelation, John presents himself as a prophet to the church.

John is, like Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, speaking to the people of God. In the same way that the Israelites were to receive the prophets as messengers from God and were to obey all of their words, the churches today must receive John as a prophet with a message from God and are to obey all of his words. See 1:1, 1:10, 4:1-2, 17:3, 21:10, 19:10, 22:9.

In the Old Testament, the primary role of the prophet was not to predict the future. It was to remind the people of God of his beauty and holiness and of the covenant he made with them. The prophets called the people of God to repentance and to holy living. They encouraged the people of God to persevere in times of suffering by reminding them of God's promises. They warned the people of God by reminding them of the punishment that comes upon all of God's enemies. To accomplish these tasks, the prophets did, at times, predict the future. However, their interest was not in giving people a timeline of the events that were to come. If this had been their primary interest, they would have spoken far more clearly about the events of the future. Their primary interest was in giving the people of God the help they needed so that they might walk with God in holiness and persevere even in difficult times.

John presents himself as a prophet to the church. Like the Old Testament prophets, John's primary role is to call the church to repentance and holy living and perseverance. His purpose is not to give people a precise timeline of events that are to come. If this had been his primary interest, he would have spoken far more clearly about the events of the future. He writes so that he might influence the present actions of the church.



12. Revelation is the story of two people groups, two cities, and two “trinities.”

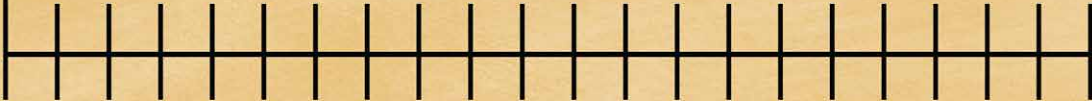
There are two people groups described in Revelation: the people who follow and worship the one true God and the people who follow and worship the dragon. Both groups are associated with a city. The people of God are connected to the New Jerusalem. The people who follow and worship the dragon are connected to Babylon. Revelation clearly declares Babylon and all of its citizens will be destroyed. The new Jerusalem and all of its citizens will be saved. This city will become the only city on earth.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are worshiped by the citizens of the new Jerusalem. The name of the true God is stamped on their foreheads. The true Trinity is triumphant and will be worshiped forever. There is also a false “trinity.” This trinity is worshiped by the citizens of Babylon. Satan is presented as a dragon of immense power. He gives all of his authority to a beast. And a dragon-lamb forces people to people to worship the beast (see Revelation 12 and 13). The name of the beast is stamped on the foreheads of all of his followers.



13. Revelation is a book about worship.

The citizens of Babylon are worshipers of Satan and of his false christ. The citizens of the new Jerusalem are worshipers of God and of the true Christ. John is a worshiper of God and of the true Christ. He writes this book so that the churches might worship Christ with great joy.



14. Revelation 1 introduces the book.

This part of the book is important because it introduces the entire book (in literature, an introduction like this may be called a **prologue**). It provides details about the book itself (the name of the author, the name of the people the author was writing to, the circumstances under which it was written, and the reason why it was written), it prepares the reader for what is to come, and it tells the reader what is expected from him or her.

It will be of great help to the preacher or teacher to read the conclusion of Revelation (22:6-21) immediately after reading the introduction. These two sections of Revelation are connected and they emphasize the reasons why this book was written. It is easy, if the introduction and conclusion are ignored, to misinterpret the message of Revelation and to focus on matters that are not important. Understanding the beginning and end of the book will help the preacher or teacher stay focused on the most important points of the book.

Notice the connections between the introduction and the conclusion:

First, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that this book is a gift from God and from Christ (1:1-2 and 22:6, 16). It is not a strange book and it is not to be avoided. It is a gift.

Second, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that this book is for the churches (1:3-4 and 22:16).

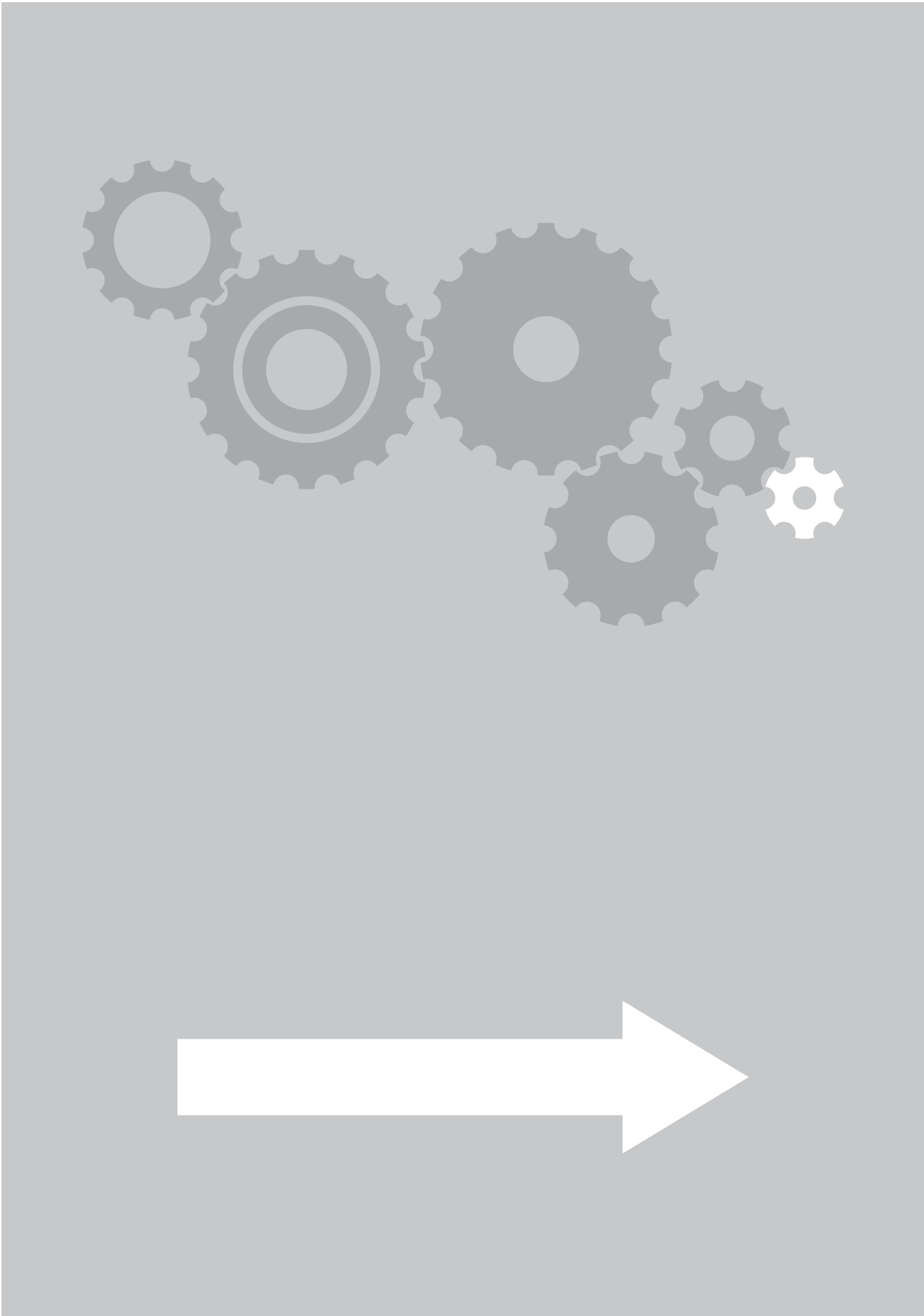
Third, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that “the time is near” and that Jesus is “coming soon” (1:1, 3, 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Thus, this book is intended to be read with urgency.

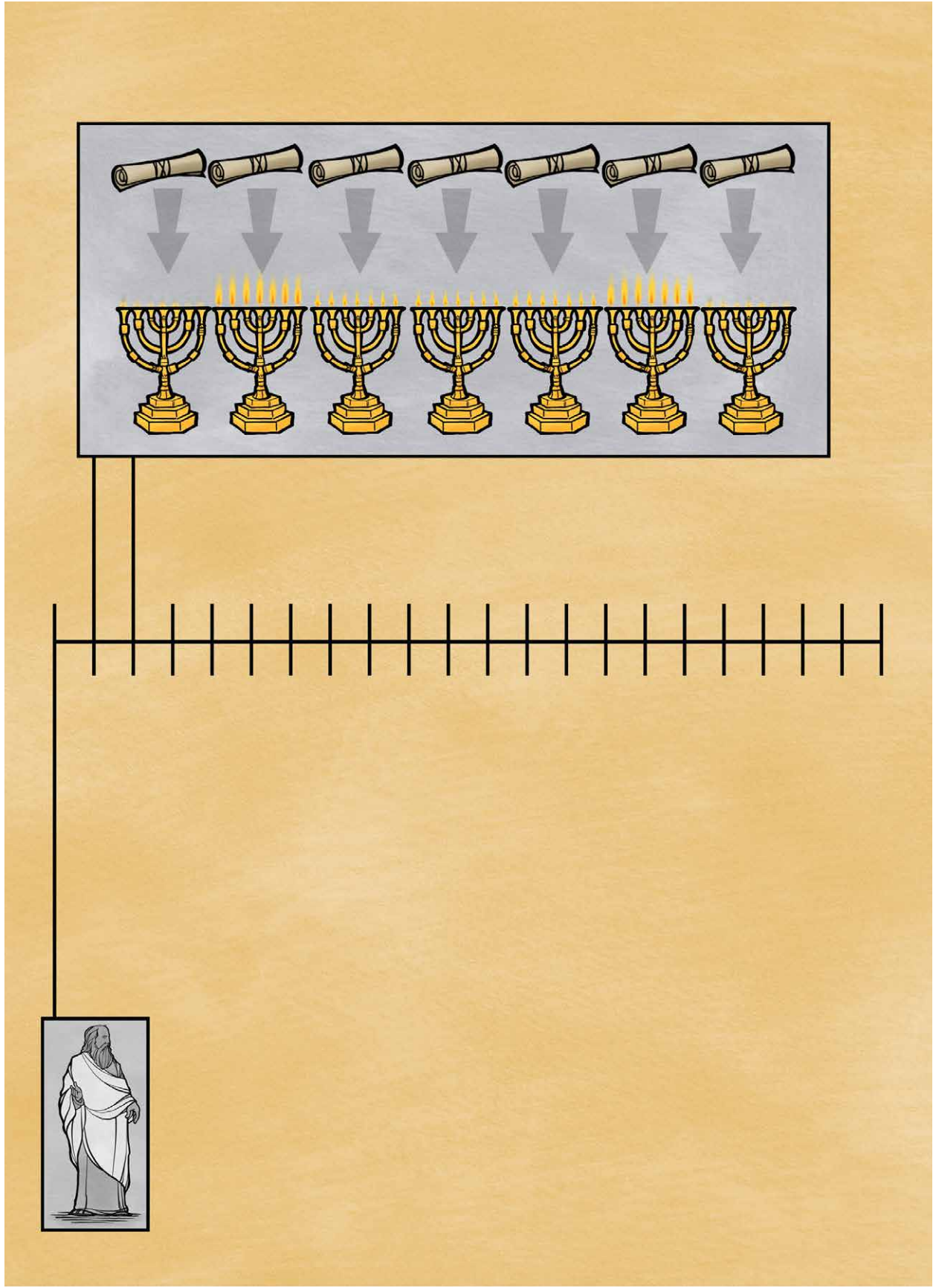
Fourth, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that blessing rests on the those who read these words and obey them (1:3 and 22:7). Since God is expecting the

churches to not only read the words but also obey the words, it is clear that God needs to give the churches everything necessary to understand the book so that they can obey it. This is why he has given us his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God to the churches so that we can understand God's words and so that we can obey them (see John 14:15-17).

Fifth, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize the greatness of Jesus (1:7, 12-20 and 22:12-16). A proper understanding of this book must result in worship of Christ.

The preacher or teacher needs to constantly remember the things emphasized in the introduction and conclusion. **It is not important** that the preacher or teacher (or the people listening) understand every symbol within this book. **It is important** that the preacher or teacher uses this book to urge the church to godliness, to help the church persevere in the midst of great suffering, and to cause the church to worship Christ with great joy.





15. Revelation 2-3 are letters to local churches.

This section includes seven letters to seven local churches. While these letters were addressed to seven real churches that were in Asia in the first century, the greatest value of these letters to churches today will not be in studying the history of conditions that were in Asia at that time. Remember, these seven churches are representative of all churches, in all places, for all times. The preacher or teacher should study these letters to discern what they are saying to the present-day church. This means far more than reading these letters and applying them to the global church (all Christians on earth) in a general way. Christ expects this book to be used by local churches in a very specific way. He expects local churches to hear what he is saying to them through these letters. He expects local churches to respond to the commands he is giving them through these letters.

It is evident, based on these seven letters, that all churches are not the same. Each church will have its own difficulties. It is also evident, based on these letters, that Jesus expects every local church to address the difficulties that they are facing. No local church, no matter what country or city or village it might be in, no matter how rich or how poor it might be, and no matter how educated it may or may not be, is free from Christ's examination. Christ expects all churches in all situations to be healthy churches. This means every local church is **responsible**. Every church must do whatever is necessary in order for the church to be healthy.

These letters, then, are gifts to all churches in all times. These letters are intended to help them flee from sin and to persevere in righteousness.

While each of the letters can be examined individually, there is evidence that John wanted them to be considered as a whole. The letters are not arranged in random order. **John intentionally arranged the letters in a pattern.** In this particular pattern in Revelation 2-3, the first letter (2:1-2:7) is connected to the last letter (3:14-22). Both of

these churches are in grave danger. The second letter (2:8-11) is connected to the second to the last letter (3:7-3:13). Both of these churches are healthy. The third (2:12-17), fourth (2:18-28), and fifth (3:1-6) letters all go together. All three of these churches are partly healthy and partly unhealthy. While all seven of the letters belong together, based on the way John has arranged the letters, **it appears John wants his readers to see that he has arranged them based on their spiritual health.**

John has focused on the spiritual health of these seven churches because he wants his readers to focus on the spiritual health of their own churches. Elders reading these letters should not, for instance, be focused on the church in Laodicea. They should be focused on the church they are supposed to be shepherding. This focus on the spiritual health of the church is not something that should happen just one time. Elders are to be constantly on the alert. In the same way that Christ is pictured, even today, as walking among the lampstands (Revelation 2:1), so the elders in a local church should be considering the health of the church they are currently watching over.

Again, the pattern in Revelation 2 and 3 is intended to send a message to all of the churches in all places for all times (not just to the seven churches). The letter to the first church presents a church in great danger. The letter to the last church presents a church in even greater danger. Both churches receive strong rebukes from Christ. Both of these churches are in great danger (from Christ!) of having their lampstand removed!

The letters to the second church and sixth church are positive. Both churches receive praise from Christ. The second and sixth churches are both struggling because of persecution. These churches are not, however, struggling because of sin in their midst. Both of these churches receive comfort and promises of help from Christ. They are **healthy churches**.

The letters to the third, fourth, and fifth churches present a picture of churches in a somewhat mixed condition. They are not quite as bad as the first and seventh churches, but they are not nearly as healthy as the second and sixth churches. If these

churches do not repent, they will, like the first and seventh churches, be in danger of losing their lampstand.

In a pattern like this, the reader is to, somehow, try to think of the one unified message being proclaimed by the whole pattern. The one message being proclaimed by the seven letters to the churches is that the churches **must conquer**. They must conquer by obeying all of Jesus' commands. They must conquer sin from within and they must conquer persecution from without. To conquer sin, they must be actively resisting sin. To conquer persecution, they must remain faithful to Jesus in the midst of the persecution. Only two of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are actually doing this. These letters, when taken together, demonstrate the true picture of a conquering church. They also present a picture of a failing church. These letters, when taken together, demonstrate that the greatest danger to a local church is not persecution. The greatest danger to any local church is sin.

It is significant that in the very middle of the middle letter (letter 4) a verse is directed to all the churches. This verse calls attention to the judgment of Christ: "And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works" (see 2:23). These letters are intended to be a warning to the churches that Christ is, at this very moment, walking among the lampstands! He sees all details. He will punish—or reward—based on what he sees. His desire is that every church might be a conquering church.

In addition to the pattern, other elements tie these letters together. These elements, like the chiasm, are intended to cause the reader to see the letters as a whole and to discern the one message being proclaimed by them. Consider the following elements:

Each letter is addressed in the same manner: "To the angel of the church in _____ write". The word angel can mean either angel or messenger. In this case, it probably refers to an angel that is associated with each local church. This should bring

comfort to all local churches. God has sent his angels to help them in their task! See Hebrews 1:14.

Each letter begins with Christ identifying himself as the author of the letter.

The words Christ uses in his introduction in each letter are highly significant. See the notes regarding his introduction at Revelation 2:1.

In each letter, after Christ identifies himself as the author (“the words of ...”) he reminds the local church of something about himself. The way Jesus describes himself in each letter is, in some way, tied to the particular situation being faced by the church in that letter. The titles he uses are intended to help that particular church. For instance, Jesus’ description of himself in the second letter (“I am the first and the last”) is drawn from three passages in the book of Isaiah. These passages relate to the people of God not being afraid of their enemies because Yahweh is the first and the last. Jesus uses this title to demonstrate that the church in Smyrna does not need to fear the people who are persecuting it.

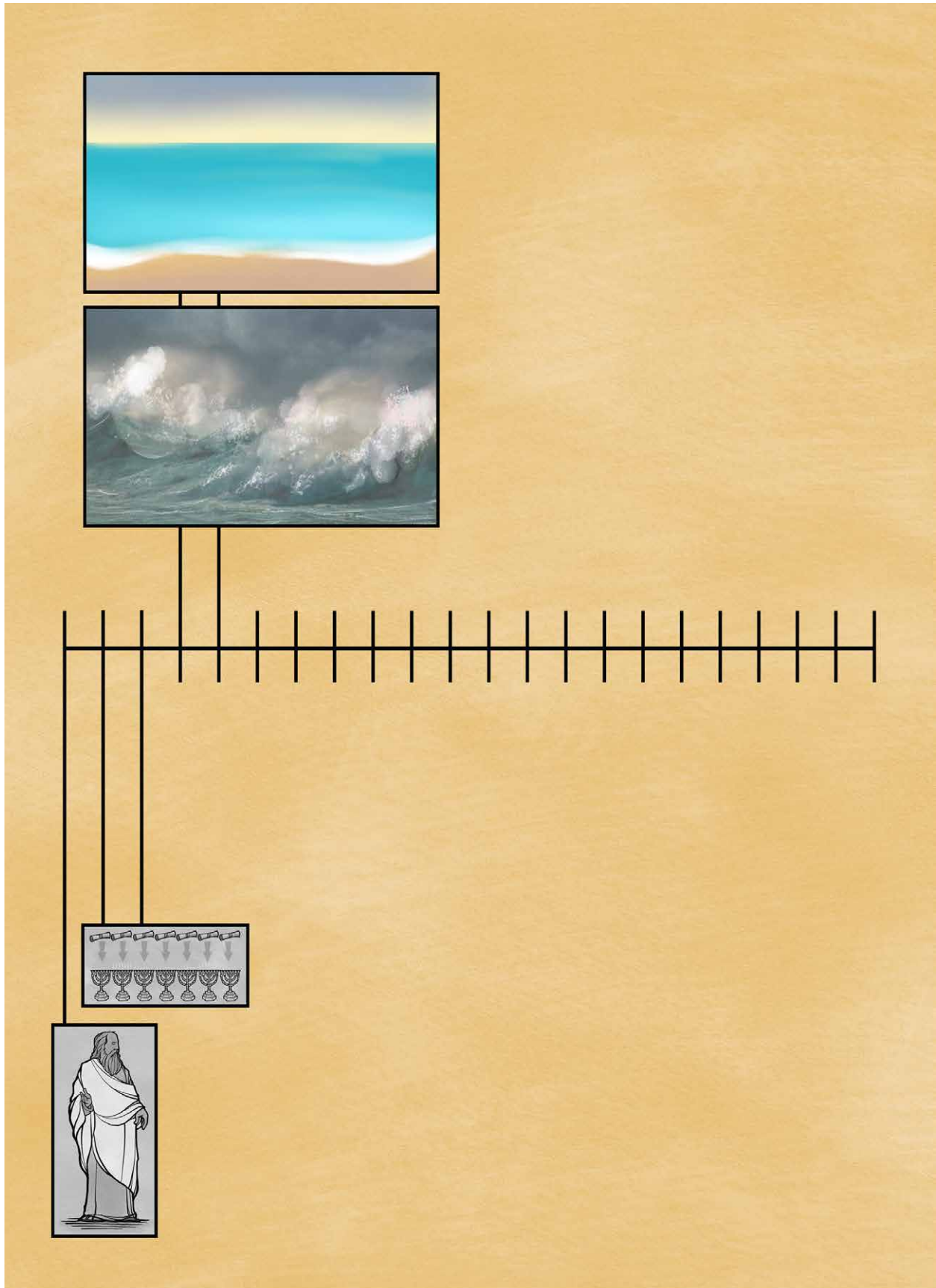
Each letter also includes a declaration by Christ that he knows that church’s current situation. Christ makes it very clear that he knows the unique situation in the place where each church is located. He knows the deeds that have been done by the church, he knows sins they have committed, and he knows how the church has been treated by those who are not Christians.

The letters all include a statement by Christ that “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Christ is calling the church to listen to his words and to obey his commands. “He who has an ear, let him hear” is nearly identical to the words Christ used in his teaching to the people (see Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 4:23, Luke 8:8, and 14:35). It is significant to note that Ezekiel 3:27 is very similar: “But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house”. See also Isaiah 6:9-10.

The letters all include a declaration that the Spirit is, through these letters, speaking to the churches.

The letters all conclude with a promise from the Christ for the one who conquers. The promises all begin with the words, “To the one who conquers I will ...”. These promises should bring great hope to the churches. The faithful will be richly rewarded!

Again, these common elements all serve to tie the letters together. It is the joy and obligation of the preacher to proclaim the one message being taught by the seven letters to the churches.



16. Revelation 4 and 5 are key to understanding the entire book of Revelation. These chapters are about worship of God in heaven (chapter 4) and about God's plan to restore worship on earth (chapter 5).

In chapters 4 and 5, John moves from letters addressed to local churches located on earth to a vision of heaven and events taking place in the heavenly courtroom/temple. The heavenly courtroom/ temple is also pictured in Daniel 7 and Isaiah 6. These passages should be read carefully in connection with Revelation 4 and 5.

In Revelation 4, John is brought into the heavenly courtroom/temple. John has been brought to this place so that he might, by writing his vision down, bring his readers to the same place! The readers have, by this vision, been brought into the very presence of God! They are able to see, very clearly, the holiness and splendor of God.

God the Father is on the throne. The Holy Spirit is before the throne. Along with these two members of the Trinity are worshipers representing all of creation (angels, representatives of the saints, and representatives of creation). Jesus, however, the third member of the Trinity, is absent from this chapter. In one sense, the "story" being told in Revelation does not move forward in Revelation 4. Worship is happening in heaven. This is the reality of heaven. All things in heaven understand their position. All things know who God is and worship him. There is no hint of rebellion in heaven. All of the citizens of heaven proclaim that God is worthy of worship (see verse 11). The reader does not sense any change in events on earth based on the events recorded in Revelation 4.

But, with the exception of the churches, God is not receiving this worship on earth! The earth is in rebellion against God. Heaven and earth will not be separated like this forever. Something must be done so that God's will is done on earth in the same

way that it is done in heaven (see Matthew 6:10). That is why the scroll in chapter 5 is so important. It contains God's plan to bring in everlasting worship. No longer will there be a hint of rebellion.

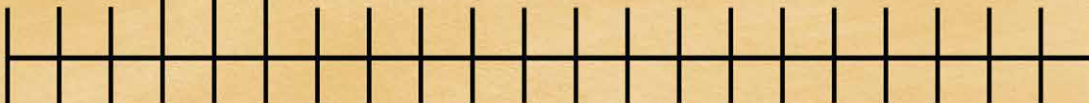
A search is made to find one who is worthy to take the scroll containing the plan and to accomplish this task. After a long search, no one is found who is worthy for this task! John weeps and weeps because this means that God's plans will not be fulfilled. Earth will forever be in rebellion! But John's weeping is stopped by one of the citizens of heaven. He says that there is one who is worthy! It is a Lion/Lamb (Jesus!). This Lion/Lamb is the one who will bring God's plan to pass. He is the one who will end the rebellion on earth and cause worship to take place on earth as it is taking place in heaven. He is the one who ransoms people and makes them "a kingdom and priests to our God" (Revelation 5:10). He is the one who makes people who are, because of their right relationship with God, fit to "reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10).

The fact that the church on earth is not mentioned in chapters 4 and 5 does not mean that it has disappeared from the earth and has been taken to heaven. The church is present on earth throughout the book of Revelation. John cannot focus on every detail at the same time. These two chapters are about events taking place in heaven, not events taking place on earth.

While this vision is about events taking place in heaven, it is for the benefit of the churches on earth. The churches need to know what is happening in heaven. The truths outlined in these two chapters must be firmly planted in our minds, for they allow us to understand the events that are taking place on earth and to face the future with great faith.

The judgments that are seen in later chapters of Revelation are all tied to events taking place in these two chapters. The truths outlined in these two chapters are the foundation of all of the events recorded in the entire book of Revelation.

Like many of the prophets in the Old Testament, John has been given a vision of heavenly realities. These are the truths he needs to proclaim to the churches. This is more evidence that John should be seen as a prophet to the churches.

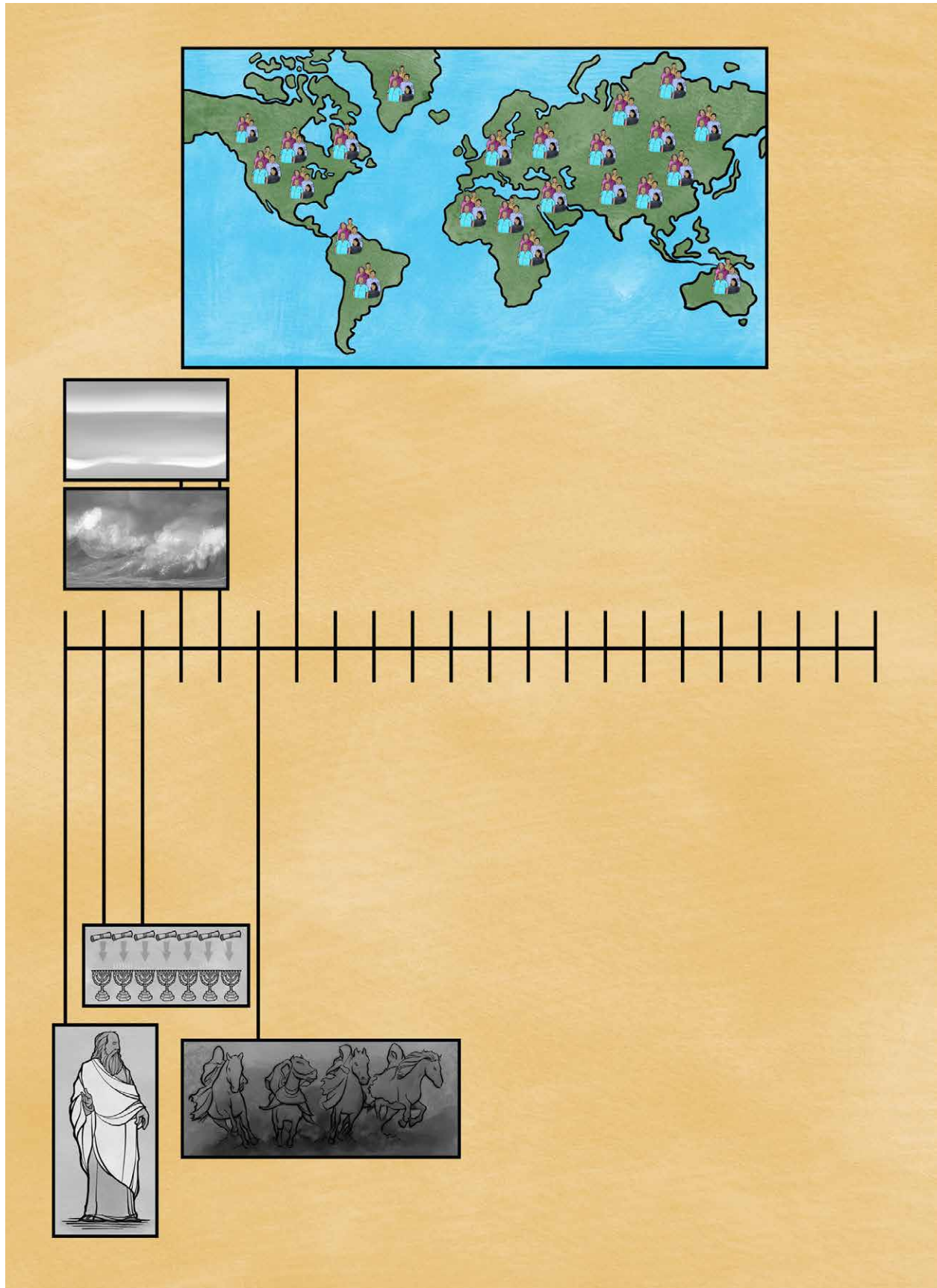


17. Revelation 6: The opening of the seals on the scroll.

In this chapter the Lamb begins opening the seals in the scroll. The scroll, again, is the plan by which God will forever end the rebellion on earth and cause worship to take place on earth as it takes place in heaven. As the Lamb opens the seals, God begins pouring his wrath out on the earth! Mankind is being punished for its rebellion! However, even in the midst of this wrath being poured out, the reader can see mercy. The judgments in this chapter are limited. People are being given a chance to repent. The chapter ends with humans on earth crying out to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”. The day of the Lord has come! This is a reference to the time period when everything is brought low and God alone is exalted. The Old Testament prophets spoke many, many times about the day of the Lord. For the saints, this is a day of great hope and expectation. For the world, it should bring great dread, for all who do not repent will be crushed.

This chapter speaks of four different horses and riders. Each of these brings disaster of one kind or another to the earth. In the same way that the reader of the Exodus story is not to focus too heavily on any one plague, the reader of Revelation shouldn't focus too heavily on any one horse or rider. These are symbols that are meant to be considered together. They are a picture of the destruction coming upon the earth because of its rebellion against God.

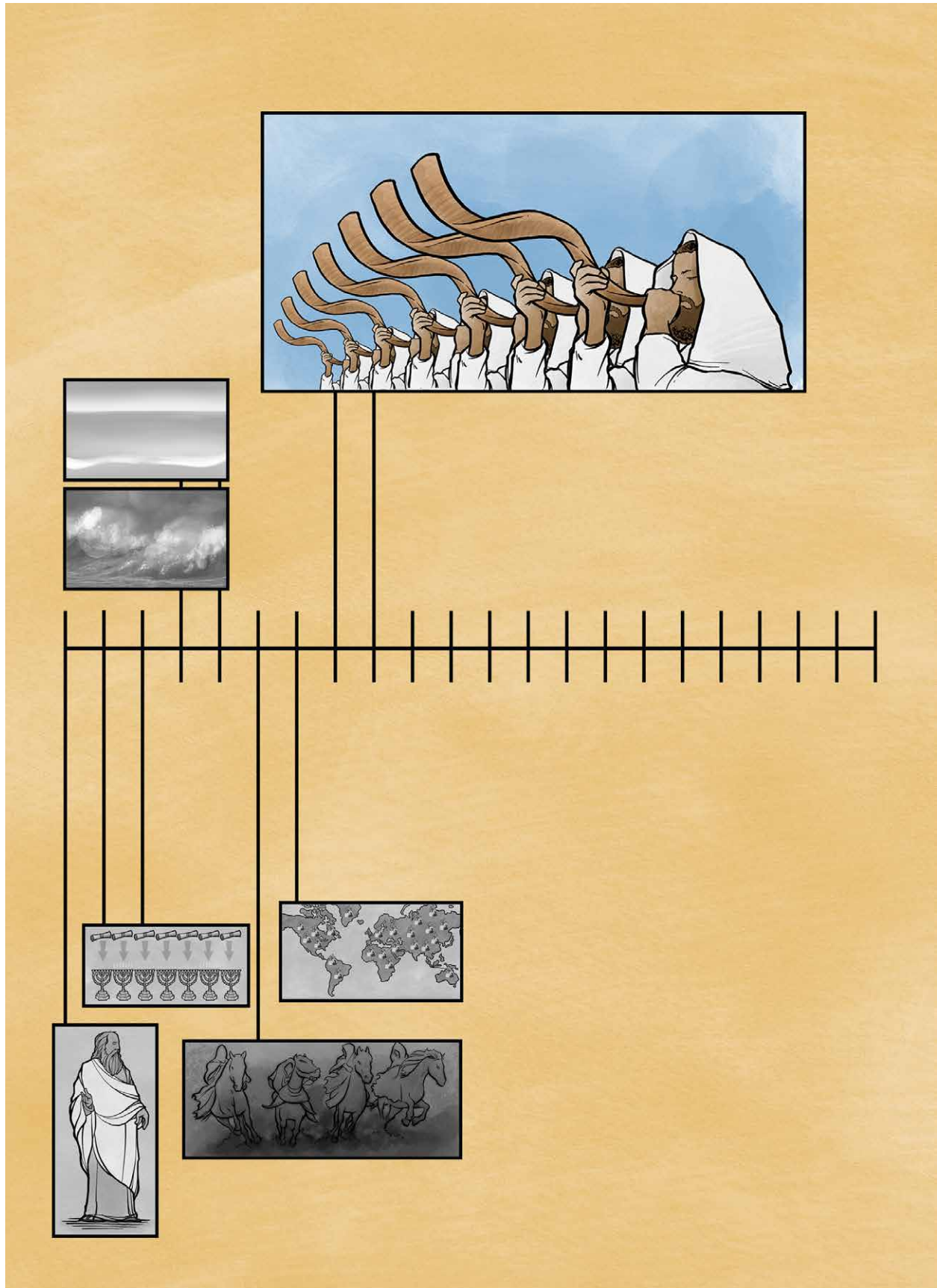
As is clear from 6:9-11, the church is still on earth at this time. For this reason, Christians need assurance that God has not forgotten about his church. How is he protecting the church during this time period of wrath? Will they, like the world, be destroyed by God's wrath? This very important question about the protection of the church is answered in Revelation 7.



18. Revelation 7: God’s care for his churches.

Chapter 7 provides essential information for the churches. It is not about God pouring his wrath out on the world. It is about God caring for the saints during the “day of the Lord”. This chapter isn’t just about God protecting his people on earth. It is also about him bringing all of his people, every single one of them, to his presence. This chapter provides sweet assurance that all of God’s people are known by him, loved by him, protected by him, and will be safely delivered into his presence by him.

This chapter has two parts: verses 1-8 and verses 9-17. These parts are referring to the same group of people. In verses 1-8, these people are on earth. In verses 9-17, these same people are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb”. It is the joy and obligation of the preacher to study both parts of this chapter, to see the connections between the two parts, and to proclaim these truths to the churches. This will bring strength and hope to the churches!



19. Revelation 8-9: Limited punishment poured out on the earth.

Chapter 7 was focused on the saints. Before further describing the plan that will end the rebellion on earth, it was essential for the saints to know that God knows them, loves them, has protected them, and that he will safely bring them to his presence. Now that the saints know this, they are ready to read more about God's plan to end the rebellion on earth and to bring in everlasting worship.

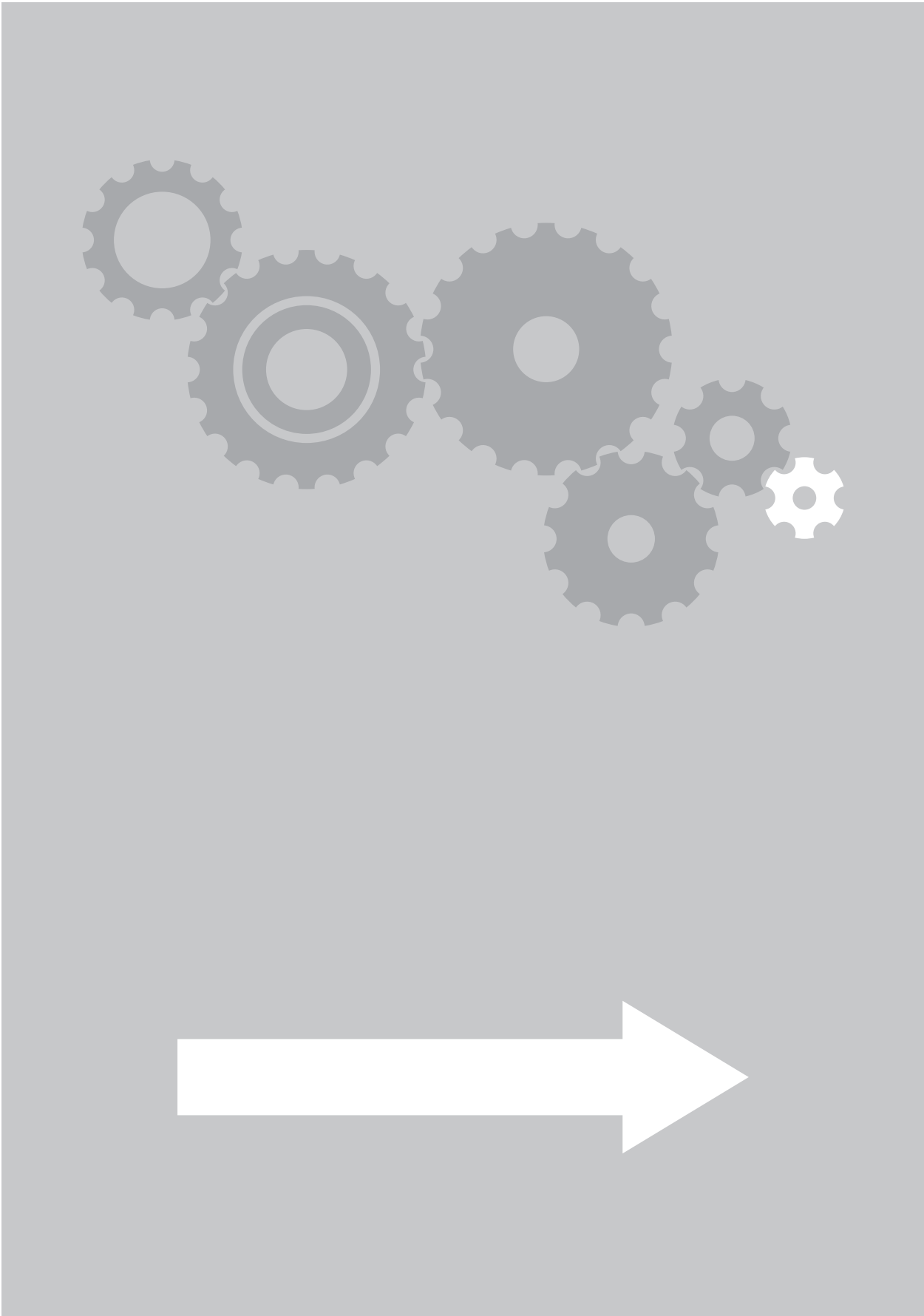
Chapters 8-9 are connected because they speak of angels blowing seven trumpets and of the things that happen when the trumpets are blown. The seven trumpets should remind the reader of the people of Israel marching around Jericho. The priests at that time also blew seven trumpets. When the trumpets blew, the walls of Jericho fell down. This is exactly what is taking place in these chapters. The trumpets are blowing and "Babylon" (mankind in wicked rebellion against God) is beginning to crumble.

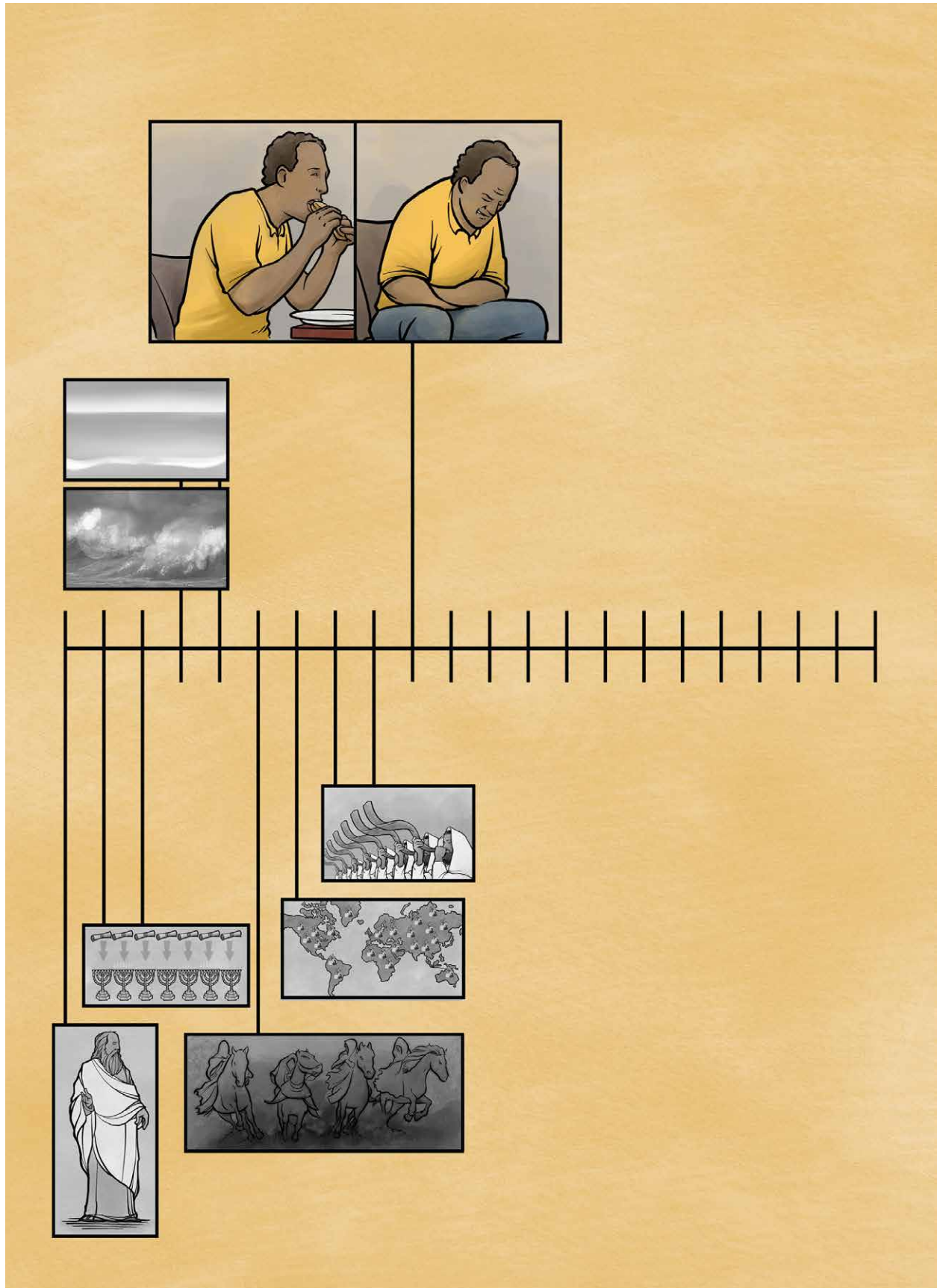
It is important to notice that the punishments in these chapters are limited. They are not total. For instance, 8:9 declares that, "A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed". This isn't because only a third deserved punishment. Rather, the reader needs to know that, for some reason, only a third were judged. This means two thirds were spared by God! These chapters demonstrate that God is giving the people on earth time to repent. He is showing great mercy! These punishments are gracious calls for the earth to repent. God does not have to show restraint.

However, even with these limited judgments, the earth will not repent (see Revelation 9:20-21). Like pharaoh during the time of the plagues in Egypt, the earth is hard-hearted and continues in rebellion. The earth's refusal to repent prepares the

reader for things to come in later chapters. There will be no more limited punishments. God will pour his full fury on the earth.

The church is on earth during these two chapters. This is clear because the prayers of the saints are mentioned in 8:3. It is also clear because the suffering of the church on earth during this time period will be a major focus in Revelation 11-13.





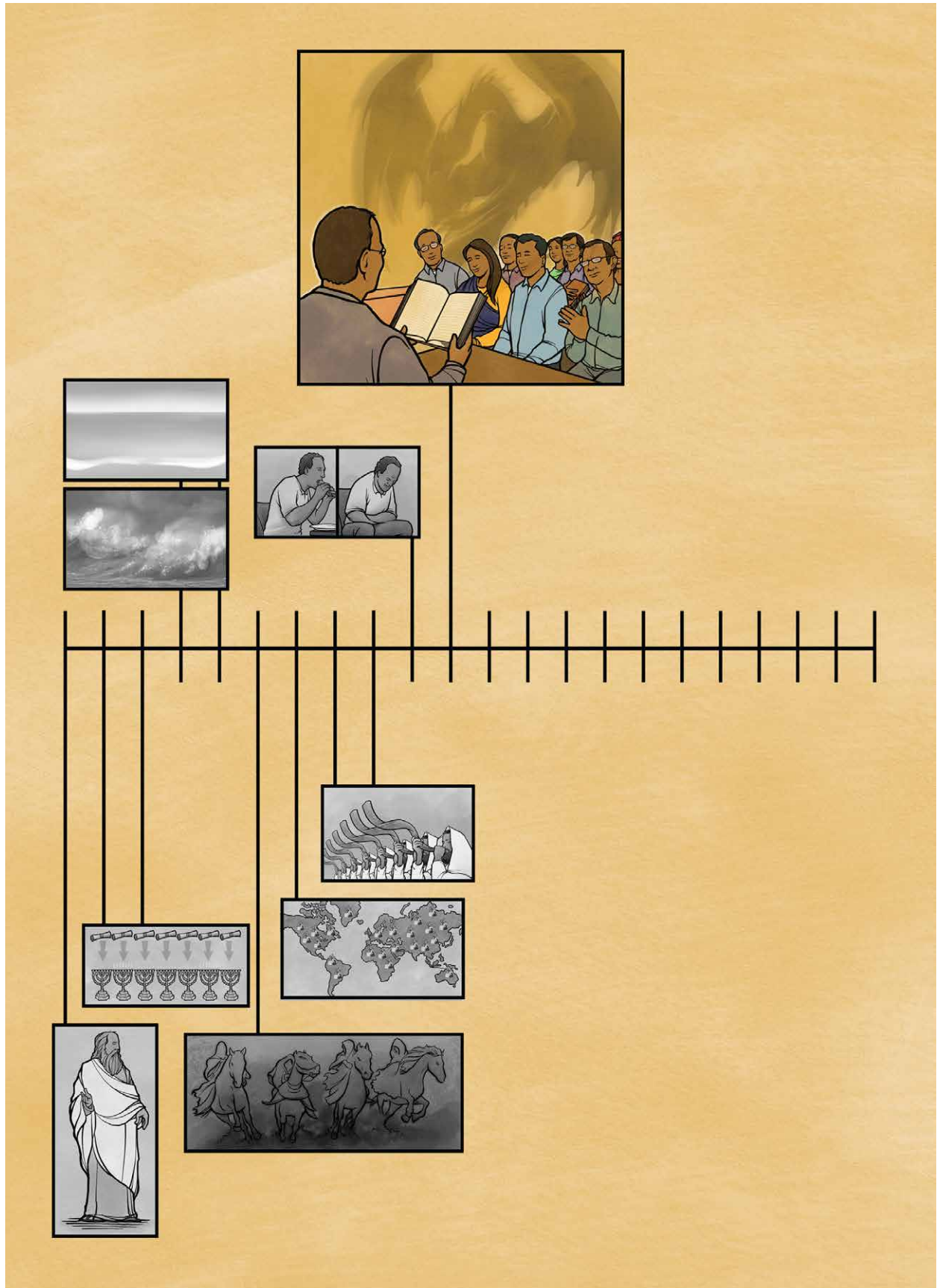
20. Revelation 10: the sweet (and bitter) plan of God.

Chapter 9 concludes by stating that the people still refused to repent in spite of God's judgments being poured out on the earth (see 9:20-21). This leads the reader to expect further and more severe judgments. Earth's rebellion will not continue forever. God's plan to end the rebellion and to bring in everlasting worship will come to pass.

Chapter 10 begins with a mighty angel coming to earth. The angel has a scroll. This scroll is probably the same scroll that was given to the Lamb in chapter 5—the scroll containing God's plan. The angel declares that there will be no more delay. To this point, final judgment against the earth has been delayed so that people might repent. However, there will be no more waiting. It is time for the plan to be finished.

The angel gives the scroll to John and tells him to eat it. He says that it will be sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. The fact that John is to eat the scroll seems to mean that John (representing the people of God) will be part of God's plan coming about. It is not separate from him. He is intimately connected to the plan of God to end rebellion and to bring in worship.

The plan of God will be sweet in his mouth. This symbolizes the fact that God's plan "tastes" wonderful. It will result in an end to all rebellion and all worship will be given to God. This is very sweet to John (and should be sweet to all of God's people). However, the plan will be bitter in John's stomach. This means that these good things (the end to rebellion and the bringing in of everlasting worship) will only come about with a great deal of pain. This pain will be experienced by the churches on earth. The pain of the churches on earth (the bitter taste in John's stomach) is the focus of chapters 11-13.



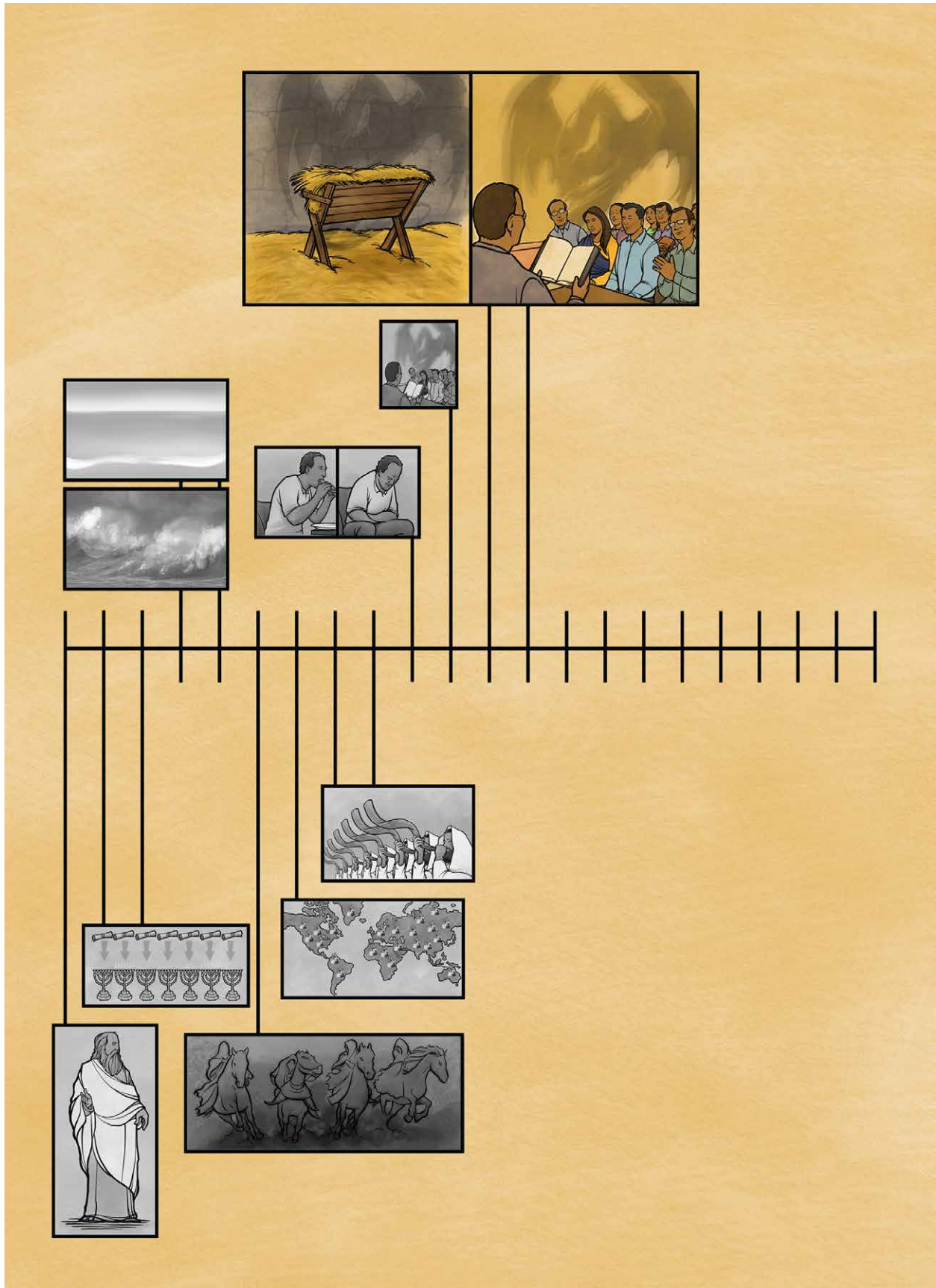
21. Revelation 11: the church and the beast.

Chapter 10 ended with John eating the little scroll. The scroll contained God's plan to end the rebellion on earth and to bring in everlasting worship. The plan was sweet and it was bitter. The fact that John ate the scroll symbolizes the fact that God's people will be very involved with the plan. The plan is sweet to the people of God, because it brings in all they have hoped and dreamed for. Yet, in order for these sweet things to come, a great deal of pain will come upon the church. This chapter (11) and the two following chapters (12-13) focus on the pain that comes upon the churches as they faithfully follow the plan given to them.

In Revelation 11, the church is compared to two witnesses. Like witnesses in a trial, the church is a witness in God's trial against the earth. This chapter teaches that the church and Satan's "beast" will be working during the same time period. The "beast" is not more powerful than the church. The church will be given great power from the Lord. However, when the church has finished its task, then the beast will finally completely conquer the church. The world thinks that it has finally won!

The chapter does not end with the church in defeat. It ends with the church being resurrected and praise taking place in heaven. The churches must never forget that, even when they are conquered, they still are the conquerors! God is working out his plan!

Chapters 12 and 13 will explain more about how Satan and his beasts will attack the church during this time period.

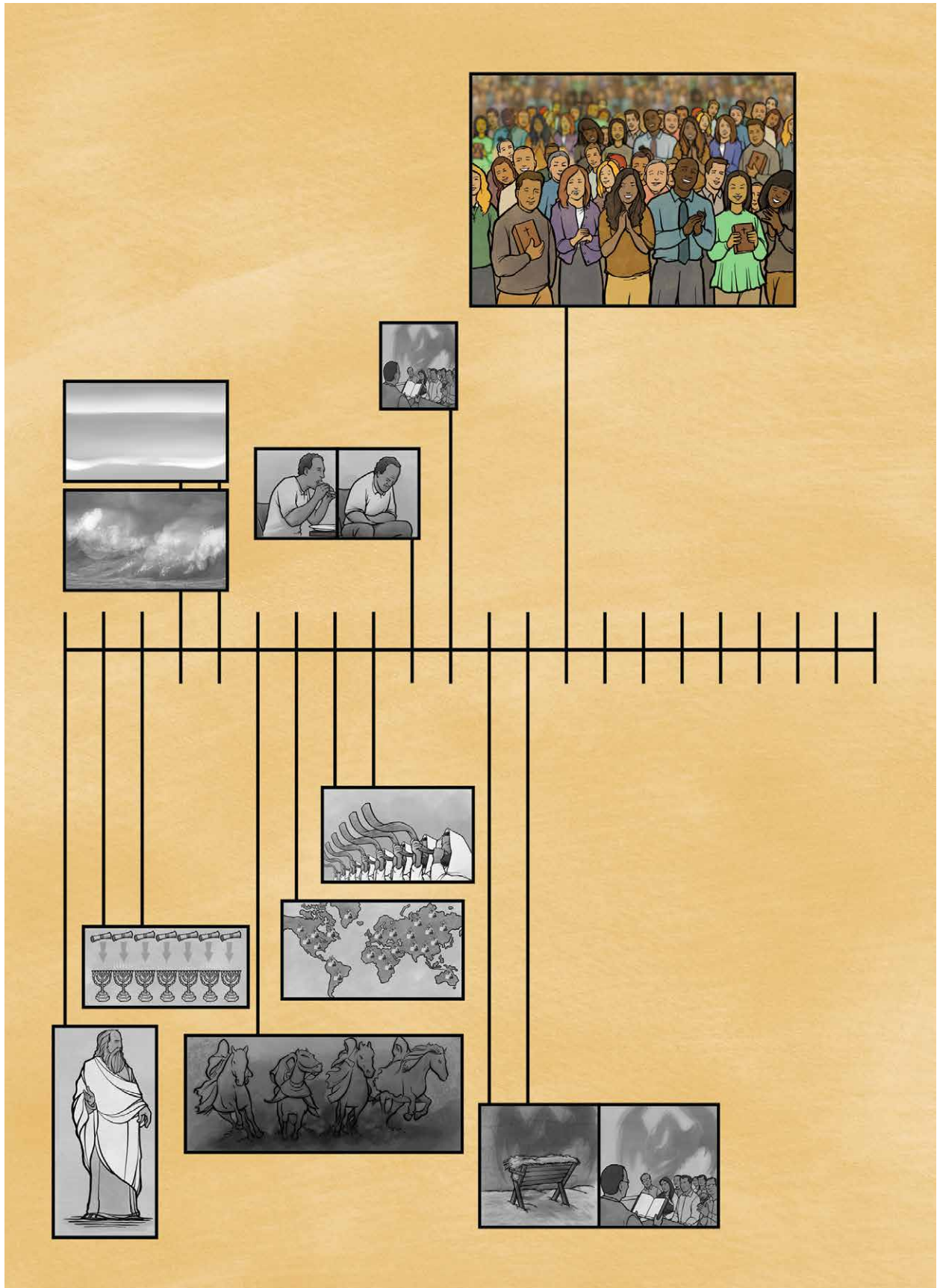


22. Revelation 12-13: the dragon's war against Christ and against the church.

Revelation 11, 12, and 13 are all related to the same time period. They all are telling the same basic story. However, chapters 12 and 13 provide details that were not seen in Revelation 11.

In chapters 12 and 13, the reader is able to read about Satan's war against Christ, Satan's war with the angels, and Satan's war against the churches. These chapters remind the Christian that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Satan's great desire is to destroy the church. Christians must resist him. "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

These chapters remind the churches that Satan was not successful in his war against Christ. Christ was "caught up to God and to his throne" (12:5). These chapters remind the churches that Satan was not successful in his war against the angels. He was "thrown down to the earth" (12:9). These chapters remind the churches that Satan will not be successful in his war against the churches. Even if the church appears to be conquered, it, actually, conquers Satan: "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (12:11). The churches need to know that Satan's beast is "allowed to exercise authority" during this time period. It is "allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them". God is allowing the saints to be conquered! He is allowing them the privilege of walking in the footsteps of their Lord. In the end, however, the saints will be the conquerors. The saints conquer by being conquered. These chapters are "a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (13:10).



23. Revelation 14: another vision of the triumphant church.

Revelation 14 is a fitting conclusion to Revelation 11, 12, and 13. It is also an introduction to events described in later chapters of Revelation.

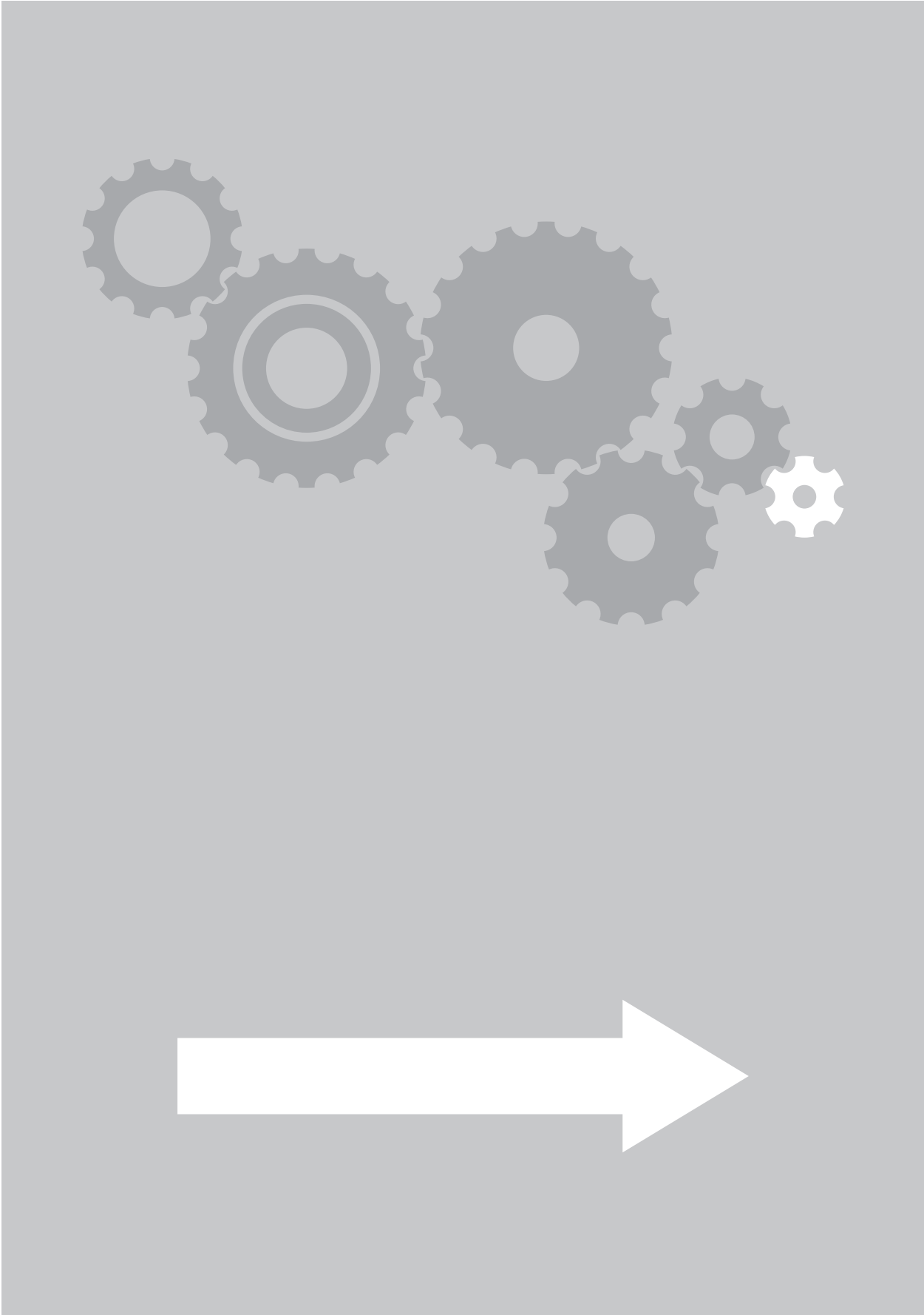
In 14:1-5, John sees the Lamb and 144,000 “virgins” standing on “Mount Zion”. After the very difficult messages about the dragon and the beasts persecuting the saints in Revelation 11, 12, and 13, these verses should bring great encouragement to the saints. In spite of tremendous persecution by the dragon and his beasts, the saints have conquered! None of them were destroyed by the dragon and his beasts! None of them took the name of the beast on their foreheads (see 13:16)! Instead, all of them have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father “written on their foreheads” (14:1). All of the saints are standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

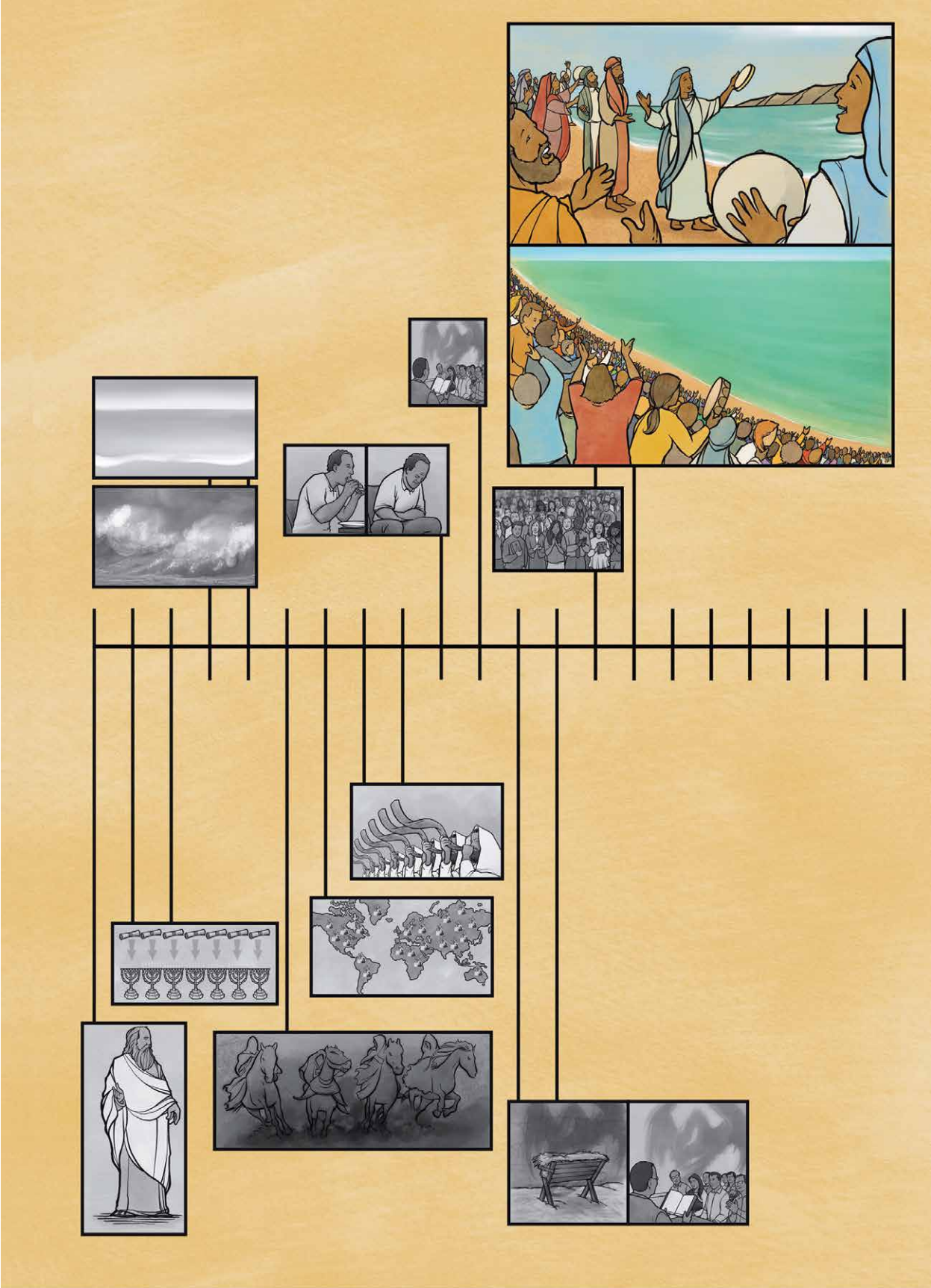
These first five verses are very similar to both sections of Revelation 7 (7:1-8 and 7:9-17). Carefully read Revelation 7 and the notes connected to Revelation 7.

Revelation 14 isn't just about the salvation of the saints. It is also about the destruction of the wicked. This chapter does not describe the destruction of the dragon and the beasts. Rather, it is about the destruction of those who follow the dragon and his beasts. Later chapters will focus on the destruction of the dragon and his beasts. The wicked people who follow the dragon and his beasts are identified with a city. This city is named in 14:8. It is called “Babylon the great”. In the same way that Mount Zion (the new Jerusalem) is the city of the righteous (see 14:1), Babylon is the city of the wicked. The destruction of this city will be a major theme in Revelation 17 and 18.

Revelation 14 ends with a description of two “harvests” of the earth (14:14-20). The harvests are symbolic of people being saved or destroyed. These verses are grace

to believers. They remind believers to persevere until Jesus returns. These verses about the harvest are also grace to those who currently follow the dragon. They are a warning that these people must repent before it is too late.

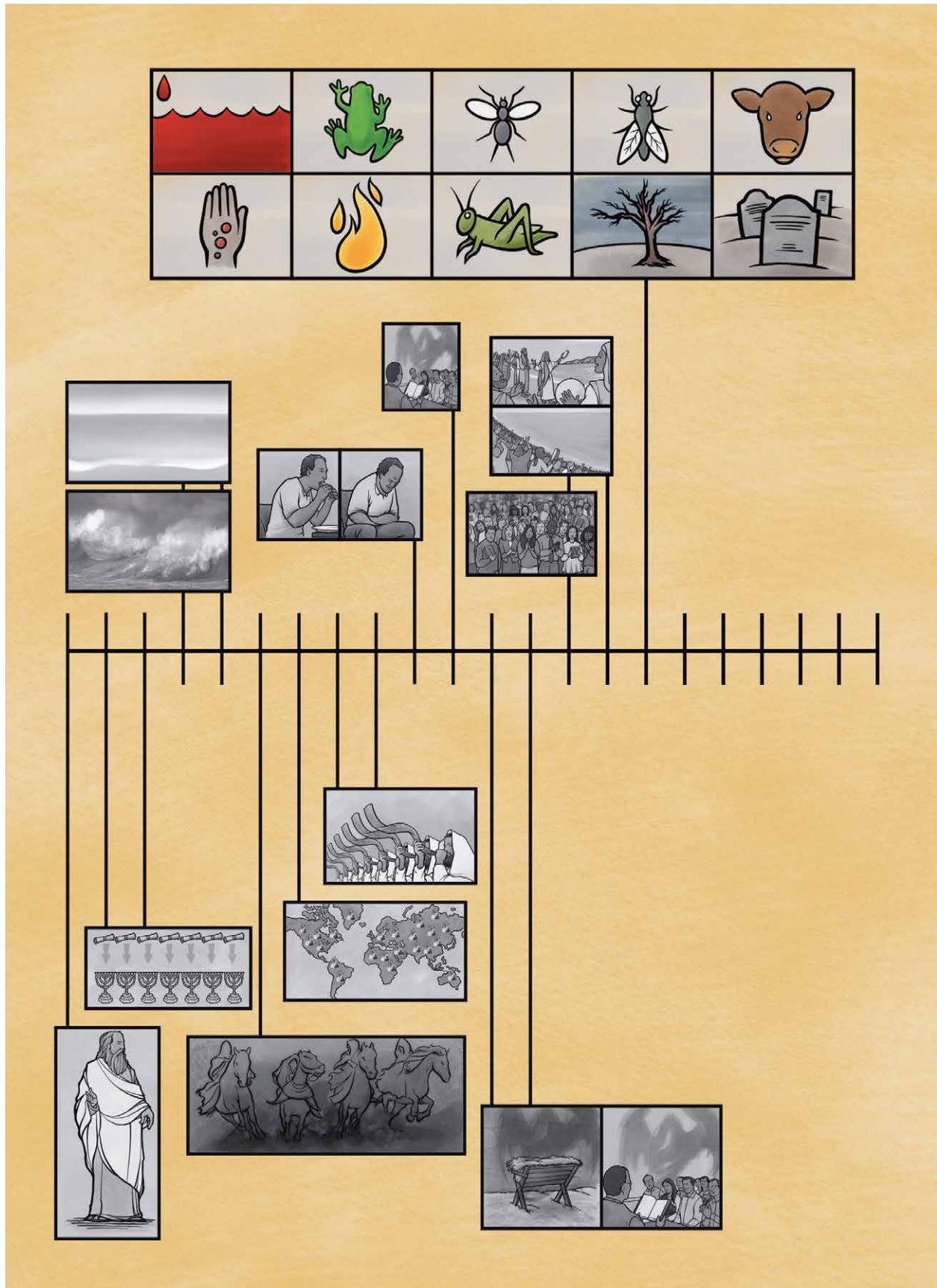




24. Revelation 15: the song of the triumphant church.

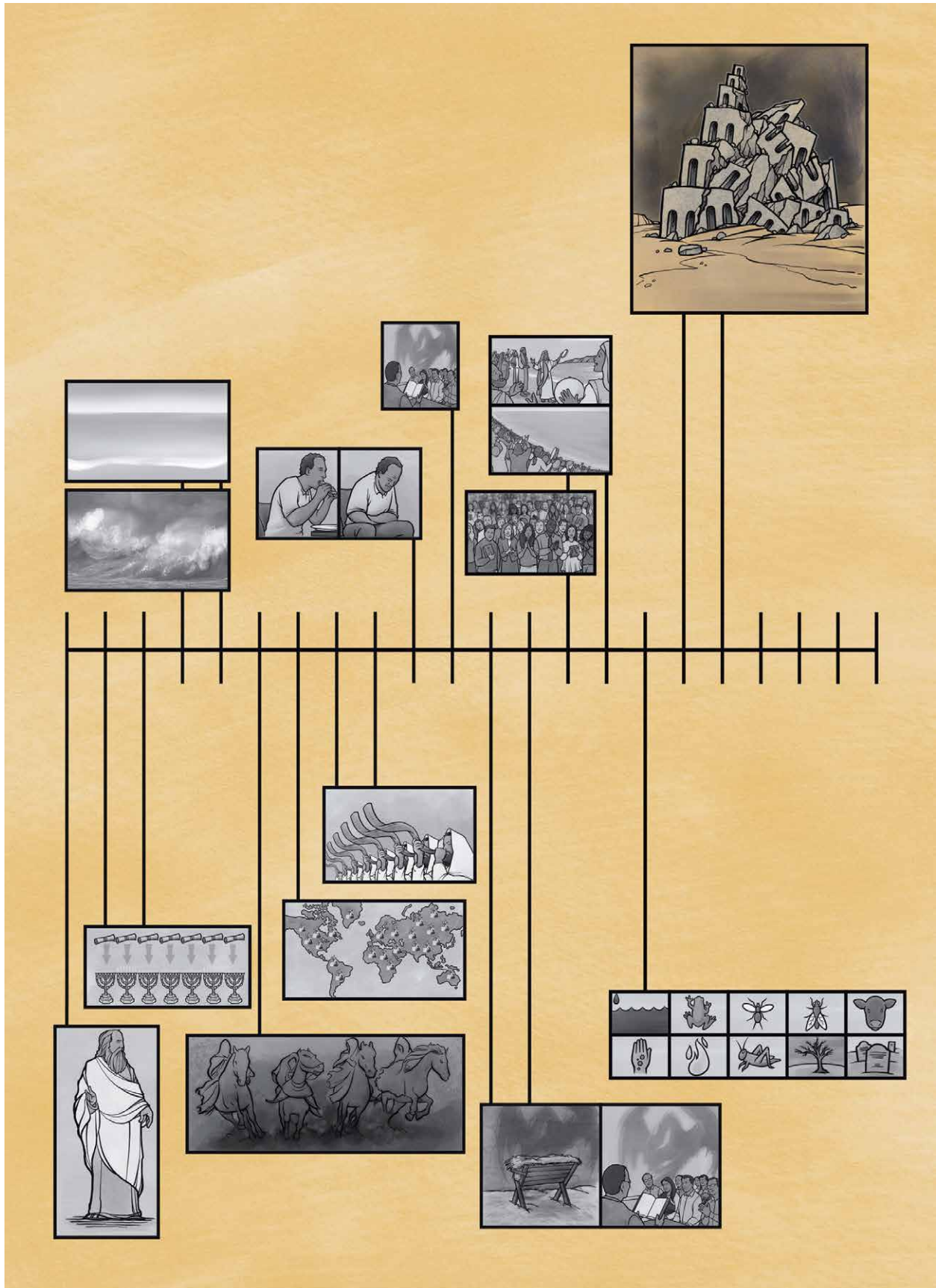
Revelation 15 provides the reader of Revelation with another image of the saints who have conquered the beast. They are before the throne and they are singing “the song of Moses”. The song is called the song of Moses because it is connected to the song that was sung by the Israelites when they crossed through the Red Sea (see Exodus 15). On that day, they celebrated the fact that God is a warrior and that he had delivered them from all of their enemies. This song is repeated in different forms several times in the Old Testament. According to Revelation 15:3, this song also has a different name. It is called “the song of the Lamb”. The notes regarding this song and the Old Testament passages mentioned in the notes should be read carefully.

The careful reader will note that John keeps seeing visions of the saints after they have conquered. See, for instance, Revelation 7:9- 17, 11:11-12, 14:1-5, and 15:1-4. Why does John keep seeing visions of the saints who have conquered? Why do the churches need to read about these visions? A simple reason is that the saints need encouragement! We need to be constantly reminded that we must persevere until the end! We need to be constantly reminded that the time of suffering is short! We need to be constantly reminded that the reward for those who conquer is very great! These passages must be preached. They bring grace to God’s people. They are one of the means by which God gives his people the strength to persevere until the end.



25. Revelation 16: God's wrath is poured out on the earth.

As was noted in the notes before Revelation 15, John sees repeated visions of the saints after they have conquered. He also sees repeated visions of the wrath of God being poured out on the earth. See, for instance, Revelation 6, 8:6-9:21, 11:13, 14:6-11, 14:17-20, and 16. Why do the saints need to read so many visions of God's wrath being poured out? The reader needs to know that these visions are grace from God! They are one of the means by which God keeps his people from falling into sin (see, for instance, the warning to the saints in verse 15). They are also a means by which he calls people to repentance. Passages like these must be preached.



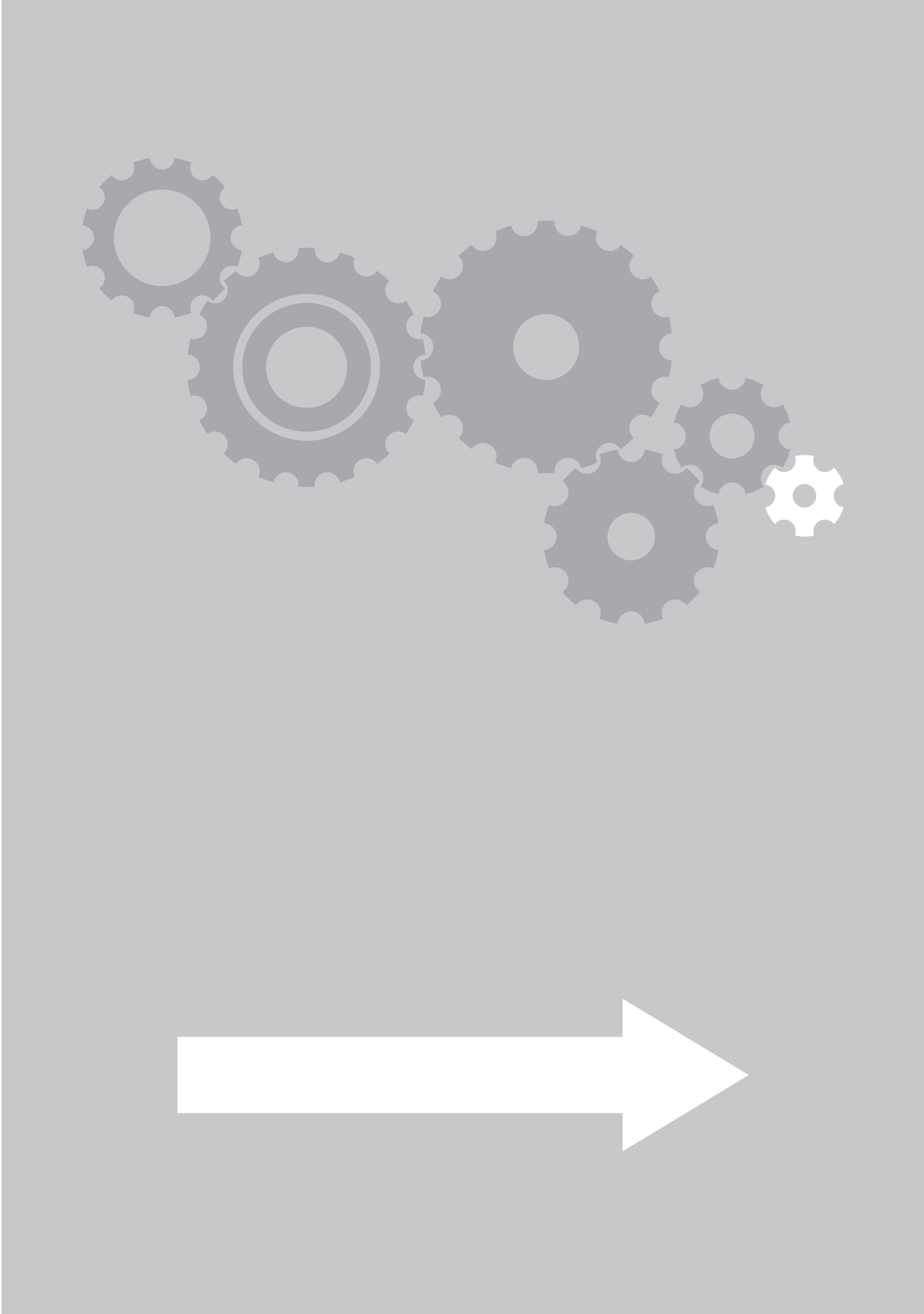
26. Revelation 17-18: the destruction of Babylon the Great.

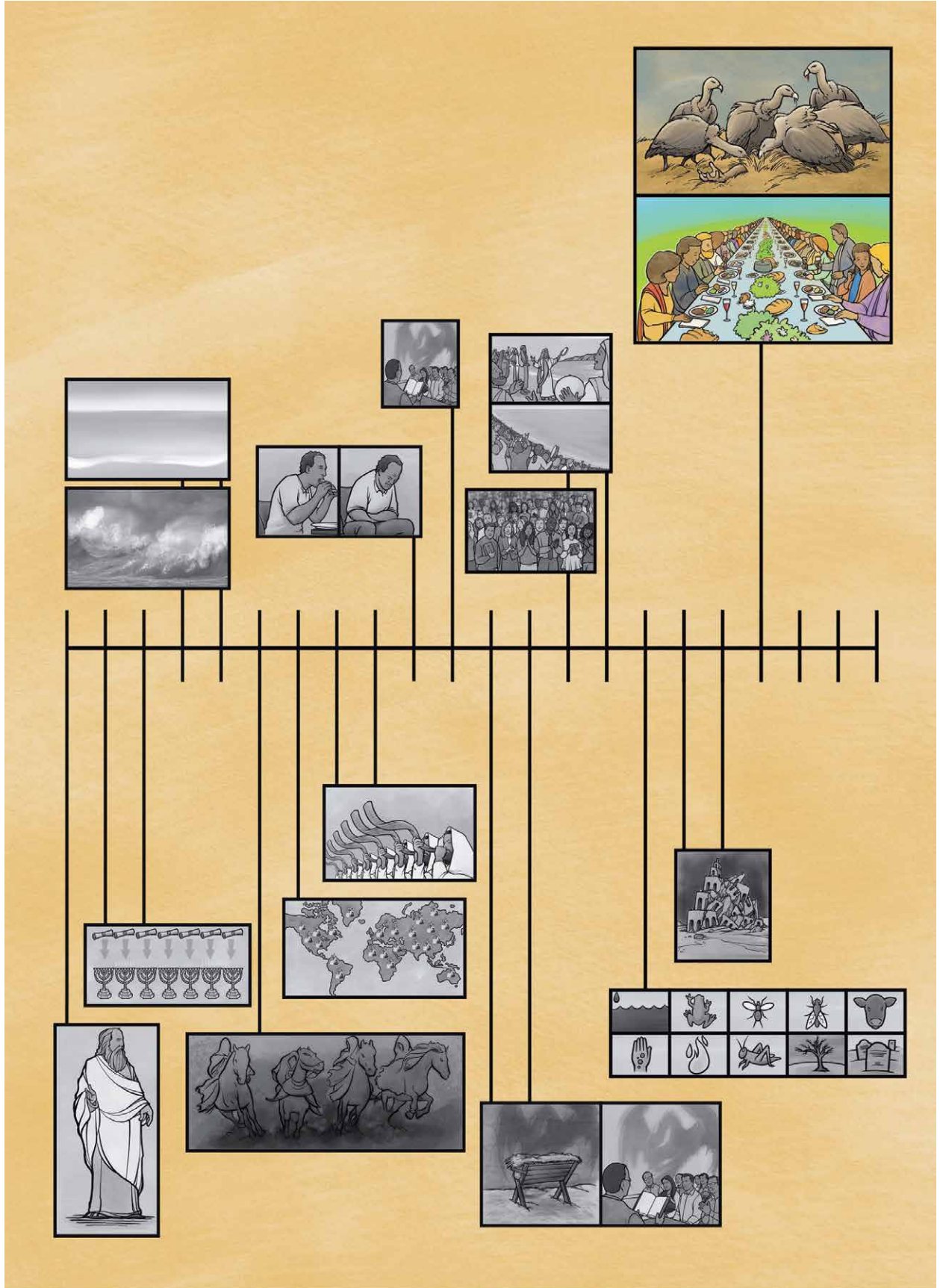
The enemies of God's people are carefully described in Revelation. It is very important for the people of God to know: (1) who these enemies are, (2) what these enemies do to the people of God, and (3) how these enemies will be defeated. Satan is the first and the most powerful enemy of God's people. Satan desires to destroy the people of God. But Satan is not the only enemy of God's people. He has two beasts who work for him. And Satan has many, many people who love him and follow him and obey him. Even though they do not know it, these people worship and obey the dragon and his beasts. So many people do this, in fact, that the worshipers of this "false trinity" have a "city". The city is called Babylon. This city is compared to a prostitute, because **all those who live in this place are guilty of having "sexual relations" with false gods**. This means they worship false gods.

In Revelation 17 and 18, the destruction of Babylon is described. In Revelation 19, the destruction of the beasts is described. And in Revelation 20, the destruction of Satan is described. It is important for the people of God to see that all of their enemies will be completely destroyed. The destruction of these enemies could have been described in one vision. However, by describing the defeat of God's enemies one at a time, the people of God are able to better see the weakness of each of these enemies when compared to the power of God. And the people of God are able to rejoice in God's victories over those who hate his name.

Revelation 17 and 18 describe the destruction of Babylon. Revelation 21 and 22 describe the everlasting beauty of the new Jerusalem. **It is clear that John wants his readers to compare the destinies of these two cities.** This is evident because the description of Babylon's destruction and the description of the new Jerusalem's beauty both begin in the exact same way (see 17:1-2 to 21:9)!

Why does John want his readers to compare Babylon with the new Jerusalem? He does this because he wants his readers to choose where they will live! The chapters about the destruction of Babylon (17-18) and the chapters about the beauty of the new Jerusalem (21-22) are, like the rest of the chapters in Revelation, grace from God. The chapters about the destruction of Babylon are warnings intended to keep the people of God from falling in love with this city. Even though Babylon may appear powerful at the present time, it will be destroyed. All those who identify with Babylon will be judged. This is similar to Jericho at the time of Joshua. Jericho appeared to be powerful. God's people appeared to be weak. However, Rahab the prostitute (ironically) knew that Jericho was weak and that it would be destroyed. She did not want to be destroyed with Jericho. Rahab provides an example for all people. Only those who think like Rahab will be saved from the destruction that is coming upon Babylon. Only those who hate Babylon and love the new Jerusalem will be saved! See Hebrews 11:10, 14-16, and 24-26.





27. Revelation 19: the two feasts.

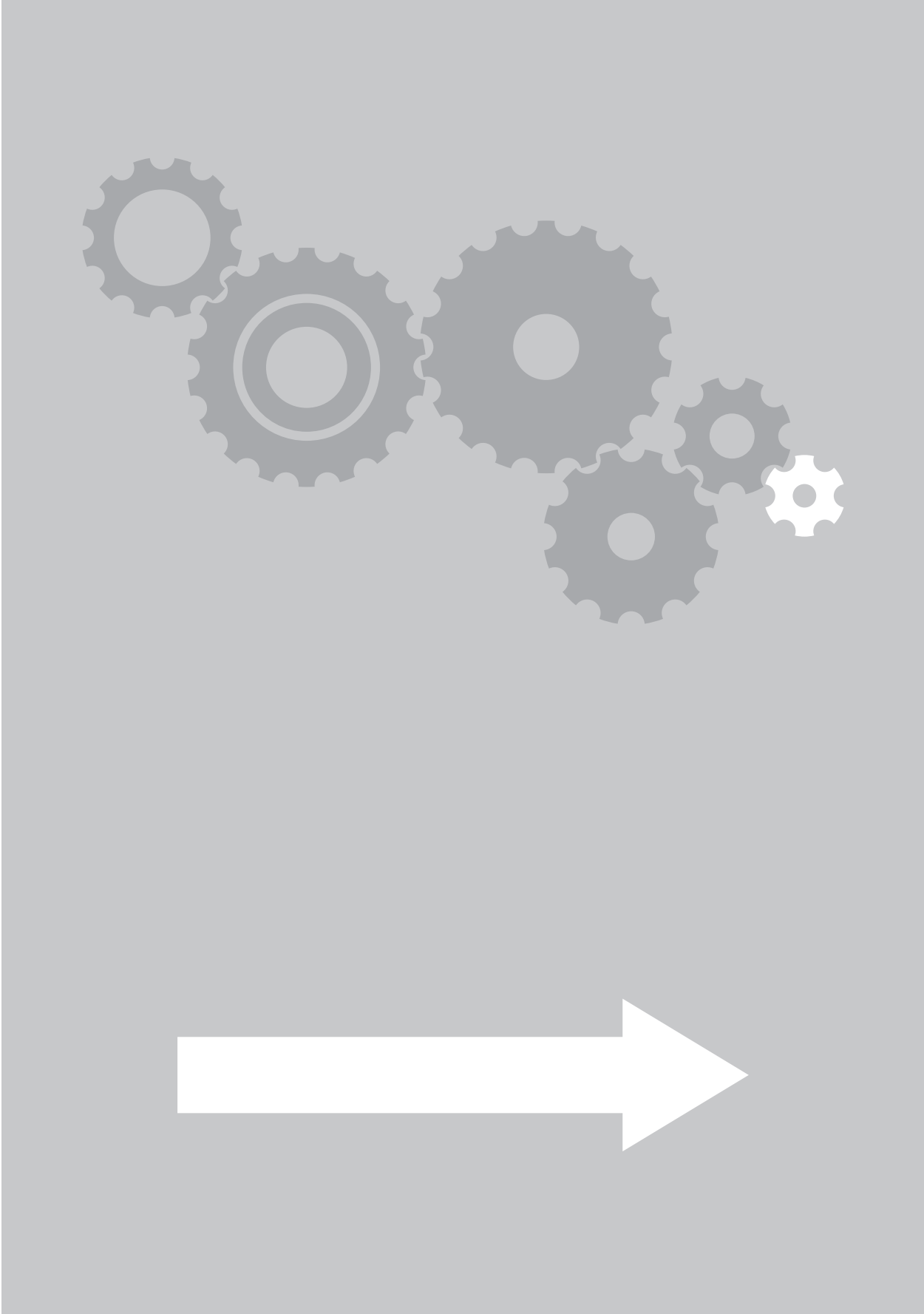
Revelation 19 describes two great feasts. Rejoicing (19:1-5) and feasting (19:6-21) are appropriate at this point in Revelation because God's people have been delivered and God's enemies have been defeated and judged. The first feast described in this chapter takes place in heaven. The second feast described in this chapter takes place on earth.

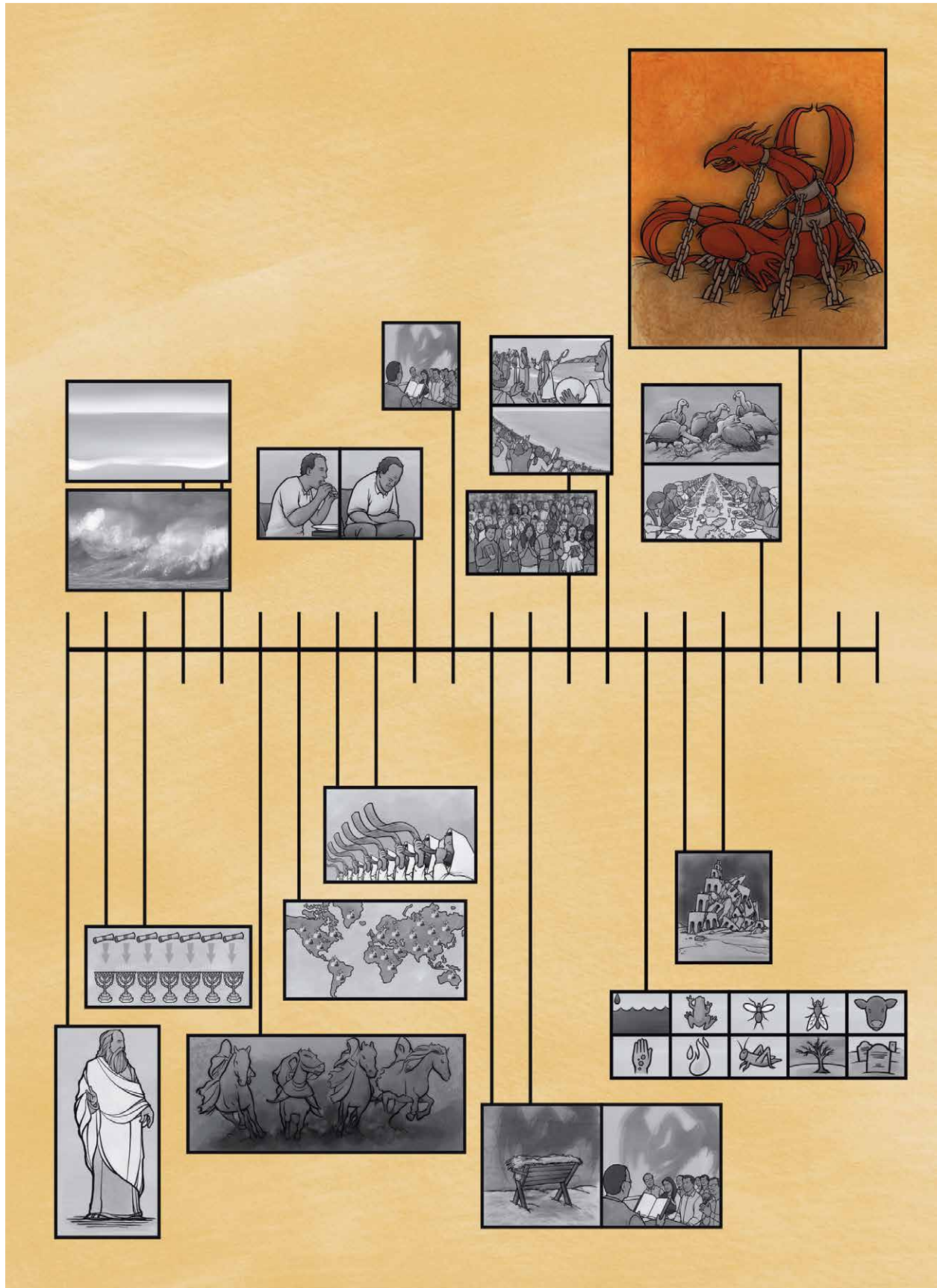
The first feast is described in 19:6-10. John describes this feast as “the marriage supper of the Lamb”. Like the feast that takes place after a wedding ceremony, this feast celebrates the eternal marriage between Christ and his perfect “bride” (the church). The bride is clothed in white. There are no more warnings for the bride to repent (unlike Revelation 2-3). Christ and his church are perfectly united. The church has been tested and has been refined through fire. She will never again be separated from her husband! This passage is tied to many passages in the Old and New Testaments. It is a day of great joy for Christ and for his people! This day has not yet come. However, the saints are able to already enjoy the “first fruits” of that coming day! The Lord's Supper is a small reminder of the marriage supper that is to come! John's descriptions of this day provide the saints with great grace so that they can persevere until the day arrives. John's descriptions of this day remind the churches that they must repent of sin and walk in holiness.

The second feast is described in 19:11-21. John describes this feast as “the great supper of God”. The guests at this feast are birds! They are invited so that they may feast on the enemies of God's people! This is a very graphic way of describing Jesus' victory over all of his enemies. This final victory takes place at the time of **Jesus' second coming**. The second coming is described in verses 11-21.

In another New Testament passage, the second coming of Christ is described as the “blessed hope” of believers (see Titus 2:13). This means that believers are to wait

with great joy for the sure blessings that will come on this day. However, this day will not bring joy to all people. This day will bring death and destruction to all of Christ's enemies. Verses 11-21 are closely connected with Revelation 20:1-10 and Ezekiel 38-39. These passages should be studied closely. It is important to note that this chapter includes a description of the defeat of Satan's beasts (see 19:20). The defeat of Satan is not described until Revelation 20.





28. Revelation 20: four great truths to help the church today.

In Revelation 20, John presents the churches with four great truths. The first two truths are related to this present time period. The third and fourth truths are related to the days to come. All four of these truths are grace from God.

The first truth is seen in verses 1-3. In these verses, John describes how God has limited the work of Satan during this present age. Satan is currently bound and cannot do all that he wants to do. This means that the churches can accomplish the tasks God has given them to do.

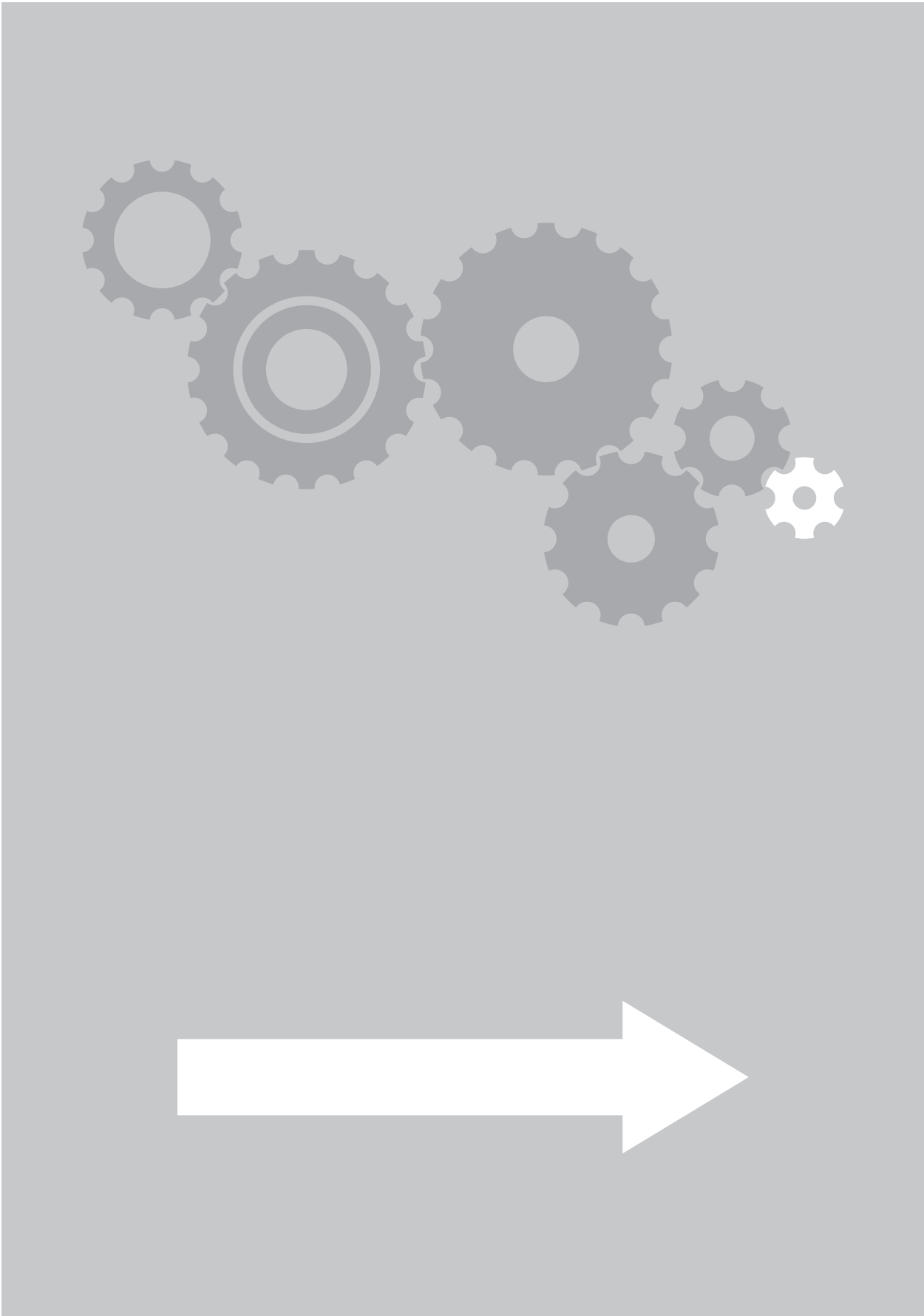
The second truth is seen in verses 4-6. In these verses, John describes what happens to those saints who have died during this present age. The saints who have “been conquered” are actually the conquerors! They are currently reigning with Christ. Those who die have not “wasted” their lives. Their destiny is to rule with their Lord and King!

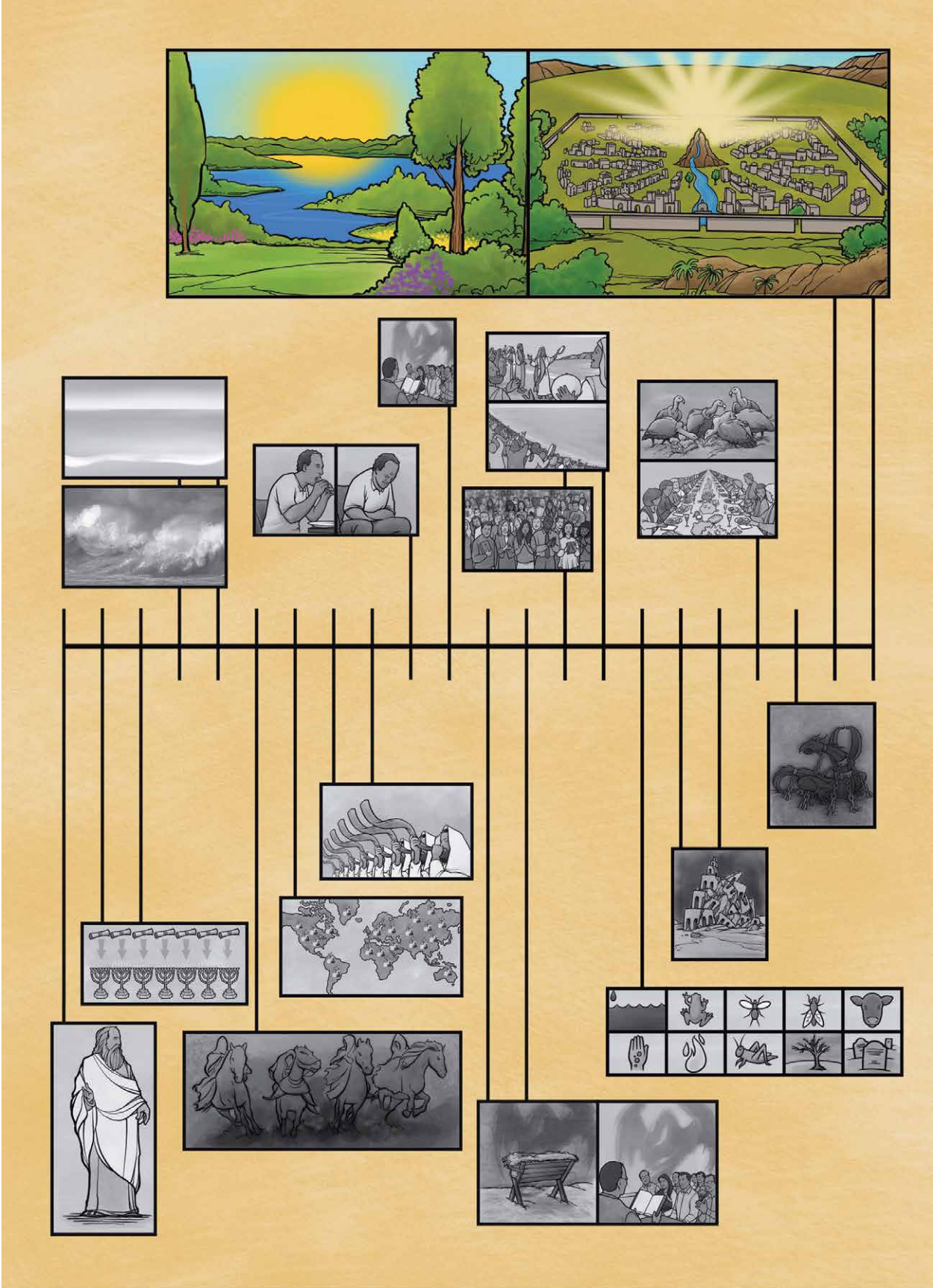
The third truth is seen in verses 7-10. In these verses, John describes Satan’s final defeat. When Satan is unbound, he will finally be able to deceive all the nations and he will gather them to war against Christ and his church. His army will be utterly defeated and he will be cast into the lake of fire.

The fourth truth is seen in verses 11-15. In these verses, John describes the final judgment. God’s justice is fully seen in this judgment. In this judgment, every enemy, including death, will be cast into the lake of fire. This judgment is described as the second death.

All four of these truths should give the churches great courage! Truth number one tells the churches that Satan has been limited by God. The churches should work

the churches that the saints who die because of the dragon haven't been defeated. Rather, they immediately go to be with the Lord and they rule and reign with Christ. Truth number three tells the churches of Satan's final defeat. He will be cast into the lake of fire. He will not accomplish his plans. And truth number four tells the churches that the judgment is coming. All wrongs have been seen by God. The saints must persevere until that day and entrust themselves to the perfect Judge.





29. Revelation 21-22:5: the New Heaven and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem.

These verses are, in many ways, connected to Genesis 1-3. In fact, it would be a great help to the preacher or teacher to read the first three chapters of the Bible before reading these verses in Revelation.

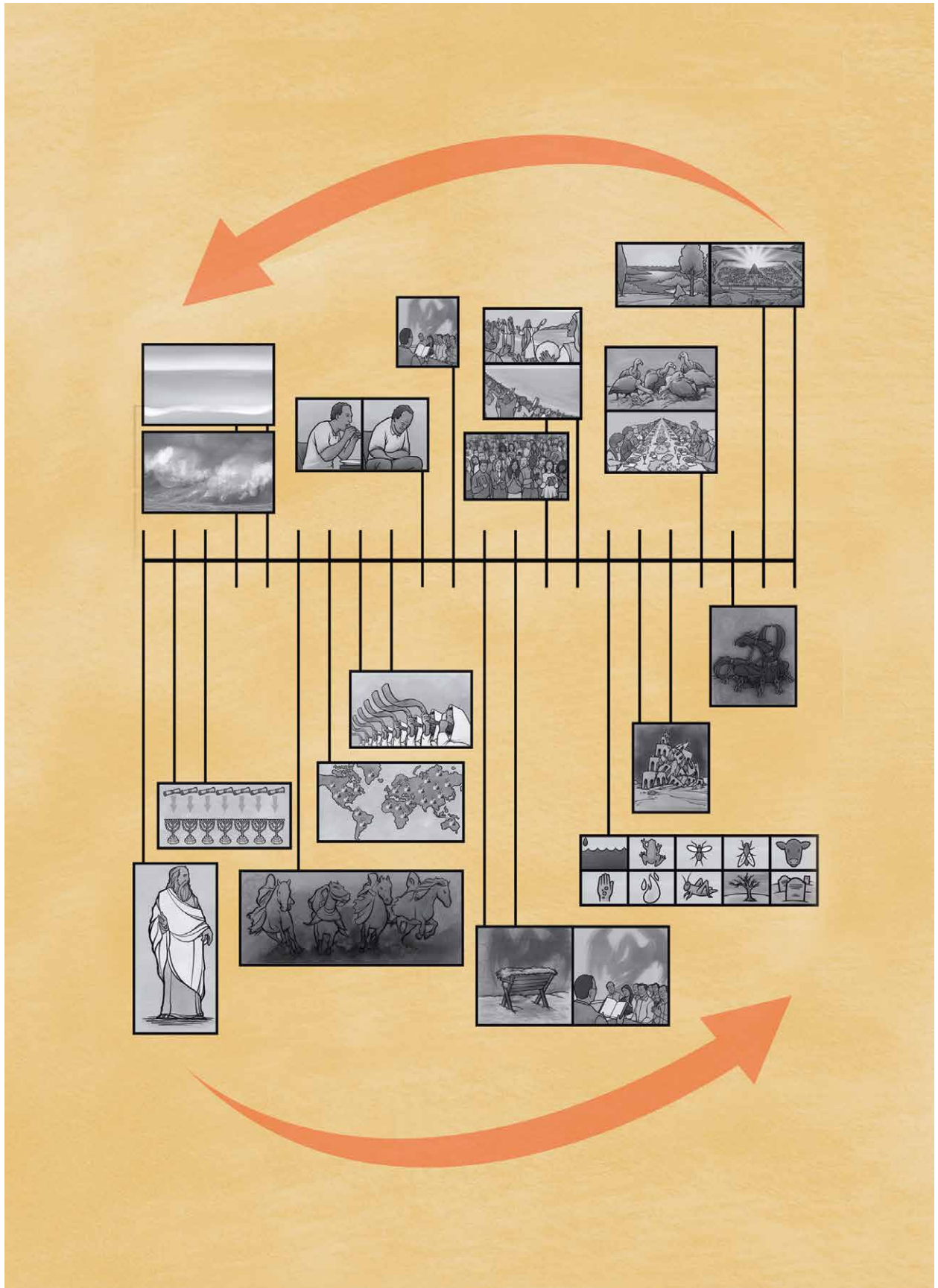
But while these verses are connected to Genesis 1-3, they are, at the same time, very different from Genesis 1-3. A new Adam (Jesus) and his bride (the church) have been placed in a new garden. The garden is not small. It is enormous! And there is no threat of evil. Adam and his bride have conquered the serpent! There is no curse. There are no tears. There is no death. Everything flourishes. The dwelling place of God is with people!

The reader needs to remember that this is apocalyptic literature. John is still using symbols in his writing. Thus, the reader needs to think very carefully about the symbols and what the symbols might represent. Many of these symbols are drawn from Genesis 1-2. Many are drawn from other portions of the Bible (particularly the Old Testament).

For instance, John measures the city and it is a perfect golden cube. The only other perfect golden cube in the Bible is the Holy of Holies in the ancient temple! That was a small holy “space” surrounded by a great deal of space that was not holy. In the new heavens and the new earth, however, everything will be holy! God will be celebrated in every place!

In the original Holy of Holies, only the high priest was welcome. In this new Holy of Holies, however, all people are welcome because all people are holy! All people are able to freely commune with God.

The symbols in these verses are intended to bring help and encouragement and strength to the churches. This means that the preachers or teachers need to carefully study these symbols and help the people think very hard about the meaning behind the symbols. The symbols in these verses are grace from God for the churches. They help the reader persevere during these times of intense suffering.



30. Revelation 22:6-21: Conclusion.

This part of the book is important because it concludes the entire book. It reminds the reader about things that were said in the book, and it tells the reader what is expected from him or her. It is important to remember that John wrote this book with a goal in mind. He was not writing this book like a journalist reporting a news event. He was writing this book as a Christian. He wants to inspire his readers to faith! That is the goal of his writing.

It will be of great help to the preacher or teacher to read the introduction of Revelation (1:1-20) immediately after reading the conclusion. These two sections of Revelation are connected and they emphasize the reasons why this book was written. It is easy, if the introduction and conclusion are ignored, to misinterpret the message of Revelation and to focus on matters that are not important. Understanding the beginning and ending of the book will help the preacher or teacher stay focused on the most important points of the book.

As was mentioned in the notes before the introduction, notice the connections between the introduction and the conclusion:

First, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that this book is a gift from God and from Christ (1:1-2 and 22:6, 16). It is not a strange book and it is not to be avoided. It is a gift.

Second, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that this book is for the churches (1:3-4 and 22:16).

Third, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that “the time is near” and that Jesus is “coming soon” (1:1, 3, 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Thus, this book is intended to be read with urgency.

Fourth, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize that blessing rests on the those who read these words and obey them (1:3 and 22:7). Since God is expecting the churches to not only read the words but also obey the words, it is clear that God needs to give the churches everything necessary to understand the book so that they can obey it. This is why he has given us his Holy Spirit. He is a gift from God to the churches so that we can understand his words and so that we can obey them (see John 14:15-17).

Fifth, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize the greatness of Jesus (1:7, 12-20 and 22:12-16). A proper understanding of this book must result in worship of Christ.

The preacher or teacher needs to constantly remember the things emphasized in the introduction and conclusion. **It is not important** that the preacher or teacher (or the people listening) understand every symbol within this book. **It is important** that the preacher or teachers uses this book to urge the church to godliness, to help the church persevere in the midst of great suffering, and to cause the church to worship Christ with great joy.