

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

WITH STUDY NOTES

A Preacher's Guide to the Book of Revelation



HANDS to the PLOW

MINISTRIES

HandsToThePlow.org

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Introduction

This book is intended to help the preacher or teacher to understand and to use the book of Revelation. It is clear that the church is to use the book of Revelation and that it was written to bring help to the local church.

The book of Revelation is filled with symbols. This preacher's guide does not cover every symbol in the book of Revelation. Indeed, if preachers or teachers were to wait to understand every symbol in the book of Revelation, no one would ever be able to teach from this book. Revelation can be taught without every symbol being understood. Focusing too much on the individual symbols can cause the preacher to miss the larger message that is being proclaimed in Revelation.

Revelation is perfect. The notes in this study, however, are not perfect. I am sure there are places where they do not reflect the intended meaning of a passage. May Christ graciously overcome the weaknesses that are surely evident in these notes and use this book for his glory and honor and for strengthening his churches.

May Christ give you great help as you study the book of Revelation and as you preach from the book of Revelation, and may he give your local church ears to hear the message of this great book.

Tom Kelby
August, 2016

How to use this guide

1.

This book contains the entire book of Revelation. We have decided the book into different sections. Before each section in this study, the reader will find a brief overview of that section.

2.

After the overview, the reader will find the text from Revelation itself. The text of Revelation appears in the **upper portion** of the page.

Revelation 1

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ,¹ which God gave him to show to his servants² the things that must soon³

3.

This book also contains study notes that refer to certain words or verses or sections in the chapter of Revelation being studied. These study notes are located beneath the text of Revelation in the **lower portion** of the page. The study notes are not sermons. They are intended to help the preacher discover the meaning of Revelation.

Revelation 1 Introduction

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 the importance of the book.

4.

The study notes in the **lower portion** of the page are numbered. These numbers are red. The red numbers next to each study note are connected to a red number appearing within the text of Revelation in the **upper portion** of the page. The numbers go together.

5.

The study notes sometimes list other passages of Scripture. These passages are sometimes from the Old Testament and sometimes from the New Testament. These passages should be carefully examined because they are connected to the passage in Revelation that is being studied.

25 thoughts to keep in mind when studying Revelation

1. Revelation is apocalyptic literature. Like music that is played at a volume that is so loud that it shakes the walls, this type of literature is associated with extremes. The symbols 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.

2. Revelation is a letter to the church. It 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.

3. Revelation is, like all Scripture, intended to be used by the 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).

4. The message of Revelation must be obeyed. This book is intended to cause local churches to repent from sin and to walk in ever increasing holiness.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. Numbers in apocalyptic literature do not function like numbers in narrative. Numbers in apocalyptic literature tend to be symbolic. Thus, the reader needs to remember that, in this type of literature, the "literal" meaning of a number may not be the actual number itself. In this type of literature, the literal meaning of 3 1/2 years may not be 3 1/2 actual years. This 3 1/2 year time period is probably intended to remind the reader of something else. It is the joy and obligation of the preacher to strive to understand John's use of numbers in this book.

10. Revelation has 22 chapters but these chapters 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.

11. 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.

12. 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!

13. The seven letters to the seven churches make it clear that Revelation was written so that local churches might “conquer”. This will be addressed in the notes regarding Revelation 2 and 3.

14. 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. 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 Spirit of God in this particular way? The literal interpretation of this image (“seven spirits who are before his throne”) is the interpretation that best explains what John meant by speaking of God’s one Spirit in this particular way.

15. John presents himself as a prophet to the church. John is, like Isaiah or Jeremiah, 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.

16. The primary role of a prophet in the Bible is not to predict the future. In the Old Testament, the primary role of the prophet 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.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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!

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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 the plans God had so that God’s image might fill the earth! This book is the culmination of all the stories together. It is the story of life returning back to the garden of Eden.

23. Revelation is the story of two people groups associated with two cities: Babylon and the new Jerusalem. As Revelation makes clear, 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.

24. Revelation is the story of two “trinities”. 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.

25. 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.

Revelation 1

Introduction

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.

Revelation 1

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ,¹ which God gave him to show to his servants² the things that must soon³

¹ The word “**revelation**” is from a Greek word (this book was originally written in Greek) meaning “to uncover” or “to reveal”. The next words are intended to describe the revelation which is found in this book: it is the revelation “**of Jesus Christ**”. The words “**of Jesus Christ**” are, in the Greek, quite **elastic** in their meaning. In other words, the words “**of Jesus Christ**” can, like a rubber band, be stretched to mean several things! These words could be indicating that the revelation in this book is **from** Jesus Christ. Alternatively, these words could be indicating the revelation in this book is **about** Jesus Christ. Which is most likely to be correct? It is likely that John uses the words “of Jesus Christ” to mean both things! **First**, this revelation is **from** Jesus Christ. **Second**, this revelation is **about** Jesus Christ. A proper understanding of this book will cause the reader to know Christ more completely, to love him more deeply, and to serve him more faithfully.

The first three uses of Jesus’ name in this book include his full title—“Jesus Christ” (see 1:1, 1:2, and 1:5). John wants his readers to know, from the very beginning of this book, that Jesus is God’s anointed king. “Christ” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah”. Both words mean “anointed” and refer to God’s anointed king. Two particularly significant Old Testament texts regarding the Christ and his eternal kingdom are 2 Samuel 7:1-17 and Psalm 2.

² The book of Revelation is a gift **from** God the Father **to** Jesus. God gave this revelation to Jesus so that his **servants** would know the things that would “soon” take place (see also Revelation 22:6 and 16).

The people of God (those who are followers of Jesus) are called “servants” throughout this book. The wise preacher or teacher will remind the people that they are called **to serve** the Most High God and **to serve** his Christ. This book of revelation explains what serving God looks like in the last days. See Revelation 1:1, 2:20, 6:11, 7:3, 10:7, 11:18, 19:2, 19:5, 22:3, and 22:6.

³ The reader is not to think that the events described in this book might happen. They “**must**” take place. The reader is not to think that he or she can escape the events described in this book. And the reader is not to think that the events described in this book are concerning the distant future. Rather, the reader is told that these things “**must soon** take place”. The end of verse 3 proclaims the same truth: “the time is **near**”. The same words are found in 22:6 (“what must soon take place”) and 22:10 (“the time is near”). John wrote this book in the first century AD. Thus, even in the first century, the readers were to think of the events described in Revelation as “soon”. “Soon” is used in Revelation 1:1, 2:16, 3:11, 11:14, 22:6, 22:7, 22:12, and 22:20. It is the obligation of the preacher to present the message of Revelation with urgency. It is dangerous for readers of this book to think these events only concern the distant future.

take place.⁴ He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,⁵

⁴ The Greek words that are translated “the things that must soon take place” also appear in Revelation 22:6 (and Mark 13:7). These words are drawn from an ancient Greek translation of **Daniel 2:28**. In addition, the words “he made it known” are connected to an ancient Greek translation of **Daniel 2:45**. By using language drawn from Daniel 2, John is signaling his readers that the events described in Revelation are somehow connected to the events recorded in Daniel 2.

Daniel 2 records a dream that was given to King Nebuchadnezzar about the events of world history from God’s perspective. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was interpreted by the prophet Daniel. Daniel said, “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar **what will be in the latter days**”. After describing an enormous statue (symbolizing the rebellious kingdoms of the earth), Daniel goes on to describe a rock that smashes the statue: “Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). **By connecting the book of Revelation to the book of Daniel, John is showing his readers that these two books are speaking of the same subject! They are both about the destruction of the power of rebellious mankind, and the kingdom of God that will be established at the end of days. Both books are intended to give grace to the people of God as they patiently endure suffering while they are waiting for the kingdom of God to be fully and finally established in all the earth.**

However, while Daniel and Revelation are describing the same things, there is a significant difference between the words in Daniel 2 and the quotation of those words in Revelation. In Daniel, the vision is describing the things that will be “**in the latter days**”. John doesn’t use these words. Instead, he says that his words describe what will take place “**soon**”. Revelation is not about the distant future. It is about the present time! This was true in the first century and it is true today. John wants the churches to know that the end of age events described in Daniel 2 are being fulfilled in their days and before their eyes!

⁵ See, again, Revelation 22:6. Both 1:1 and 22:6 emphasize that God gave this Revelation to his **servants** to **show** them “the things that are necessary to take place”. By putting the same words at the beginning (1:1) and at the end of the book (22:6), the author has formed an **envelope**. Authors in the Bible frequently use envelopes, and they are a great help to the perceptive preacher or teacher. A literary envelope works like a large paper envelope. If the large paper envelope had the words “FAMILY PICTURES” written in large black letters on the front and back of the envelope, anyone picking up the envelope would know that the envelope was filled with pictures of the family. In the same way, the author John has used a literary envelope to let his readers know that this book—all of it—is about “the things that are necessary to take place”. This is a literary structure that helps the reader understand the contents of the entire book.

2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.⁶ 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear,⁷ and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.⁸

6 The writer of this letter to the churches is a man named **John**. The author does not say that he is **the Apostle John**. Instead, he describes himself as a servant of Jesus. The church has traditionally ascribed this book to the **Apostle John**, however, some scholars believe that, because of differences in language between Revelation and the Apostle John's books (the gospel of John and 1, 2, and 3 John), the Apostle John is not the author of Revelation. While it is possible that Revelation was written by another man named John, it seems more likely that it was written by the Apostle John. In either case, this letter should be considered Scripture. Like all Scripture, Revelation "is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

7 John's words in this verse demand close attention. He speaks of "one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy". The word "**aloud**" does not appear in the Greek. It has been added by the ESV so that the reader will understand what John is describing in this verse. John is describing the book being used by the church when it is gathered together. The "**one who reads aloud**" is the **one** person who reads the book to the **many people** of the church. This is, perhaps, a description of the pastor of the church (or another elder or a teacher). And "**those who hear**" is a description of the members of the church as they attentively listen to the book being read to them. John is not thinking about people who are reading this book silently by themselves in their own homes (in his day, few people would have owned their own copies of the Scriptures). Rather, he is describing the book being used by the church (see also Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27). Church history indicates that early churches read books like this over and over and over again. Together, they carefully considered the message being brought to them. This is an important point to make about this book. From the beginning of Revelation to the end, there is an emphasis on the church actively hearing and obeying the words found in this book.

It is important to notice that John doesn't say that merely reading the book brings a **blessing**. He says blessing rests on those who read and listen to the book **and** obey the things that are written within it. The book of Revelation brings no blessing to those who merely read its words. This is a book demanding obedience. Great blessing is promised to those who meditate upon and obey the revelation contained within this book.

There are seven "blessed" statements in Revelation. All of these statements are intended to bring encouragement to the saints so that they might persevere. See 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14. These should be studied closely.

8 John, once again, emphasizes that this book concerns events that are not in the distant future. Those who read this book should understand that "the time is near". See also 22:10.

1:4 John to the seven⁹ churches that are in Asia:¹⁰

⁹ This is the first of many numbers that appear in the book of Revelation. The reader should pay careful attention to how numbers are used in this book. Numbers in a book of this type (**apocalyptic literature**) are different from numbers appearing in a book of **narrative** (a story). Numbers in a book of narrative are normally connected to a specific number. In other words, in a narrative, three men normally means three men. The number in a narrative is normally not a symbol of something else. That is not the case with numbers in apocalyptic literature. Numbers in this type of literature are likely to be symbolic of something else. They are one of the colorful tools the author uses to convey his message. Regarding the number seven, see Revelation 1:4, 1:11, 1:12, 1:16, 1:20, 2:1, 3:1, 4:5, 5:1, 5:5, 5:6, 6:1, 8:2, 8:6, 10:3, 11:13, 12:3, 13:1, 15:1, 15:6, 16:1, 17:1, 17:3, 17:7, 17:9, and 21:9. Clearly, this number has great symbolic importance in this book. The “literal” interpretation of numbers (and other symbols) in Revelation is the interpretation that was intended by the author.

¹⁰ This book is addressed to “the seven churches that are in Asia”. However, this number, as with other numbers in apocalyptic books, should be seen as symbolic. This is evident for several reasons. First, there were more than just seven churches in Asia at this time. The seven churches referred to here were not “THE” seven churches in Asia. They were seven churches chosen from among the many churches in Asia. Each of the seven churches were chosen for a particular reason. Second, other evidence from Revelation indicates that this book is for all churches, in all nations, from all time periods (see, again, the reference to the church using this book in public worship in 1:3 and the reference to the churches in 22:16). While the churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 were clearly seven real churches in Asia, these seven churches seem to be intended to represent all churches in all ages. The messages to the seven churches is a message to all of the churches. Thus, in this case, **the number seven seems to symbolize the full number of churches**. Seven is probably associated with the idea of completeness or fullness because of the number of days in which God created the earth (see Genesis 2:2-3). This number was used in other instances to demonstrate completeness (see, for instance, Genesis 4:15, 24, Leviticus 8:11, Psalm 12:6, and Psalm 79:12). It is not clear why Jesus focussed on these particular seven churches in Asia. They were not the “best” churches in Asia. Jesus may have focused on these particular churches because John was familiar with these seven churches and because they provided a good representation of all churches in all locations during all time periods. In other words, the situations described in these seven churches are representative of the situations likely to be found in all churches for all time.

Grace to you and peace¹¹ from him who is and who was and who is

¹¹ Verses 4-5a are the **greeting**. This sort of a greeting is very typical in New Testament letters. **The greeting is a wish for blessing to come to the readers from the members of the Trinity.** A greeting like this may be seen in Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, and Philemon 3. Close variations of this greeting are found in 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, 2 Peter 1:2, and 2 John 3. In all of these references, the grace and peace are **from** God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in 1 Peter 1:2, the greeting is expanded to include all three members of the Trinity (see also 2 Corinthians 13:14). The blessing in Revelation, like the blessing in 1 Peter 1:2, is from all three members of the Trinity. **But John doesn't use the names Father, Holy Spirit, and Son in these verses.** The careful reader should ask why the members of the Trinity are referred to as they are in these verses. Why doesn't John say, "Grace to you and peace, from God the Father and from the Holy Spirit and from the Lord Jesus Christ"? What are these particular descriptions intended to tell the reader? How are these names intended to help the church?

to come,¹² and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,¹³
5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,

12 **God the Father** is described as “him who is and who was and who is to come” (see also 1:8 and 4:8). Why has John described God the Father in this way? Remember, the church was being persecuted at the time of writing, and Revelation declares that this persecution will only increase until the end. This description of God the Father reminds the church that persecution does not change who God is. Even when the church is suffering, God is still God. It should comfort the church to remember that the God who currently is God is the same God who has been ruling from the beginning and who will be ruling at the end. He is the God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and who is safely bringing his people to him in a “second Exodus” (the description of the Father as “him who is and who was” seems to be drawn, in part, from Exodus 3:14). And by reminding the churches that God is the one who “is to come”, the author is encouraging the church to persevere until the day of his coming to rescue the saints and to judge the world (this part of his name seems to be drawn from passages like Daniel 7:22). See also Isaiah 41:4. These passages should be studied in connection with John’s words here. It is significant that this name changes in later chapters in Revelation. In Revelation 11:17 and 16:5, no longer is God referred to as him “who is to come”. At that point in Revelation, he has come! The saints will not always be waiting for God to come and deliver them and to judge the world!

13 **God the Spirit** is described in what may appear to be a very strange manner: “the seven spirits who are before his throne”. Two things are worthy of note here. First, the Spirit is described as “the **seven** spirits” (see also 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6). This does not mean that there are seven spirits of God. Again, numbers in apocalyptic literature are not like numbers in other types of literature. The reader needs to constantly remember that numbers are likely to be symbolic of something else. John knows that there is one Holy Spirit (see 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? In the same way that the seven churches seem to represent all of the churches, so “the seven spirits” likely represent the way the one Spirit is at work in all of the seven churches. But John isn’t the first one to describe the Holy Spirit in this way. In Zechariah 4:2-10, the prophet Zechariah uses the same language. This passage in Zechariah is connected to Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6.

Additional evidence that this is a reference to the one Holy Spirit (and not to seven different spirits) is the fact that the reference to “the seven spirits” comes right between references to two members of the Trinity. **The only appropriate person to put in a group with the other two members of the Trinity is the third member of the Trinity.** Thus, grace and peace comes from the three members of the Trinity working together: **God the Father** (“him who is and who was who is to come”), the **Holy Spirit** (“the seven spirits who are before his throne”), and **Jesus Christ** (“the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on the earth”).

The fact that the seven spirits are described as “**before his throne**” means that the Holy Spirit is constantly in God’s presence. Not only is he with the churches on earth, he is with God the Father in heaven. The members of the church need to remember that the Holy Spirit who is with them and in them is also with God in heaven. The actions of the church on earth are being seen in heaven. This should bring great encouragement—and fear—to the church.

and the ruler of kings on earth.¹⁴

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood
6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,¹⁵ to him

¹⁴ **God the Son** is described in three ways. All three descriptions should bring great hope and encouragement to the church as it patiently endures suffering. First, Jesus Christ is described as **“the faithful witness”** (see also Revelation 3:14). This description means at least two things. **First**, this description of Christ reminds the suffering church that Jesus was faithful to his Father even unto death. When he was persecuted he did not shrink back in fear and he did not abandon God’s commandments. Instead, he faithfully witnessed to the truth of God. He demonstrated that he is the blessed man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). The church, like its leader, must be faithful even unto death (see Revelation 2:10, 2:13, and 12:11). The church must hold fast to God’s good words, even when doing this (temporarily) results in suffering. **Second**, this description of Christ as **“the faithful witness”** is intended to remind the readers of God’s steadfast love. John alludes to Psalm 89:36-37 in this passage. In those verses, the Christ sitting on his throne is a “faithful witness” to God’s steadfast love. His existence “in the skies” is proof that God has been faithful to his covenant. This should bring great encouragement to the suffering church! The fact that Jesus is ruling and reigning demonstrates that God has not abandoned his promises.

The description of Jesus as **“the firstborn of the dead”** reminds the suffering church of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead as the “firstborn” of God’s new creation. He is the “firstborn” of a large family who will, because they are “in Christ”, also be physically raised from the dead (see Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:18, and Paul’s sermon on Christ’s resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15). Death holds no fear for those who know that they will be raised from the dead.

Finally, the description of Jesus as **“the ruler of kings on earth”** reminds the suffering church that Jesus is currently ruling over the wicked rulers of the earth and the demons behind their power (in Revelation, references to the **kings of the earth** often emphasize their great wickedness—see Revelation 6:15, 17:2, 17:18, 18:3, 18:9, and 19:19). Even if the church is suffering at the hands of wicked kings or authorities, this description of Christ reminds the church that Jesus is currently the King over all other kings and those kings will be defeated by him.

These three descriptions of the Christ are, as with the descriptions of the Father and the Holy Spirit, drawn from the Old Testament. In this case, they all appear to be drawn from Psalm 89. Psalm 89 is a psalm celebrating the steadfast love of God the Father. In this psalm, God makes stunning promises regarding the Christ. John is clearly thinking of these promises when he writes these words in Revelation 1:5. John alludes to Psalm 89:27: “And I will make him the **firstborn**, the **highest of the kings of the earth**”. And, as mentioned earlier, John alludes to Psalm 89:36-37: “His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a **faithful witness** in the skies”. John wants his readers to connect God’s promises in this psalm to Jesus. The fact that Jesus is currently the **firstborn**, is currently the **King over all kings**, and is currently seated on a throne as **the faithful witness** should serve as proof to God’s suffering churches that God does love them, that he will be true to his word, and that he will keep his covenant (see Psalm 89:33-34). This psalm should be studied closely.

¹⁵ See 5:10. The suffering church needs to remember its true identity. Because of the work of Jesus, we are a kingdom! We are priests to God the Father! See Exodus 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.¹⁶ **7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.¹⁷ Even so. Amen.¹⁸

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,”¹⁹ says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”²⁰

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom

¹⁶ John’s description of Christ causes him to break into a **doxology** (verses 5b-7). John loves Christ, and, when speaking of him, he cannot help but celebrate his greatness. The church should imitate John’s praise. **Truths about Jesus should lead to praise of Jesus.** Notice how Jesus is described in these verses. These descriptions, as with the descriptions of the Trinity in verses 4-5a, should bring great encouragement to the church. The church, because of the work of Christ, is not weak and powerless. By his blood (this is another way of saying **by his death**), he has set sinners free from their sins and has made them into a kingdom of priests. John’s language regarding the people of God as a kingdom of priests is drawn from Exodus 19:5-6 (see also 1 Peter 2:9-10).

¹⁷ In verse 7, John quotes from two Old Testament passages to demonstrate that Christ’s coming means he has total victory over all of his enemies. This verse includes quotations from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 (these same passages are combined in Matthew 24:30). John wants his readers to read more than the small portion of the verses he quotes. This verse is a gracious gift from God to all people. It should encourage the church. And it is a gracious call to all people to repent of their sin and to put their faith in Christ. See also John 19:31-37. In this passage, a Roman soldier pierces Jesus’ side. The soldier is an initial picture of this prophecy being fulfilled.

¹⁸ John frequently adds his “Amen” to a prophesy in Revelation. He is much more than just a reporter of facts. John loves Christ and he is eager to see all of the prophecies come to pass.

¹⁹ Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. This figure-of-speech emphasizes that God rules over all human history from its beginning to its end. The fact that God rules over all history (including the middle part between the beginning and the end) should provide great comfort to the church. No enemy will prevail against the church because no enemy can prevail against God or his Christ. See also Revelation 21:6 and 22:13.

²⁰ See the note connected to Revelation 1:4.

and the patient endurance that are in Jesus,²¹ was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.²² **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet **11** saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."²³

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on

²¹ Those who are "in Jesus" have chosen a difficult path. They are partners in **the tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance that are in Jesus**. John does not want his readers to separate these three things. He ties these three things together by using just one article (the word "the"). This one article is shared by all three words (the ESV translation used here does not make this clear). In other words, in the Greek, all three things are connected because they all use the same article. John wants his readers to consider all three things together. They are a unit. At the present time, a person cannot live in the kingdom of God and, at the same time, avoid tribulation. The kingdom goes along with tribulation. In the same way, the only way to live in the kingdom is by patient endurance. The three things cannot be separated.

John is suffering as he writes these things. All those who are in Christ will, like John, suffer tribulation because of their love of Christ (see 2 Timothy 3:12). This book is one of the gracious ways God helps those who are in Jesus patiently endure until the end. **A distinguishing mark of the saints is that they endure to the end because God enables them to endure to the end** (see Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Mark 13:13, Luke 21:19, Romans 5:3, 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, 10:13, 2 Corinthians 1:6, 6:4-10, Colossians 1:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 2 Timothy 2:10-13, 3:10-12, 4:5-8, Hebrews 10:32, 10:36, 11:27, 12:1-3, 12:7, 13:13-14, 1 Peter 2:19-21, Revelation 2:2, 2:19, 3:10, 13:9-10, and 14:12-13). **Those who do not endure to the end will not be saved** (Matthew 10:22, Matthew 13:21, Matthew 24:13, Mark 4:17, Mark 13:13, 2 Timothy 2:12).

²² See Revelation 6:9 and 12:11.

²³ In the same way that prophets in the Old Testament were commissioned by God to speak his words to the people (or to write his words), John is commissioned as a prophet. He is a prophet to the "seven churches"—this refers, again, to all churches, in all circumstances, during all times. In the same way that the Old Testament prophets warned the people of God so that they might repent of sin, come to God, and be saved, so John is a prophet to all churches so that they might repent of sin, come to God through Christ, and be saved.

turning I saw seven golden lampstands,²⁴ **13** and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man,²⁵ clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, **15** his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his

24 The seven churches are described as “seven golden lampstands”. This imagery is drawn from the Old Testament (see, for instance, Exodus 25:31-40, 37:17-24, Leviticus 24:1-4, and Zechariah 4:2-11). The lampstand was to “be kept burning regularly”. This required constant attention on the part of the people and on the part of the high priest. The people were to bring “pure oil” (this would have required constant attention) and Aaron, the high priest, was to “arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly” (Leviticus 24:1-4). The lampstand described in the Old Testament is a **type** (a picture) of the church. Like the lampstand described in Leviticus 24, the seven golden lampstands described in Revelation 2 and 3 are to be kept burning before the LORD regularly. Unfortunately, most of the lampstands in Revelation 2 and 3 are not burning brightly. Christ, like Aaron, is the High Priest who oversees the condition of the lampstands. In Revelation 2 and 3, we see Christ, as the true and final High Priest, arranging the lampstands so that they produce light. Only pure oil will be accepted by the High Priest.

In the Old Testament, the purpose of the lampstand was to bring light to **the temple**. In Revelation, the lampstands are not found inside a physical temple. Instead, they are found throughout the province of Asia. This does not mean, however, that the lampstands (local churches) are now outside of the temple. Jesus is now the temple (see John 2:18-22). He is the “place” where people come to worship God and to find forgiveness and to fellowship with him. Because of Christ (the true temple), **the entire earth has become the temple of the Lord**. The churches are the lampstands that are to constantly be bringing light to this enormous temple. Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:14-16 should be seen in this light.

25 Based on the Old Testament imagery of the lampstand, it would seem that Christ would be called the High Priest in this passage. While he is dressed as a High Priest, John doesn’t call him the High Priest. Instead, he refers to him as “one like a son of man”. “**Son of Man**” is Jesus’ favorite title for himself (this title appears more than 80 times in the gospels). The title is based on a prophecy regarding the coming of someone called the Son of Man in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man comes before God the Father and receives “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him”. In the gospels, the Son of Man didn’t appear in this way. The coming of the Son of Man was surprising. He didn’t seem glorious. However, the fact that he was the Son of Man was not hidden. He constantly reminded the people that he was the Son of Man (see, for instance, Mark 2:10, 2:28, 8:31, 8:38, 9:9, 9:12, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45, 13:26, 14:21, 14:41, and 14:62). People should have, based on his words and signs, put their trust in him **and, at the same time, regarded him with great fear, for Daniel makes it clear that all judgment is given to the Son of Man**. In Revelation, however, the majesty and power of the Son of Man is fully displayed. The full display of Christ’s glory is a gift to the church. The church needs to know that it is the **fully glorified** Son of Man who is walking in the midst of the churches (see Revelation 2:1). The church needs to know that it is the **fully glorified** Son of Man who speaks to John and, through John, to all of the churches in all places for all time. He is not weak or powerless. And he will judge all those who do not serve him.

face was like the sun shining in full strength.²⁶

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me,²⁷ saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last,²⁸ **18** and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”²⁹ **19** Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place

²⁶ Readers need to carefully consider why Jesus would appear in this particular way as he commissions John to write **to the churches**. His appearance and his words in chapters 2 and 3 seem intended to frighten the churches into action. The seven churches have not, for the most part, been careful about the way they have been living. His appearance and his words are intended to shake them out of their disobedience. The Son of Man is powerful and he knows all things. Evil deeds done by the churches cannot be hidden from his sight. He will punish all those (from within the church!) who do not obey him. At the same time, John's description of the Son of Man is also intended to comfort the churches. Christ is the all-powerful warrior, priest, king, comforter, and rewarder of obedient churches. He is able to help obedient churches conquer and overcome in the most difficult circumstances. John's description of the Son of Man includes many allusions to Old Testament passages. These passages should be studied carefully. See, for instance, Deuteronomy 32:41, Job 38:17, Isaiah 11:1-5, 44:1-6, 48:12, 49:2, Ezekiel 1:24-28, 9:2-11, 43:2, Daniel 7:9-13, and 10:5-6. New Testament passages to be considered along with these verses include Matthew 16:19 and 17:1-8.

²⁷ John's reaction to Christ is typical of prophets when they encounter God or one of his messengers. This is additional evidence that John should be seen as a prophet to the churches. See, for instance, Isaiah 6:1-6 and Daniel 8:18-19.

²⁸ Jesus is “**the first and the last**”. These words are taken from Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12-13. In Isaiah, these words are spoken by Yahweh. By quoting these words, Jesus is clearly saying that he is Yahweh. This verse in Revelation is one of the many, many places where Jesus clearly claims to be God (see also the footnote attached to 2:1). As “the first and the last”, Jesus is all-powerful. He will protect and deliver his people and he will punish his enemies. The passages where this title is used in Isaiah should be carefully studied, for they explain much more about what “the first and the last” means to the people of God. The fact that Jesus is “the first and the last” should give great confidence to the churches as they suffer.

²⁹ This means that Jesus has the power to release people from the power of Death and Hades. Christ's power over Death and Hades should bring great joy to the believer. See Revelation 20:13-14 and 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.

after this.³⁰ **20** As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

³⁰ In this verse, as he did in 1:1, John refers to Daniel 2:28-29 and 2:45. John also refers to the same verses in Daniel in Revelation 4:1 and 22:6. John appears to be providing an outline of the major sections of his book by using these words from Daniel 2. The churches should pay careful attention to all three parts of John's message: "the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this". Everything that John wrote and every detail that he saw is intended to bring help and strength to the church as it suffers. In the same way that John needed to carefully record everything that was given to him, the churches need to carefully study these things.

The Greek words that are translated "after this" are, like so many other things in the book of Revelation, taken from the book of Daniel (see 2:28-29). These words also appear in Revelation 4:1. John is constantly sending reminders to his readers that he is speaking about the same things that Daniel spoke about.

Revelation 2-3

The Letters to the Seven 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.**

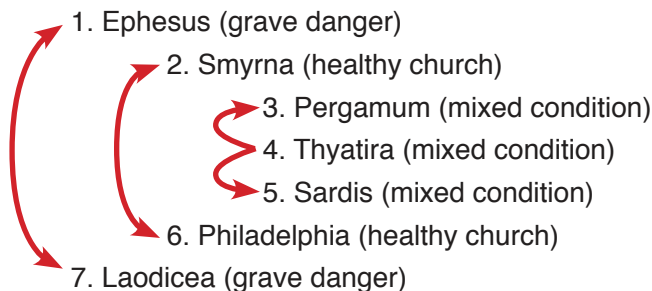
It is evident, based on these seven letters, that all churches are not the same. Each church will have its own difficulties. It is also evident, based on these letters, that Jesus expects every local church to address the difficulties that they are facing. No local church, no matter what country or city 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.

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.** This pattern, which is described below, helps churches see the main point of this section of Revelation.

John has arranged the seven letters in a pattern called a chiasm. This pattern is named about the Greek letter chi (this is why the pattern is called a chi-asm). The Greek letter chi looks like the English letter X. In the same way that the bottom of an X is an exact copy, in reverse, of the top half of an X, in a chiasm the writer deliberately makes a pattern in which various elements are copied by

other elements in a recognizable 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). The second letter (2:8-11) is connected to the second to the last letter (3:7-3:13). The third (2:12-17), fourth (2:18-28), and fifth (3:1-6) letters all go together.



Notice how, when the letters are arranged on a page, they make a pattern. Letter 1 is on top of letter 7. They are in line with each other. Letter 2 is on top of letter 6. They are in line with each other. And letters 3, 4, and 5 are in line with each other. 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.³¹ 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!

³¹ See Paul's words to the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:17-35.

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 (called a chiasm), 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 chiasm, 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 letters also include a declaration by Christ that he knows their 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.

Revelation 2

2:1 “To the angel³² of the church in Ephesus³³ write: ‘The words of him³⁴ who holds the seven stars in his right hand,³⁵ who walks

³² See also 2:8, 2:12, 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, and 3:14. The word **angel** (in the Greek language) can mean “angel” (whether good or bad) or it can mean “messenger”. Based on this, some have argued that each letter is addressed to the human **messenger** of each church. This human “messenger” might be, for instance, the main elder within the church. This is unlikely. John uses the word “angel” 75 times in Revelation. He consistently uses the word to refer to actual angels. If he wanted to refer to leaders in the local church (or to something else like the general “attitude” or “spirit” of the local church), it would be very strange for him to use a word he frequently uses in a very different way throughout the rest of the book. **It seems most likely that John is addressing his words to the heavenly angel who is assigned to help each specific church.** The fact that an angel is helping each church should bring great comfort to the suffering churches (then and now!). Local churches are not struggling alone. Heaven is helping them, even in ways that cannot be seen (see Hebrews 1:14)!

Beyond this, by addressing his words to the angel associated with each church, Jesus is reminding the churches that they are heavenly in nature, and that their life together, their practices, and their worship must also be heavenly. Because the churches are heavenly in nature, the churches must not compromise with that which is earthly. The visions of heavenly worship later in the book are also intended to remind the churches that their worship must reflect what is in heaven, not what is of the earth.

³³ Ephesus (the first church listed) and Laodicea (the last church listed) are similar. They are both unhealthy churches and are in great danger of having their lampstand removed. See the note at the introduction of this section regarding the organization of the letters.

³⁴ Christ’s introduction begins with the words: “The words of ...”. These exact words are repeated in each letter (see 2:8, 2:12, 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, and 3:14). It is important to note that these same Greek words (which, when transliterated from Greek into English would be spelled “Tade legei”) appear over and over in the writings of the Old Testament prophets (in the Septuagint). **The prophets use these exact words when they are introducing the words of Yahweh.** See, for instance, Amos 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:13, 2:1, 2:4, 2:6, 3:11, 3:12, 5:3, 5:4, 5:16, 7:11, 7:17, Micah 2:3, and 3:5. By beginning each letter to the churches in this way, John is indicating to his readers that the words of Jesus in Revelation are equal to the words of Yahweh in the Old Testament! This is strong evidence that Jesus has, based on his resurrection, been given the name that is above all names—Yahweh (see Philippians 2:8-11)! Jesus is God! But this is more than just proof that Jesus is God. It is additional evidence that the book of Revelation should be seen as a prophetic book that is speaking to the churches. The churches must be careful to listen to and to obey everything that Jesus is saying to them. To disobey the words of Jesus is to disobey God.

³⁵ Christ is intimately connected to the angels helping in each church. This is why he says that he “holds the seven stars in his right hand”. It should bring great comfort to the suffering church to know that the protection of all local churches is under the direct control of the Lord Jesus.

among the seven golden lampstands.³⁶

2:2 “ ‘I know³⁷ your works, your toil and your patient endurance,³⁸ and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. **3** I know you are enduring patiently³⁹ and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.⁴⁰ **4** But I have this

³⁶ In 1:13, Jesus is described as “in the midst of the lampstands”. In 2:1, Jesus further defines what it means to be “in the midst” of the churches—he is walking among them. This means that he is personally involved with each local church! Based on the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3, it is clear that Jesus knows what each local church believes, he knows what each local church is doing, he knows how each local church is suffering, and he knows what each local church needs. Jesus is examining the local churches as he walks among them. The fact that Jesus is walking among the churches should bring fear—and joy—to those in the local church.

Many schools hang pictures of their country’s president or king on their classroom walls. However, even though the image of the leader may be present in the schools, the leader is not actually walking in the schools. The leader may be thousands of miles away from the schools and has no idea of what the people in the schools are actually doing. Jesus is NOT like that. He is not a figurehead. He is actually among his people. This was true in the first century. It is true today. Local churches need to constantly remember that their Lord is walking in their midst.

³⁷ All of the letters begin with the words “I know”. Christ is in a state of perfect knowledge regarding every church.

³⁸ See 1:9.

³⁹ See 1:9.

⁴⁰ The church in Ephesus is commended for its “works”, its “toil”, and its “patient endurance”. It did not “bear with” evil people within the church. This means that the church expected the people within the church who were claiming to be Christians to live holy lives. This is different from the church in Pergamum (2:14-15) and the church in Thyatira (2:20). Both of these churches were tolerating evil that was being done by people who were part of the church! But Ephesus did not do this. And Ephesus did not allow false apostles to influence the church. Instead, it tested people who wanted to be leaders. This test, it seems, would have been based on the truths detailed in the Scriptures. The church seems to have suffered because of its commitment to truth (“you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary”). This church’s commitment to protect **orthodoxy** (right belief) should be imitated by all churches. Local churches that do not do these things will have serious problems with sin and compromise within the church.

against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.⁴¹

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.⁴² **6** Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.⁴³ **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.⁴⁴ To the

⁴¹ At the very same time that this church was doing the very important things mentioned in verses 2 and 3, they had stopped doing the most important thing! They had abandoned love! According to verse 5, in the beginning, the church in Ephesus had been doing certain “works” that demonstrated their love. But they were no longer doing those works that were connected to love. The text doesn’t say whether this lack of love was primarily seen in how the church related to God or to other believers. It probably means both, for they are connected (see Luke 10:27). If we love God we will love other people. While this church was strong in doctrine, it was weak in love. This lack of love was great sin. In fact, this sin was so great that Jesus warned them that he would remove their lampstand if they did not repent! All local churches should pay careful attention to this warning. See John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17, Romans 12:10, 13:8, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Peter 1:22, 4:8, 5:14, 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, and 2 John 5.

⁴² This is a terrible warning of judgment! If the church does not repent, it will no longer exist. Jesus’ warning is spoken to this one church. However, through this letter to this one church, the Spirit is speaking to all local churches. If churches abandon love of God and love of one another, their lampstand is in danger of being removed. Jesus doesn’t say how he will remove the lampstand. That is not the point of his warning. He simply says that he will do it. All local churches must consider whether they have “abandoned the love they had at first”.

⁴³ Scholars are not entirely certain about the identity of the Nicolaitans. Based on 2:15 (which is the only other place in Scripture where the Nicolaitans are mentioned by name), they were a group of people who desired to bring false teaching into the church. It is likely this false teaching had something to do with spiritual compromise. The church in Ephesus resisted these false teachers. The church in Pergamum, however, did not resist these false teachers (see 2:15). The church in Ephesus is commended because they hated the false teaching and did not allow it to influence the church. All churches, like Ephesus, should hate false teaching and should do what is necessary to prevent it from taking place in the church. **It is not necessary to completely understand the teaching of the Nicolaitans in order to understand the main point: churches must hate false teaching and they must not allow it to grow and flourish in the church.**

⁴⁴ “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says”: these words are a sober call to local churches to listen to Jesus’ words in this letter and to take the necessary actions they need to take. The Spirit didn’t speak to just one church in this letter. He is—even today—speaking to all churches through this letter. All those who “have ears to hear” should obey the instructions in this letter. Any church that does not hear and obey the Spirit’s words is in danger of having its lampstand removed.

one who conquers⁴⁵ I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.⁴⁶

2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna⁴⁷ write: ‘The words of

⁴⁵ This is the first of seven statements that begin with the words “To the one who conquers”. This is a **conditional promise**. A conditional promise is a promise that has a condition attached to it. In order to receive the reward that is promised, the individuals within the local church must conquer. Based on these seven letters, those who conquer maintain **pure faith**, they **do not tolerate sin** in the church, they **love one another**, they **listen to the Spirit**, they **repent of sin**, and they **do not give up** in difficult times. This promise is not just for the individuals in the church in Ephesus. It is a promise for all Christians in all times. All conquering Christians will have the right to the tree of life.

⁴⁶ The rewards promised to those who conquer are drawn from the Old Testament. The rewards are not intended to apply only to individuals from one particular church. In other words, believers from any church may, if they conquer, eat from the tree of life. These rewards are intended to motivate believers in all churches during all time periods.

The promise that those who conquer will eat from the tree of life means far more than merely the experience of eating fruit from a fruit tree. The tree of life was located in the Garden of Eden. Eden was the place where people and God were to walk in perfect fellowship. The tree of life symbolized the eternal life and healing and fruitfulness and fellowship that are only found in God. This promise, then, is about much more than eating a piece of fruit. It is about perfect people enjoying perfect fellowship with God for all time! It is significant to note that the Bible begins with a tree of life (see Genesis 2:9). Because of sin, people are not permitted to eat from this tree (see Genesis 3:22). The Bible ends with the tree of life. However, at the end of the Bible, the fruit from the tree of life is being eaten by a great multitude of people (see Revelation 22:1-2). Who are these people? These are the people who have conquered! They are not just from the church in Ephesus. They are individuals from all local churches during all time periods. They are the people who have met the condition of the promise in Revelation 2:7. These people are the members of local churches who have listened to the Spirit and have remained faithful to Christ to the very end. Key Old Testament passages related to the tree of life include Ezekiel 47:12 and Psalm 1:3.

⁴⁷ Smyrna (the second church listed) and Philadelphia (the second to last church listed) are connected (see the note at the introduction to this section regarding the organization of the letters). Smyrna and Philadelphia are both healthy churches. It is important to note that both of these churches are suffering persecution because of their faith. The fact that a church is being persecuted does not mean God has forgotten about the church. Indeed, according to Matthew 5:10-11, blessing rests on those who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake”! Jesus promises that all those who are in him will suffer persecution (see John 15:18-16:4). See also Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 3:12.

the first and the last,⁴⁸ who died and came to life.⁴⁹

2:9 “ ‘I know⁵⁰ your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)⁵¹ and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but

⁴⁸ In this letter, Jesus tells the church in Smyrna that he is “**the first and the last**” (see also 1:17). These words are taken from Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12. In Isaiah, these words are spoken by Yahweh. By quoting these words, Jesus is clearly saying that he is Yahweh. This verse in Revelation is one of the many, many places where Jesus clearly claims to be God (see also the footnote attached to 2:1). Jesus tells the church in Smyrna that he is “the first and the last” because they are suffering severe persecution. Jesus assures this church that he—the first and the last—is the one who is walking among them. As “the first and the last”, Jesus is all-powerful. He will protect and deliver his people and he will punish his enemies. The passages where this title is used in Isaiah should be carefully studied, for they explain much more about what “the first and the last” means to the people of God. The fact that Jesus is “the first and the last” should give great confidence to the churches as they suffer.

⁴⁹ Jesus also describes himself as the one “**who died and came to life**” (see 1:18). Jesus reminds the church in Smyrna of this because some in this church will die for their faith (see 2:10). Jesus reminds the church that even though he died, he didn't stay dead! He came to life! Jesus' words remind this church (and all churches) that those who are faithful to death will, like their King, also be raised from the dead. Those who are in Christ do not need to fear death. Even if they die at the hands of persecutors, Christ will give them life (see 2:10-11) because he holds the keys of Death and Hades (see 1:18).

⁵⁰ Jesus knows about each church's situation because he walks among them. This should bring great comfort to every local church. It should also cause disobedient churches to repent. Jesus knows everything happening in every local church.

⁵¹ This church is very poor. However, Jesus reminds the church that they have great riches. Those who are in Christ need to remember that Christ's inheritance is their inheritance. True and lasting riches do not come from the world. They come from Christ. See Romans 8:16-17.

are a synagogue⁵² of Satan.⁵³ **10** Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison,⁵⁴

⁵² The Jews in Smyrna were apparently speaking against the church in Smyrna. The Jews were claiming to be the true followers of God. Jesus assures the church that these Jews are not true followers of God. Rather, he calls them “a synagogue of Satan”. A true Jew is one who believes in Christ. See Romans 2:25-29.

⁵³ This is the first mention of Satan in the book of Revelation. His name means “adversary”. He is a major character in this book. Satan is described in many different ways. He is called “the devil” in verse 10. He is called the “great dragon”, “that ancient serpent”, “the deceiver of the whole world”, and “the accuser of our brothers” in 12:9-10. Satan is a powerful enemy. He has great hatred for Jesus, but was not able to “devour him” (see 12:1-5). He has great hatred for the saints and desires to destroy them (see 12:7-17). However, Satan is not equal with God and he is under God’s control. He can do nothing without God’s permission. This should give great comfort to the saints. God allows Satan to test the saints. He allows him to have many of the saints put to death. Even by death, however, Satan is not able to ultimately defeat the saints. Instead, the saints conquer the devil (see 13:11). The testing of the saints results in great glory and praise to God, because his people prove that they love him even more than they love their physical bodies. It is important to know that while Satan has permission from God to throw saints in prison and to cause them to suffer (and even to kill them), this is for a brief period. In this letter, this brief period is symbolized by the words “ten days”. Satan will not be allowed to fight against the saints forever. Revelation declares that Satan will be “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur ... and will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:10). This should bring great joy and encouragement to the saints!

⁵⁴ This does not necessarily mean that these saints were thrown into physical prisons. This is a term used to describe bondage and great suffering.

that you may be tested,⁵⁵ and for ten days you will have tribulation.⁵⁶ Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.⁵⁷ **11** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.⁵⁸

2:12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words

⁵⁵ Satan desires to destroy the saints. God uses these tests for his glory. They demonstrate his faithfulness and they demonstrate the love his people have for him.

⁵⁶ This is not referring to a literal period of **ten days**. Remember, numbers in this type of literature are usually symbolic. These words about tribulation lasting ten days connect the testing this church is to face with the test of faith Daniel and his three friends endured when they were captives in Babylon and were being trained for service to the king (see Daniel 1). These young men were tempted to “defile [themselves] with the king’s food” (see Daniel 1:8). However, these young men did not defile themselves. **They were tested for ten days** (see Daniel 1:8–16). With God’s help, they passed the test. By repeating these words to the church in Smyrna, Jesus is telling the church that they will, like Daniel and his friends, suffer a test of faith. During this test, they will, like Daniel and his friends, be tempted to compromise. The church is to remember that God helped Daniel and his friends pass the test. God was glorified by this testing. Daniel and his friends demonstrated that they loved God more than their own lives. God would, in the same way, help this church pass its test. This is a message of hope for all churches. All of God’s people will be tested. Jesus does not guarantee immediate deliverance from suffering. All faithful churches will, like Smyrna, face a test of their faith. Those who are “faithful unto death” will receive “the crown of life”.

The reader needs to know that the individuals in the church in Smyrna probably suffered for a period that was far longer than just ten days. The fact that the suffering is described as lasting for just ten days, however, reminded this church that any suffering caused by Satan would be brief. Even in the midst of suffering, Christ would give this church joy and protection. He promises to do the same for every faithful church today.

Old Testament passages connecting the number ten to a period of testing include, of course, the ten plagues that tested Egypt and Israel (see Exodus 1–12). Other “testings” using the number ten are seen in Genesis 24:55, 31:7, 31:41, Numbers 14:22, and Job 19:2–3.

⁵⁷ This, like the promise of eating from the tree of life, is a poetic picture of something far greater than the image itself. The crown Jesus is promising is not, primarily, physical. **The crown he is promising is eternal life. Beyond this, the crown symbolizes that those who receive eternal life will reign with Christ.** It is strange to think that the only way to receive the crown of life is by being “faithful unto death”. This reward reminds the church that nothing, not even physical death, can take eternal life away from them. See also James 1:12.

⁵⁸ Jesus’ words remind the church that the “first death” (the physical death that everyone faces during this lifetime) is not the death which should be feared. The death to be feared is the **second death**—eternal judgment. Jesus promises that “The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death”. The second death is eternal punishment in the “lake of fire” (see Revelation 20:6, 14, and 21:8). Those who do not conquer will not be delivered from the second death.

of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.⁵⁹

2:13 “‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.’⁶⁰ **14** But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food

⁵⁹ The “sharp two-edged sword” is not a literal sword. This is a symbol of Jesus’ powerful **words**. That is why, in other verses in Revelation, the sword is pictured as coming from **Jesus’ mouth** (see Revelation 1:16 and 19:15, 21). Jesus’ words of judgment cut through falsehood and destroy those who hold to lies. His words also bring deliverance to those who hold to the truth! Jesus describes himself in this way to this church because certain people in this church were claiming to worship God but were living wicked lives. Others in the church were embracing false doctrine. By describing himself in this way, Jesus is reminding the church that he is their judge and that all evildoers—even those within the church—will be judged by him. All of Christ’s enemies—even those within the church—will be destroyed by him. See, again, Revelation 19:15 and 21. See also Isaiah 49:2 and Hebrews 4:12.

⁶⁰ This does not mean Satan lived (or still lives) in Pergamum. Satan is a spirit and does not have a physical home. This means that this church was in a very dangerous location. Pergamum had a temple that was connected to the worship of the Roman emperor. Because of this, the city pressured its citizens to proclaim loyalty to Caesar alone. People proclaimed their loyalty to Caesar by declaring “Caesar is lord” and by burning incense to him. The temptation for believers to do this would have been very great. In fact, the pressures to compromise within this city were so great that it seemed as if this was Satan’s capital city! The church, however, was not living in fear. It had remained faithful even during a time of especially intense persecution against the church (when a man named Antipas was killed). This church’s strength in the face of intense persecution should be an encouragement to all local churches.

sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.⁶¹ **15** So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.⁶² **16** Therefore repent.⁶³ If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.⁶⁴ **17** He who has an ear, let him hear what

61 While this church had remained strong in the face of direct persecution, some of the members of the church had not remained strong when they were tempted to compromise. A group of people within the church were following the same type of spiritual advice that the Old Testament “prophet” Balaam had given to the wicked king Balak. Balak knew he couldn’t destroy the Israelites in battle. Balaam encouraged him to destroy them by sin! Balaam’s wicked teaching is described in Numbers 31:16. His teaching resulted in many Israelites committing sexual immorality with Moabite women (see Numbers 25:1-9). This Old Testament passage should have been a warning to the church that it must not compromise. However, some within this church were, according to Jesus, acting just like these ancient Israelites. While their sin is described as “sexual immorality”, he is referring to far more than physical sexual acts. He is referring, primarily, to the spiritual adultery these people were committing. They were claiming to love God but were, at the same time, professing allegiance to Caesar! They were compromising with the world. These people were not like Daniel and his three friends, and they were not like the church in Smyrna (see Revelation 2:10). While it is not mentioned in the letter to the church in Pergamum, it is important to note that **Balaam was killed by the Israelites with a sword** (see Numbers 31:8 and Joshua 13:22). In the same way, Christ will, with the sword of his mouth, destroy all those within the church who follow Balaam’s teaching. Teachers and preachers should carefully read Numbers 25, for this chapter not only highlights the curse that comes upon people who follow Balaam’s teaching, it also highlights the great blessing that comes upon those who hate Balaam’s teaching and stand against it.

Those in the church need to know that “sexual immorality” (idolatry) is connected to the citizens of Babylon (see, for instance, Revelation 14:8). All of Babylon’s citizens will be destroyed along with their beloved city. Purity is connected to the citizens of the new Jerusalem. This is why the saints are called “virgins” in Revelation 14:4. This means they are devoted to God alone.

62 See 2:6. The church in Ephesus hated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Jesus praised that church for their hatred of this teaching. The church in Pergamum was not like Ephesus. A certain group of people within the church loved the teaching of the Nicolaitans, and the rest of the church was not doing anything about this false teaching that was among them!

63 The entire church is called to repent because of the evil that was found within this church. This is important for all churches to see. Sin cannot be tolerated within the church. Paul’s words to the church in Corinth should be studied with this particular letter. Paul rebuked the entire church because of their attitude toward the sexual sin of one man (see 1 Corinthians 5)! Repentance on this church’s part would necessarily include church discipline directed toward those within the church who would not repent. See, again, Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 5. See also Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:15-20.

64 In the same way that Balaam was killed by the sword (see Numbers 31:8), Jesus promises that he will come and war against Balaam’s spiritual followers with the sword coming from his mouth. Sin must not be tolerated within the church. Jesus promises that he will war against those who sin within the church in the exact same way as he is seen warring against the nations (see Revelation 19:11-16).

the Spirit says to the churches.⁶⁵ To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna,⁶⁶ and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.⁶⁷

2:18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God,⁶⁸ who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet

⁶⁵ This is not just a message for Pergamum. All churches in all times need to hear the warning given to the church in Pergamum.

⁶⁶ Jesus promises that the conquering ones within this church will be given “hidden manna”. The word manna is associated with God’s miraculous provision while the Israelites were being tested in the wilderness (see Exodus 16 and Psalm 78:25). However, unlike the manna eaten by the Israelites, the believers in Pergamum who conquer will be given “hidden manna”. This means that it won’t be seen. In the same way that the manna sustained the Israelites until they set foot in the Promised Land, so Christ promises to sustain his conquering saints with this “hidden manna” until they need it no longer.

⁶⁷ It seems likely that the white stone is a reference to the white stones that were used as invitations to a great banquet. Taken together, the two promises to the conquering believers offer great hope for this life and the life to come. The “hidden manna” provides the believers with hope because they will be sustained in this life. And the “white stone” of invitation gives the believers great hope for the future. If they persevere, they will be invited to the great feast!

The name written on the white stone is probably not a new personal name for the person who conquers. Based on how this phrase is used in Revelation, it is Jesus’ own name (see Revelation 3:12 and 19:12). This name is revealed to Jesus’ true followers. This means that they truly know him and he knows them and trusts them. Only those who receive this personal invitation are able to share in his kingdom. This is a great promise for all those who are suffering! See also Isaiah 62:2, and 65:15.

⁶⁸ Son of God is a name of tremendous importance. This title, which is drawn from God’s words regarding the Christ in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2, reminds the church that Jesus is God’s Anointed King. He has been given all authority and power. It is significant to note that this name is connected with Psalm 2, for this same Psalm is also referred to at the end of this letter. Meditation on Psalm 2 will help the faithful saints obey the teaching of the true King—Jesus.

are like burnished bronze.⁶⁹

2:19 “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance,⁷⁰ and that your latter works exceed the first.⁷¹ **20** But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel,⁷² who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to

⁶⁹ It is significant to note that many of the things Jesus refers to when he describes himself are also mentioned in Revelation 1. The wise preacher needs to ask why the churches need to be reminded of these things. Why, for instance, do the churches need to be told more than one time that Jesus “has eyes like a flame of fire” and “feet like burnished bronze” (see also 1:14-15 and 19:12)? These words are repeated because the churches need to think about Jesus in this way! He is not weak. He does not tolerate sin. The “eyes like a flame of fire” emphasize that Jesus sees all and he knows all and he judges all. He perfectly sees the deeds done by every church (see 2:23). The feet “like burnished bronze” emphasize that Jesus walks in perfect holiness and in perfect power as he walks among the churches. In the same way that one who was like “a son of the gods” walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (see Daniel 3:25), so the “Son of God” promises to walk with the faithful and to deliver them from their trial. The language of feet like burnished bronze is also used in Ezekiel 1:7 and Daniel 10:6. All churches need to remember that Christ sees all, and that he walks with his faithful people even as they live in the most dangerous times and places (like fiery furnaces and the situation in Thyatira).

⁷⁰ See 1:9.

⁷¹ Jesus perfectly knows the condition of this church. This church was doing many things that pleased Jesus. The actions listed in verse 19 should be imitated by all local churches. Compare this to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesus, the church’s “latter works” were not as great as its first works.

⁷² Jesus’ words are addressed to the church. They are not addressed to Jezebel.

idols.⁷³ **21** I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her

⁷³ Even though, according to verse 19, this church was doing a great deal that was right, there was something terribly wrong in Thyatira. This church was tolerating evil teaching by a “prophetess” named “**Jezebel**”. This probably doesn’t mean that there was actually a teacher named Jezebel teaching in the church in Thyatira. As with numbers, names in this type of literature are often symbolic of something else. Jesus called the false teachers in Thyatira **Jezebel** for a particular reason. He wants the churches to connect the teaching that was happening in Thyatira with the events that took place during Jezebel’s reign. He wants the teachers in the church to be connected to Queen Jezebel. He wants the people in the church to see that they are like the Israelites during Jezebel’s reign. In the same way that Jezebel, during her wicked reign, caused the people of God to fall into great sin (see 1 Kings 16–21, 2 Kings 9:21–37), the teachers within the church in Thyatira were tempting the believers to “practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols”.

The sexual sin being referred to here is not physical. These words are used to refer to **spiritual adultery**. That is why the false teachers in Thyatira are called Jezebel. The godly members of this church were constantly being tempted to compromise with the pagan culture in Thyatira. Again, this constant pressure to compromise was coming from within the church! The reason people would want to compromise with the pagan culture was probably financial. Compromise was good for a person’s business. If a person, because of his or her belief in Christ, refused to acknowledge the gods that were worshiped in Thyatira, that person’s business opportunities were greatly limited. By acknowledging the gods (i.e., by eating food sacrificed to idols or by offering incense), a person could demonstrate that he or she was truly a part of the culture in Thyatira. This would allow that person to buy and sell with no limitations.

It is significant to note that **two letters in a row** refer to the same sins. In both Pergamum and Thyatira, the members of the church are sinning by eating “food sacrificed to idols” and by committing “sexual immorality” (see 2:14 and 2:20). And in both of these letters, the sins are connected to particularly evil Old Testament characters. The first church (Pergamum) is connected to Balaam. The second church (Thyatira) is connected to Jezebel. **The reader needs to think carefully about these names, because names in this type of literature are often symbolic.** These two names may help us understand the situations in both of these churches. Balaam’s influence over Israel was from the outside. He was not an Israelite. And while his teaching caused great harm to the Israelites, he was killed rather quickly. This, in a general way, may describe the situation in Pergamum. Jezebel’s influence over Israel, however, was from the inside. Even though she was a Sidonian by birth, she was, based on her marriage to Ahab, connected to the Israelites. Throughout her long reign she constantly pressured the people of God to worship Baal. This constant pressure led to the people of God compromising. They began serving both Yahweh and Baal. The prophet Elijah described their beliefs in the following way: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). A situation very much like this seems to have been taking place in Thyatira.

sexual immorality.⁷⁴ **22** Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, **23** and I will strike her children dead.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ **24** But to the rest of you in Thyatira,⁷⁷ who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan,⁷⁸ to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. **25** Only hold fast what you have until I come.⁷⁹ **26** The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the

⁷⁴ It appears that “Jezebel” had been influencing the church in Thyatira for many years. These false teachers in Thyatira had been warned of their wickedness, but they refused to repent. They kept on teaching, and, unfortunately, the church did nothing to stop them! It seems that it continued so long that it couldn’t be stopped! This is a warning for all churches. If churches tolerate evil teaching, the results will be disastrous. Instead of tolerating this sort of evil, the churches are to exercise spiritual discipline. They must command false teacher to stop teaching lies (see Paul’s words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3-7). See also instructions regarding spiritual discipline in Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5. See also Paul’s words regarding how he dealt with two men who were blaspheming in the church (1 Timothy 1:19-20). If false teachers are not corrected, they will produce spiritual children who embrace their views (see verse 23).

⁷⁵ Jesus does not call the people who follow Jezebel his servants. He calls them “her children”. All those who persist in spiritual adultery will be considered Jezebel’s children and will receive her punishment. This is a warning to every church.

⁷⁶ This is a warning to all Christians and to all local churches. All people will be judged based on the deeds they have done (see Revelation 18:6, 20:12-13, and 22:12 – see also Psalm 62:11-12, Proverbs 24:12, Jeremiah 17:10, and Romans 2:6-11).

⁷⁷ In spite of Jezebel’s teaching, it seems that there were a large number of faithful believers in Thyatira. This explains how this church could be doing so many great things (see verse 19).

⁷⁸ The false teachers were teaching the saints that it was okay for them to live in two kingdoms at the same time! They taught their followers that they could learn Satan’s “deep things” and, at the same time, be members of the kingdom of God.

⁷⁹ In the same way that the righteous people living in Israel during Jezebel’s reign were called to be faithful to Yahweh even in the terrible days of her rule, so the righteous people in Thyatira are called to be faithful even in the terrible days of this church’s “Jezebel”. The saints are called to be faithful until Jesus comes. The fact that Jezebel is in this midst does not give them an excuse to walk in spiritual compromise. They must remain faithful. Notice, Jesus does not call these saints to rise up and drive Jezebel from the church. It seems that the situation in Thyatira had gone too far. The faithful people in the church did not have the ability to change the teaching. They did, however, have the ability to walk in holiness and to reject sin. This is sometimes the case in churches today. The leadership is corrupt, and the “average” people cannot change the situation. Jesus calls saints in this situation to be faithful until his coming. This should provide great comfort to all faithful people to know that Jesus does not require the saints to do more than they are capable of doing.

nations, **27** and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.⁸⁰ **28** And I will give him the morning star.⁸¹ **29** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.⁸²

Revelation 3

3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.’⁸³

“ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.’⁸⁴ **2** Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.⁸⁵ **3** Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and

⁸⁰ This is a reference to Psalm 2:8-9. Jesus promises that the saints who conquer will participate in his rule and reign. The true saints have been suffering under the “reign” of Jezebel for a long time. If they are faithful to the end, they will be the ones who reign! Psalm 2 is referred to two different times in the letter to Thyatira. This Psalm is an encouragement to all those who are suffering in a church that has embraced false teachers.

⁸¹ The “morning star” is a reference to the rule of Jesus. Again, believers who conquer will participate in the glorious rule of Christ! The believers in Thyatira had been living in great darkness. They were being “ruled” by Jezebel. This is a reminder that the “morning star” (Christ) would soon be shining and he would drive all darkness away! Conquering believers would soon be living under the light of the morning star! See Numbers 24:14-20, 2 Peter 1:19, and Revelation 22:16.

⁸² All churches need to ask if they are “tolerating” evil teachers and evil teaching within the church. This letter warns churches that they must act quickly if evil is being taught. If churches do nothing, then the evil teachers will become deeply entrenched in the church.

⁸³ See 1:4 and 1:16. Why does this church need to hear about Jesus having the “seven spirits of God” and the “seven stars”? It may be because this church had very little spiritual life within it. Jesus is telling this church that he has what they need. He is the one who sends the Holy Spirit. This church desperately needs the help of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus has help from heaven (angels) that this church needs.

⁸⁴ This church has a reputation as a healthy church. However, this is not a healthy church. It is dying.

⁸⁵ Jesus doesn’t refer to any good works being done by this church. Other churches, even if they are unhealthy churches, have some works (see 2:2-3, 2:9, 2:13, and 2:19). The works are a sign of life. With the exception of a few healthy people (see verse 4), this church seems to have no evidence of Christ’s life and power within it.

repent.⁸⁶ If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief,⁸⁷ and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.⁸⁸ **4** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.⁸⁹ **5** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments,⁹⁰ and I will never

⁸⁶ At one time, this church had heard the true gospel. It had built a reputation as a healthy church because it probably had been, at one time, a healthy church. Unlike Pergamum and Thyatira, it doesn't seem as if false teachers were influencing this church. But something happened to this church. Now, like a person on life support in a hospital, this church is beginning to die. It's not too late! Jesus calls the church to wake up. They are to repent for their spiritual laziness, to remember the things they had been taught (the gospel message), and to start obeying Christ's commands.

⁸⁷ Jesus warns the church that he will "come like a thief" if they do not obey his words. This means far more than that they will be unprepared for his coming. This means that he will destroy them. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Paul says that "the day of the Lord will **come like a thief** in the night". Paul says that this day will bring "sudden destruction" upon the enemies of God. It is important to know that Jesus doesn't come like a thief to the "children of light" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:5)! He comes like a thief to his enemies. The church in Sardis needs to hear this. If they don't repent they will be destroyed by Christ because they are his enemies! The same warning appears in Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!". See also Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4, and 2 Peter 3:10.

All churches need to hear Christ's warning in this letter.

⁸⁸ This church, unlike the two previous churches, does not seem to have been influenced by false teaching. Rather, it has had the true gospel preached within it. The people, however, did not **remember** the true gospel and they did not **obey** the true gospel. If they do not repent, Christ will come to them as an enemy.

⁸⁹ There is a small remnant of faithful believers within this church. A remnant of believers is also seen in 2:24-25. Notice, again, Jesus' words in Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!". These believers were awake! Even if the rest of the church did not wake up, these faithful saints would be saved!

⁹⁰ White garments are symbolic of the righteous deeds of the saints. Only those who are "clothed in white" (righteous) have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. See Daniel 11:35, 12:10, Revelation 3:18, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 7:13, and 19:14. See also Matthew 22:11.

blot his name out of the book of life.⁹¹ I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.⁹² **6** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

3:7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia⁹³ write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David,⁹⁴ who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’⁹⁵

3:8 “ ‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.⁹⁶ I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.’⁹⁷ **9** Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who

⁹¹ Jesus’ words need to be examined closely so they are not misinterpreted. Jesus is not wanting to frighten his true followers. Instead, he wants to encourage them! He promises that he will never blot them out of the book of life. They are absolutely secure! This promise would have brought great comfort to the few people in Sardis who were walking in the truth. It should bring great comfort to all those who walk in the truth today. At the same time, Jesus’ words to the faithful should have caused the “faithless” portion of the church in Sardis to see the dangerous position they were in and to repent. Jesus’ words should do the same to faithless churches today. The book of life is the listing of those who are spiritually alive! The names of the spiritually dead are not written in it. The people in Sardis were acting like their names were all written in this book, even though they weren’t alive and they weren’t conquerors. See Philippians 4:3, Revelation 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, 21:27, and 22:19. See also Moses’ words with Yahweh regarding the book of life in Exodus 32:32-35.

⁹² This is a glorious promise for the faithful. The names of the faithful will be proclaimed in heaven. The unfaithful, however, will not be proclaimed in heaven. They will be judged by Jesus and will not inherit eternal life. See also the warning to unfaithful people in Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26.

⁹³ Philadelphia is, like Smyrna, a healthy church. This church, like Smyrna, is suffering.

⁹⁴ This is a reference to a prophecy made about the Christ in Isaiah 22:22. The authority of David’s keys extends to all things, for in Revelation 1:18, Jesus declares, “I have the keys of Death and Hades”.

⁹⁵ See 3:8. Jesus’ description of himself is connected to the actions he has taken for this church.

⁹⁶ Because Jesus has the “key of David” (3:7), everything he opens stays open, and everything he shuts stays shut. He has opened a door for this church. They have an open door to heaven. They have an open door so they can keep evangelizing. The church is encouraged that their enemies will not prevail. See Isaiah 45:1.

⁹⁷ Jesus knows the state of the church in Philadelphia. They are not powerful. They are not influential. However, Jesus doesn’t rebuke the church for its lack of strength. Rather, he commends those in the church for their obedience to his word and their lack of compromise. They have had opportunities to deny his name, but they have remained faithful. Unlike Pergamum and Thyatira, they have not compromised with the world. Unlike Sardis, they have not forgotten the gospel. Unlike Ephesus, they have not abandoned love. This is a faithful church.

say that they are Jews and are not, but lie⁹⁸—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.⁹⁹ **10** Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial¹⁰⁰ that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.¹⁰¹ **11** I am coming soon.¹⁰² Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.¹⁰³ **12** The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar

⁹⁸ It seems the church in Philadelphia, like the church in Smyrna, is being persecuted by Jewish people. These Jewish people claim they are the true people of God. Jesus declares that these Jewish people are not true Jews. See also Paul's words regarding a "true" Jew in Romans 2:25-29. See the note at 2:9.

⁹⁹ Jesus' promise to this church is connected to promises to the people of God in Psalm 86:9, Isaiah 45:14, 49:23, and 60:14. All of these passages speak of **Gentiles** coming to **Israel** and bowing down and proclaiming that God truly is among them. These passages should be read carefully, for, according to Jesus, the faithful church in Philadelphia will see these promises fulfilled. The same is true of all faithful churches. Ironically, the Jews in Philadelphia who have been tormenting the Christians are the "Gentiles" spoken of in these Old Testament passages who are being forced to bow at the feet of the true people of God. The enemies of God's faithful people will proclaim that the church is loved by God (see Isaiah 43:4). This may mean that these people will be won by the gospel and will come to faith in Christ.

¹⁰⁰ This is an hour of testing that will come on the whole world. See Daniel 12:1-2.

¹⁰¹ This is a powerful promise. It applies to the church in Philadelphia and to all faithful churches. Jesus promises to protect his faithful people as they go through the trial that will come on the whole world. Based on the letter to Smyrna, this promise does not mean that people in Philadelphia (or elsewhere) will escape persecution and even death (see Revelation 2:10). This is not a promise that Jesus will take those in this church out of the world. **Rather, "I will keep you" means something like "I will protect you in the midst of the trials, and these trials will not destroy your faith".** The Greek words that are translated into English as "**keep**" and "**from**" are also used in John 17:15. In that verse, Jesus prays for his disciples, asking God the Father to "**keep** them **from** the evil one". In that passage, Jesus does not pray and ask the Father to remove them from the world. He asks the Father to **keep** them **from** being eternally damaged by Satan. Examples of Jesus keeping his true followers even in the midst of great testing are seen in Revelation 13:8 and 17:8. In these passages, everyone but Jesus' elect are deceived! He keeps his people in the most difficult of trials!

¹⁰² The fact that Jesus is coming soon should bring great joy and encouragement to faithful churches (see Revelation 1:1, 22:6-7, 22:12, and 22:20). The fact that Jesus is coming soon should bring great fear to all who are unfaithful (see Revelation 2:16).

¹⁰³ This does not mean that true believers are falling away from the faith. Many other passages clearly proclaim that true believers persevere to the end. Rather, this is one of the ways Jesus keeps true believers from falling away! This warning is a word of grace from Jesus. Believers hear this and are strengthened so that they do not fall away! See the note regarding crowns at 2:10.

in the temple of my God.¹⁰⁴ Never shall he go out of it,¹⁰⁵ and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven,¹⁰⁶ and my own new name.¹⁰⁷ **13** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

3:14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.¹⁰⁸

3:15 “ ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! **16** So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.¹⁰⁹ **17** For you say, I am rich,¹¹⁰ I have prospered, and I need nothing, not

¹⁰⁴ This is figurative language, for, according to Revelation 21:22, there is no temple in heaven. Jesus is the Cornerstone of the true temple. He is the “place” where people come to worship God, to find forgiveness, and to fellowship with God. The Christians who conquer will be part of the structure of the entire temple. They are the “stones” used to enlarge this temple. See Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-6. By calling these believers “pillars”, Jesus is emphasizing the importance of these seemingly weak believers.

¹⁰⁵ Again, this is not referring to a physical temple. It does not mean that conquering believers will, for all eternity, be living in a building. It is referring to the fact that conquering believers will never be driven from God’s presence. They will always walk in perfect fellowship with God.

¹⁰⁶ See Revelation 21:2 and 10. The Christians who conquer will be eternally identified with Jesus, with the new Jerusalem (referred to as Zion in the Psalms and other Old Testament books), and with God the Father. Identification with the name of Christ and the name of God the Father and the name of their great city is an important theme in Revelation. See Revelation 2:3, 13, 17, 3:8, 3:12, 11:18, 13:6, 14:1, 15:4, and 22:4. Those who are identified with Satan and his “beast” are identified with the name of the beast. See Revelation 13:17 and 14:11.

¹⁰⁷ See the note at 2:17.

¹⁰⁸ This is a quote from Psalm 89. See the note at 1:5.

¹⁰⁹ If the ancient Israelites didn’t keep God’s laws, they would be vomited out of the Promised Land (see Leviticus 18:25-28 and 20:22). In the same way, false Christians will be vomited from the kingdom of God. They will not be pillars in the temple (see 3:12). Instead, they will be judged as non-believers and will be numbered with the wicked who are outside the gates (see 22:15). This warning, as with all warnings, is grace to those who will receive it. This warning is a sign of Christ’s love for this church. See 3:19.

¹¹⁰ Compare to 2:9.

realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.¹¹¹

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.¹¹² **19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline,¹¹³ so be zealous and repent. **20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.¹¹⁴ **21** The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.¹¹⁵ **22** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

¹¹¹ This church is spiritually impoverished (compare this to Smyrna in 2:9). However, this church, like Sardis, is completely unaware of its spiritual state. Unlike Sardis, however, no mention is made of any conquering people in Laodicea. This is a church in name only. It has no faithful witness to Christ within it. All of the church's problems in verse 17 (it is “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”) are addressed in verse 18. The things listed here are used to describe disobedient Israelites in the Old Testament. See, for instance, Isaiah 42:18, Lamentations 1:8, Ezekiel 23:10, 18, 29, Hosea 2:9, Nahum 3:5.

¹¹² The church is commanded to “buy” items from Jesus. They are to buy gold, white garments, and salve for their eyes. This is the only way the problems described in the previous verse can be solved. Jesus is not talking about something that can be “bought” from him with money. He is talking about something that can be “bought” by doing the things described in verses 19 and 20.

¹¹³ Words of judgment by Christ are actually words of grace. They are gifts given to those he loves!

¹¹⁴ While this verse is often used by Christians when they are preaching the gospel to non-Christians, in Revelation this verse is used by Jesus when he is speaking to a faithless church! All churches need to ask if they have bought these items from Jesus and if they are eating with him.

¹¹⁵ See Psalm 110:1. See also Ephesians 2:6 and Colossians 3:1-4.

Revelation 4-5

The heavenly courtroom/temple

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.

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 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.

Revelation 4

4:1 After this¹¹⁶ I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”¹¹⁷ **2** At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.¹¹⁸ **3** And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow¹¹⁹ that had the appearance of an emerald. **4** Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with

¹¹⁶ “After this” does not mean that the things in this chapter happen after the events described in Revelation 2 and 3. It means this is the vision John saw next. See also 7:1, 7:9, 15:5, 18:1, and 19:1. This vision is not intended to tell the reader **when** these events take place in heaven. Rather, it is intended to tell the reader **what** is taking place in heaven. The worship constantly taking place in heaven is to be reflected on the earth (see Matthew 6:10).

¹¹⁷ Like many Old Testament prophets, John is brought into the council room of heaven. He is to carefully record all that he sees and to proclaim it to God’s people on earth.

John draws the words “what must take place after this” from Daniel 2:28-29. Similar words are used in Revelation 1:1 and 1:19.

¹¹⁸ It is interesting that John refers to the throne before he refers to the one seated on the throne! The word throne is used 17 times to refer to the throne of God in Revelation 4-5! This should give great comfort to the suffering churches! Everything that is happening on the earth is under the watchful eye of the one seated on the throne. While it appears that the world is in chaos, the church is reassured that the throne room of God is not in chaos. All is under control.

All three members of the Trinity play a key role in this vision. They are, as in Revelation 1:4-5, not described by the names “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit”. Notice, John doesn’t name the one who is seated on the throne. He could have said that it is God the Father. Instead, he chooses to describe him. John uses this description to force his readers to think hard about the one seated on the throne. Readers are, after careful consideration of the one seated on the throne, to join the “twenty-four elders” and the four creatures in worshipping God. That is the only appropriate response to the one seated on the throne. Regarding the throne of God in heaven, see Psalm 11:4, 103:19, and Ezekiel 1:26-28.

¹¹⁹ The rainbow in heaven is a reminder of the covenant God made after the flood (see Genesis 9:7-17). The rainbow brings comfort to God’s people, demonstrating that God remembers all of his promises and he will act in accordance with his word. He will show mercy to his people.

golden crowns on their heads.¹²⁰ **5** From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder,¹²¹ and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,¹²² **6** and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.¹²³

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: **7** the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.¹²⁴ **8** And the four living creatures, each of them with

¹²⁰ John does not say whether these 24 representatives of the people of God are human or angelic. While this may seem important, it is not the important question to be asking. The important question is, **what do the 24 elders symbolize?**

Revelation is filled with symbols. The 24 elders before the throne are representative of something. They probably are intended to represent the unity of the saints from the age of the Old Covenant and from the age of the New Covenant. The number 24 is fitting to represent all of the saints because the people of God under the Old Covenant were connected to the 12 tribes of Israel and the people of God under the New Covenant are connected to the 12 Apostles of Christ. This vision of 24 heavenly elders (12 tribes + 12 Apostles) worshiping in unity shows that there are not two people of God, but one people of God (see Ephesians 2:11-22 and Revelation 21:12-14). There are not two stories of salvation being told in the Bible. There is one story of salvation being told in the Bible.

It is significant to note how many times the number 12 and numbers connected to it (like 24) are used in Revelation. See also 7:4, 12:1, 21:12-14, 21:21, and 22:2.

¹²¹ See Exodus 19:16-19. See also Revelation 8:5, 11:19, and 16:18.

¹²² This is the Holy Spirit. The fact that John uses the phrase “the seven spirits of God” again is a reminder that the Spirit is at work in local churches. The churches, even though they may appear absent in this vision, are represented by the Holy Spirit!

¹²³ **The “sea of glass” symbolizes at least two things. First**, it symbolizes an absence of evil. The sea is a symbol of chaos and danger in the Bible. God alone is the one with the power to calm the sea and to bring his people through the sea (see Job 9:13, 26:12, 38:8-11, Psalm 65:7-8, 89:9-10, and 106:8-9). This is why Jesus’ disciples were so afraid when he calmed the sea (Mark 4:35-41)! He gave them a sign that he is God! In this vision in Revelation 4, the sea before the throne was like pure glass. This should bring great comfort to the church. Even though chaos seems to reign on the earth, there is no chaos in heaven. All things are under the control of the one who is seated on the throne. John borrows imagery here from Ezekiel 1:22. **Second**, this sea is intended to remind the reader of the Red Sea. The story of the Israelites being led by Moses through the Red Sea in the first exodus is symbolic of the far greater exodus led by Jesus through the “sea” in the second exodus. John will return to this image in Revelation 15:2.

¹²⁴ In the same way that the 24 elders are symbolic of the entire people of God, the four living creatures seem to be symbolic of all of creation. These creatures are worshipping God. The 24 elders are also worshipping God. This is a picture of all things bringing glory and honor to God. See Isaiah 6:1-4. See also Romans 8—a chapter celebrating the time when all of creation will be renewed.

six wings, are full of eyes all around and within,¹²⁵ and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”¹²⁶

4:9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.¹²⁷ They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

4:11 “Worthy are you,¹²⁸ our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,

¹²⁵ The fact that the creatures are “full of eyes” symbolizes God’s perfect vision. He sees all and knows all. The suffering churches can take great comfort in the fact that God sees their pain and has the power to deliver them. Old Testament passages with creatures like the four here include Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. There are differences between the creatures described in the Old Testament and the creatures described in Revelation. This is additional evidence that they are symbolic. It is significant that Solomon’s temple included panels with carvings of “lions, oxen, and cherubim” (1 Kings 7:27-37). These carvings are a reflection of the true and complete worship that has always taken place in heaven and which should be taking place on the earth.

¹²⁶ This is an echo of the praise offered to God in Isaiah 6:3.

Regarding the name “who was and is and is to come” see the note connected to Revelation 1:4.

¹²⁷ Two different times in verses 9 and 10 John refers to God the Father as “**him who is seated on the throne**” and him “**who lives forever and ever**”. Again, John has chosen to refer to God the Father in an unusual way. He wants his readers to think very hard about the Father’s position (he is seated on the throne) and about the length of his life (he lives forever and ever). The fact that God the Father lives forever and ever means that he reigns forever and ever. Those who are suffering can take great comfort in the fact that there has never been a time and there will never be a time when God the Father has not been ruling over all things! It is the joy and obligation of the preacher and teacher to carefully and completely proclaim these truths.

¹²⁸ Compare this verse to 5:9. 4:11 outlines why God is **worthy** to receive glory and honor and power. 5:9 outlines why Jesus is **worthy** to receive the “scroll”.

and by your will they existed and were created.”¹²⁹

Revelation 5

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll¹³⁰ written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.¹³¹ **2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” **3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **4** and I began to weep loudly because no one was

¹²⁹ This “hymn” is a perfect summary of Revelation 4. The hymn emphasizes that God “created all things”. The 24 elders and the creatures around the throne are symbols of “all things”. In heaven, which is perfect, all things worship God at all times. The local churches need to know this! May the worship of the saints on earth reflect the worship constantly taking place in heaven.

This hymn refers to God’s “will”. It is clear that God’s will is that all things worship him. This is why all things were created. The punishment that is poured out on the earth in chapters 6 through 20 is directly related to mankind refusing to obey God’s will. They refuse to obey God’s will because they refuse to worship him. True worship includes repentance from evil deeds.

¹³⁰ A scroll is also used as a symbol in Ezekiel 2:9-10. See also Isaiah 29:11 and Daniel 12:4.

¹³¹ It is significant that the scroll is the first thing seen in Revelation 5. The scroll is clearly very important. In fact, the contents of the scroll are the subject of most of the book of Revelation! The significance of the scroll is also seen in John’s great weeping regarding the scroll remaining unopened!

The scroll is a symbol of something. But what does it symbolize? It will help the reader to remember that this vision of the scroll is connected to the vision of heavenly worship in Revelation 4. Thus, this scroll is somehow connected to worship. Perfect worship in heaven was pictured in Revelation 4. That chapter ended with a declaration that all things should worship God. He is worthy of “glory and honor and power”. Based on Revelation 4, it is clear that God is receiving “glory and honor and power” in heaven. However, God is not receiving this worship on earth. The scroll is connected to this lack of worship that is taking place on earth.

Based on the events that take place in later chapters in Revelation when the scroll is opened, this scroll seems to be a symbol for **all of the events that are necessary to take place for perfect worship to take place**. That is why the scroll has **seven** seals. The number seven is a symbol that the scroll contains the **complete plan** and there is no other plan to accomplish this task apart from what is contained in the scroll. This scroll is the plan by which God causes his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. The scroll contains God’s plan for rescuing his people from evil, his plan for punishing the wicked, and his plan for bringing in full worship. Who is the one who is worthy to bring about God’s plan?

found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.¹³² **5** And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of

¹³² The words from verse 3 are repeated in verse 4. This repeating of words emphasizes the tragedy of the fallen human race. Not one person in all of history is worthy to open the scroll and to cause God’s plans to come to pass. John weeps and weeps because if the scroll is not opened, God’s plans will not be fulfilled. If the scroll is not opened, the universe will remain broken, and God will not receive the worship he so richly deserves. The scroll can only be opened by a person who is “worthy”. A worthy person is a person who “has conquered” (see verse 5). Unfortunately, no one on earth has conquered.

Judah,¹³³ the Root of David,¹³⁴ has conquered,¹³⁵ so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”¹³⁶

5:6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God

¹³³ See Genesis 49:8-12. This is the first explicit promise that God’s anointed king (the Christ) will be from the tribe of Judah. In these verses he is compared to a lion. See also Numbers 24:9, which is a quotation from Genesis 49.

¹³⁴ See Jesus’ words in Revelation 22:16. See also Isaiah 11:1-10, which is closely connected to this title (Isaiah 11 speaks of the “root of Jesse”—Jesse was King David’s father). The title “root of David” is, like a sponge full of water, a title holding a great deal of theology. The words “of David” emphasize that Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah), **the Anointed King who was to come from the line of David**. Significant passages related to the rule of the Christ are found throughout the Old Testament. As an introduction to the theme of the Christ, the preacher and teacher should carefully read 2 Samuel 7:1-17, Psalm 2, and Psalm 110.

But this title is saying much more than that Jesus is David’s heir, the Anointed King who will rule forever. This title emphasizes that Jesus is the healthy “root” that was promised in the Old Testament. Because the root is healthy, the fruit from this root will also be healthy. Based on the previous chapter, it is clear that healthy fruit is praise of God.

Old Testament passages frequently speak of the unhealthy root of the people of Israel. In Deuteronomy 29:18-19, Moses warns the people of Israel that they must not become stubborn in their hearts. If they do, Moses warns, they will be like a “root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit”. This is exactly what happened. Because of the people’s hard hearts, the land was filled with “poisonous and bitter fruit”. See, for instance, Isaiah 5:24, Hosea 9:16-17 (in this passage, Ephraim is another name for Israel), and Malachi 4:1. These passages emphasize that Israel bore poisonous fruit because it had a diseased root. But this is not the only root spoken of in the Old Testament. Many Old Testament passages promise that God would, in the last days, plant a healthy root. See Isaiah 11 (particularly verses 1 and 10), Isaiah 27:1-6, Isaiah 53:2, Jeremiah 17:7-8, and Hosea 14:4-7. See also Jesus’ words about fruitfulness in John 15:1-17, for they are connected to these Old Testament promises! See also Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12.

¹³⁵ Conquering is a theme in Revelation. The churches were told that they must conquer. The Lion, according to this verse, has already conquered. His battle, even in this early chapter of Revelation, is described as if it is complete. The results of Jesus’ conquering are seen in verses 9-10. Because Jesus has conquered, he is rewarded with the privilege of opening the scroll. It is significant that the churches are told that they must conquer, but their conquering is not described as if it is complete (see Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21, and 21:7). Even though Jesus’ victory is complete, the results of Jesus’ victory will not be fully known until every enemy is under his feet (see Psalm 110:1). In this sense, he is still conquering and will be conquering until the very end (see Revelation 17:14). Jesus’ completed victory—and the ongoing victories connected to that victory—should give local churches great confidence that they will, if they persevere, also conquer.

¹³⁶ The reader is, like John, longing for the scroll to be opened. How will God’s purposes be accomplished?

sent out into all the earth.¹³⁷ **7** And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. **8** And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb,¹³⁸ each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.¹³⁹ **9** And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you¹⁴⁰ to take the scroll
and to open its seals,¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ This is a surprising image. Based on the **words** of the elder, the reader is expecting to see a Lion. Instead, however, the reader sees a Lamb. The Lamb hasn't replaced the Lion. Instead, the Lamb is the Lion. These two images cannot be separated. The reader is to carefully think about both of these symbols of Christ, for, in them, the entire gospel message is contained. The **words** about the Lion came first, for Jesus is the Anointed King. And we must never forget who he is. However, it is significant that the **symbol** we are to think of when we think of the Christ isn't a lion. It's a lamb. The lion image never appears in this vision except in the words of the elder. The reader “hears” about the Lion, but “sees” the Lamb. **Interestingly, after this point in Revelation, Christ is never referred to as a Lion again.** The Lion is constantly referred to as the Lamb (see 5:6, 5:8, 5:12, 5:13, 6:1, 6:16, 7:5, 7:10, 7:14, 7:17, 8:1, 12:11, 13:8, 13:11, 14:1, 14:4, 14:10, 15:3, 17:14, 19:7, 19:9, 21:9, 21:14, 21:22, 21:27, 22:1, and 22:3). The reader is never to think of the conquering Christ without remembering that he conquered by offering himself as a sacrifice. The Lion conquered by becoming the Lamb. See John 1:29. This is why other images of the conquering Christ also include reminders of Christ's death (see Revelation 19:13).

The Lamb looks like it has died. But the Lamb is not dead. He is very strong. This is why he is described as having seven horns. The seven horns are a symbol of the fullness of his strength. He is also filled with God's Spirit. This is why he has seven eyes. This is a symbol of the fullness of the Spirit that rests upon the Lion-Lamb.

It is perhaps significant that the priests who marched around Jericho were blowing seven ram's horns (see Joshua 6:4-13). The destruction of Jericho was a small picture of the far greater city (Babylon) that would fall because of the Lamb with seven horns. In the same way that the Israelites followed the priests with the seven horns, the church follows the Lamb with the seven horns. The connections to the events that took place at Jericho will grow stronger later in Revelation. Again, images in the Old Testament are greatly magnified in Revelation.

¹³⁸ It is significant that the 24 elders and the four living creatures do the same thing before the Lamb as they do before the one seated on the throne. Christ is God (see, for instance, John 20:28). As God, Jesus is to be worshipped. This was true when Jesus was on earth. It is true today. It will be true forever.

¹³⁹ In the Old Testament, the smoke from an incense offering ascended to heaven. This was pleasing to God. Prayers are compared to incense. The pleasing aroma of prayer ascends to heaven and pleases God. Thus, prayer is worship. Every local church should ask if they are offering this type of worship to God.

¹⁴⁰ Compare to 4:11.

¹⁴¹ The Lamb doesn't merely take the scroll. By opening the seals, he is causing the things written in the scroll to come to pass.

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁴²

10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”¹⁴³

5:11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels,¹⁴⁴ numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb¹⁴⁵ who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”¹⁴⁶

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb¹⁴⁷ be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

¹⁴² Different forms of the phrase “from every tribe and language and people and nation” are repeated in 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, and 17:15. Christ’s victory stretches across the entire planet. A similar phrase is repeated in Daniel 3-7. Worship of God and of the Lamb will cover the entire earth. The fact that these people are called priests indicates that the world is God’s temple. This is an early hint of the **worldwide temple** pictured at the end of Revelation. The priests in this worldwide temple are from every people group.

¹⁴³ See Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 61:6, and 1 Peter 2:9-10. See also Revelation 1:6.

¹⁴⁴ **Millions of angels** have joined the elders and the creatures. Thus, we see a vision of all created things declaring the greatness of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴⁵ See Psalm 18:3.

¹⁴⁶ This verse demands very careful reading. All of the creatures in heaven (the four living creatures, the 24 elders, and thousands of angels) are declaring far more than that Christ is worthy of receiving **some** of the “power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing”. The Greek text says that he is worthy of receiving “**THE**” power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (the word “the” does not appear in the ESV). This means that **all** power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing belong to Christ. His victory means that all of the available riches of the universe—whether in praise or riches or strength—belong to him. All of the creatures in heaven acknowledge this fact! The fact that people on earth refuse to join in this worship of the Lamb is something that will be addressed as the scroll is opened.

¹⁴⁷ Chapter four began with one seated on the throne receiving worship. In chapter five, the Lamb receives worship. At the end of chapter five, both the one seated on the throne (God the Father) and the Lamb (God the Son) receive worship together. This is another passage clearly demonstrating that Jesus is God.

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.

Revelation 6

6:1 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” **2** And I looked, and behold, a white horse!¹⁴⁸ And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.¹⁴⁹

6:3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” **4** And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

6:5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ This chapter is related to a vision that Zechariah the prophet saw. In Zechariah's vision, he sees four different colored horses with their riders in a glen of myrtle trees. Zechariah asks an angel about the meaning of the horses. The angel says that the four horses are “they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth”. The riders then say, “We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest” (see Zechariah 1:7-17). The fact that the earth is at rest while the people of God are suffering troubles the angel of the LORD and he asks Yahweh to show mercy to his people. In answer to the angel's cry, Yahweh says that he will comfort his people and that he is “exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease”. It would appear that the four horses and riders in Revelation are to be connected with the four horses and riders in Zechariah. The careful reader will note a major difference between Zechariah and Revelation. In Zechariah, the horses and riders were sent to patrol the earth. In Revelation, the horses and riders are sent out to take peace from the earth. They are being sent because God is angry with the nations (see Revelation 6:16-17).

¹⁴⁹ Later in Revelation, Christ and the armies of heaven are pictured riding on white horses (see Revelation 19:11 and 19:14). However, this white horse and its rider is not a symbol of Christ or of the saints. It is not a symbol of the antichrist. The white horse is one of the symbols used to demonstrate that God is pouring out his wrath on the earth. The fact that there are four horses described in four different ways demonstrates that God will pour out his wrath in many ways and his wrath will be complete.

¹⁵⁰ There are limits to the destruction that will be poured out on the earth. Here, the oil and wine are spared. The reader is not told why this limit is put in place. A limit to the destruction is also seen in verse 8, where the destruction is limited to a fourth of the earth. The fact that the horsemen are limited in the destruction they cause should be a comfort to the people of God. This is a demonstration that God is in full control of everything that is happening. This is also a demonstration that God is giving people time to repent. In the same way that pharaoh and the people of Egypt were to recognize the wrath of God and were to repent of their evil deeds, the people on earth are to recognize the wrath of God and they are to repent of their evil deeds.

6:7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” **8** And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

6:9¹⁵¹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar¹⁵² the souls of those who had been slain¹⁵³ for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. **10** They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”¹⁵⁴ **11** Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be

¹⁵¹ Verses 9-11 are key to understanding this entire chapter. Verses 9-11 describe the saints who have died because of the persecution they have faced and the witness they have maintained even while they are suffering. These saints have conquered (see Revelation 2 and 3)—“they loved not their lives even unto death” (Revelation 12:11). These saints have been brought to heaven, however, they are concerned with the events taking place on the earth! These saints know what is happening on earth and they are calling for God to judge those who have persecuted them. They want to know when he will “**avenge**” their blood. These verses focus on the saints who have died and who are in heaven. However, they are written for the benefit of saints who are living on the earth! These verses demonstrate that the saints in heaven are deeply concerned about the injustice being done on the earth. All of heaven is watching the rebellion and waiting for judgment to take place. This should comfort the suffering churches on earth. There will be an end to all suffering!

Based on the words of the saints in heaven and on the response that is given to their question, it is clear that the church is on earth during the events described in this chapter. Thus, even while God is pouring out his wrath on the citizens of the earth, the citizens of the earth are persecuting the saints!

¹⁵² It is significant that the souls of those who have been slain are “under the altar”. This is a demonstration that their death was worship to God. See Romans 12:1. See also Paul’s description of himself as a “drink offering” in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

¹⁵³ Note that the Lamb is also described “as though it had been slain” (see Revelation 5:6).

¹⁵⁴ This is another connection between this passage and the passage about four horses and riders in Zechariah 1. The saints, like the angel of the LORD in Zechariah 1:12-13, ask God how long until he will judge the earth. In Zechariah, Yahweh “answered gracious and comforting words to the angel”. In Revelation, the saints are “each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer”. God will judge “those who dwell on the earth” (the citizens of Babylon) for the way they have treated the saints (the citizens of the new Jerusalem). This prayer of the martyrs will be answered in Revelation 19:2. Between the prayer in this chapter and the answer in Revelation 19 is a great deal of suffering.

complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. ¹⁵⁵

6:12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, **13** and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵⁶ **15** Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, **16** calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, **17** for

¹⁵⁵ These “souls” may represent only those Christians who have been killed for their faith. However, based on the way Revelation has emphasized (and will continue to emphasize) the suffering of **all saints**, it seems more likely that those under the altar represent all conquering saints who have gone to be with the Lord. The Christian offers his or her life as a sacrifice to God. Again, this is why the saints are pictured **under the altar**. There aren’t two classes of saints. There is only one kind of saint: those who have conquered. All saints are waiting for God to fully and finally judge evil. It should bring great encouragement to the saints that a day is coming when all persecution will end.

¹⁵⁶ This is **symbolic language** describing the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb being poured out on the earth. The reader is to understand that the citizens of the earth deserve this wrath because of their rebellion against God. The descriptions of the events that are taking place in the outpouring of wrath are not intended to be taken **“literally”**. In other words, these verses do not mean that a day is coming when literal stars will be falling onto the earth. Stars are larger than the earth, so this cannot be the intended meaning. (Beyond this, Revelation 8:12 speaks of one-third of the stars being “struck”. How could this be if the stars had already fallen to earth in Revelation 6?) These verses do not mean that the sky itself will vanish. (Revelation 8:12 speaks of the destruction of a third of the sun, moon, and stars. This means that the sky will still be in existence after the events of Revelation 6.) These verses do not mean that every island and mountain will be removed. And these verses do not mean that every single person on earth will literally hide in the rocks of the mountains. **John’s vision is symbolic.** John’s description of this vision is intended to “paint a picture” in the mind of the reader. This is a vision of the full fury of the heavenly wrath that is being poured out on the earth! This is the punishment that the citizens of the earth deserve because of their rebellion against God and because of their persecution of God’s people! The wrath of “him who is seated on the throne” and “the wrath of the Lamb” have come. No one is able to stand against this wrath! No one is able to escape from this wrath except those who are in Christ.

the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ The question asked at the end of chapter 6 is a perfect introduction to Revelation 7. Only those who are sealed by God are able to endure when he pours out his wrath. A similar question is asked in Joel 2:11: “For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?”.

The images in these verses are frequently used in Old Testament and New Testament passages that speak of “the Day of the Lord”. The Day of the Lord is a term used to describe the time when God pours out his wrath on sinful man, when he rescues his people, and when he alone is exalted. Old Testament passages using Day of the Lord imagery include Isaiah 2:19, 13:9-11, Ezekiel 32:7, 38:20, Hosea 10:8, Joel 2:10-11, 31, 3:15, and Micah 3:6. New Testament passages using Day of the Lord imagery include Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:25, Luke 21:25, 23:30, Acts 2:20, Revelation 8:10-12, and 12:4 (and many other passages in Revelation).

Matthew’s description of Jesus’ death demonstrates that Jesus’ death was a “Day of the Lord” event (carefully read Matthew 27:45-50). Matthew’s descriptions of Jesus’ death should remind the reader of “Day of the Lord” images in the Old Testament. At the cross, God poured his wrath out on Jesus. This was not because Jesus was sinful. Rather, Jesus bore the sins of God’s people as a substitute (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). On this day, the people of God were rescued. And on this day, God alone was exalted. The fact that Jesus has borne the wrath of God for all of God’s people for all time means that the Christian can live without fear of God’s wrath (see 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9). For the Christian, the Day of the Lord has already come. The Christian is **already** living in the kingdom of God as a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). At the same time, however, Christians living on earth are still in the world. They have **not yet** experienced the kingdom in all of its fullness. Christians are waiting for Christ’s coming when he completes the good work he began in them. This is not true for those who will not come to God through Christ. Those who refuse to repent and place their faith in the work Christ accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, will face the outpouring of God’s wrath.

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!

Revelation 7

7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.¹⁵⁸ **2** Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, **3** saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God

¹⁵⁸ This chapter answers a very important question that is tied to the events described in Revelation 6. Revelation 6, remember, speaks of the outpouring of God’s wrath upon the disobedient. But what will happen to the saints who are on earth? They are not in rebellion against God. Is God pouring his wrath out on them? Is God making any distinction between the righteous and unrighteous? **Revelation 7 proclaims that God will protect his people from his wrath and that all of God’s people will be saved. None of them will be lost.** This does not mean that God’s people will not suffer. All Christians will suffer persecution. It means that all Christians will be saved by God from God’s wrath. This chapter begins with a vision of God’s people being sealed on earth. It ends with a vision of God’s people having been safely delivered to his presence!

In Revelation 7:1, John sees “four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth”. The “four winds” described in 7:1 are symbols of God’s wrath. Why are the angels holding the winds back? They are doing this so that God’s people might be protected from God’s wrath! The reader needs to remember the four horses and riders in Revelation 6. These were **symbols** of God’s wrath. The “four winds” in Revelation 7 seem to be **another symbol** used to describe the same thing. Thus, the “four winds” in Revelation 7 are equal to the “four horses and riders” described in Revelation 6. The four winds blowing on the earth are doing the same thing as the four horses and riders riding throughout the earth. Both are symbols of God’s wrath. The saints need to know that God, in order to be holy and to protect the honor of his name and the glory of the Christ, must pour his wrath out on the earth. But the saints need to know that God will protect them from this wrath. This chapter demonstrates that God does this. He seals all of those who love and trust him.

The fact that God’s people are protected by God as he pours out his wrath should bring great comfort to the Christian. God’s protection of his people is a theme seen throughout the Bible. The Christian should remember the ten plagues that were poured out on the Egyptians. At that time, the Lord made a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This doesn’t mean the Israelites didn’t suffer. It means God protected them in the midst of their suffering. The Lord made a distinction between Lot and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the Lord made a distinction between Noah and the wicked people of the earth at that time. See also Matthew 24:31.

on their foreheads.”¹⁵⁹ 4 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.¹⁶⁰

7:5 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,¹⁶¹

12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,

12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

6 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,

12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,

12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

7 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,

12,000 from the tribe of Levi,

12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

8 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,

12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,

¹⁵⁹ The righteous are distinguished from the unrighteous because they are sealed on their foreheads. The unrighteous, as will be seen in later chapters, also have a “mark” on their foreheads (see 13:16)! This “sealing” on the foreheads of the righteous is further defined in 14:1. According to this verse, to be sealed means that the name of the Lamb and the name of God the Father is written on one’s forehead (see also 9:4 and 22:4). **A name written on a forehead is a symbol of ownership and of worship. It is a sign of one’s true identity.** The people of God have his name written on their foreheads. The fact that God’s people have his name and the name of the Lamb written on their foreheads means they are owned by God and known by God. It means they love God and worship God. All those who are “sealed” in this way will be protected by God. The people of God are also identified because they do not have the name of Satan’s false christ on their foreheads (see 20:4). Instead, they hate his work and are grieved by sin (see also Ezekiel 9). The wicked are identified because they do not have God’s name on their foreheads (see 9:4). Instead, the name of “the beast” (Satan’s false christ) is written on their foreheads (see Revelation 13:16 and 14:9). To have the name of Satan’s false christ on one’s forehead is a symbol that a person is owned by him and knows him and loves him and worships him.

¹⁶⁰ In the same way that Revelation 5:5–6 records John **hearing** about the Lion but **seeing** something surprising and different (a Lamb), in this chapter John **hears** the number of the sealed (144,000), but **sees** something surprising and different (“a great multitude that no one could number”)! John tells his readers what he hears and what he sees. This allows the reader to “experience” the vision as John experienced it. The reader is expecting to **see** 144,000 people (7:4). Instead, however, the reader **sees** “a great multitude that no one could number” (7:9). **This great multitude hasn’t replaced the 144,000. Instead, this multitude is the 144,000.** Like the Lion and the Lamb, these two images cannot be separated. The reader is to carefully think about both of these symbols of the people of God, for, in them, the full impact of the saving work of Christ upon people is proclaimed.

¹⁶¹ Judah is listed first among the tribes listed here even though he was not Jacob’s firstborn son. The order has been changed to put Judah first because Jesus is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”. All of the “tribes” naturally follow after Judah.

12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.¹⁶²

7:9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”¹⁶³ **11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

¹⁶² This is another instance where it helps the reader to remember that numbers in apocalyptic literature are typically symbolic. The reader is immediately struck by the perfection of the numbers in verses 4-8. 144,000 people are sealed. This number is taken from “every tribe of the sons of Israel”. There are 12 tribes listed here. 12,000 people from each tribe are sealed. Even though the number of the people who are sealed is the exact same in each tribe, John takes the time to name each tribe and to list the precise number of people in it that are sealed. The reader needs to ask, “Why is each tribe listed by name? Why are the precise numbers for each tribe given even though they are the same?” **The fact that 12,000 are taken from the 12 tribes is symbolic of the fact that God will seal (and therefore save) all those who are “true Jews” (see Romans 2:28-29). This is a reference to those who are circumcised inwardly! In other words, this is a description of all those who are in Christ! The precise number indicates that God knows his people perfectly and he will save every single one of them. Not one of them will be swept away by the flood of his wrath.**

John is not the first New Testament writer to refer to Christians as members of the “twelve tribes”. James uses this same terminology when he writes to the church (see James 1:1). And while he doesn’t use the words “twelve tribes”, by using the words “elect exiles of the dispersion”, it is clear that Peter is thinking of Christians in this same way (see 1 Peter 1:1).

It is significant to note that this list is different from the list of tribes in the Old Testament. Again, Judah is listed first. In addition, the tribe of Dan is missing. Dan was particularly associated with idol worship (see Judges 18). **The fact that Dan is missing is another demonstration that only those who conquer will be saved. Dan seems to be a symbol of all those who commit “sexual immorality” with the world while claiming to follow God. These adulterous people, like Dan, will not be saved.**

¹⁶³ The second half of Revelation 7 (verses 9-17) is connected to the first half of Revelation 7 (verses 1-8). They need to be read together, for both sections are referring to the same group of people! The 144,000 people are symbolic of all of the people of God. The precise number indicates that God counted all of them. None of them will be destroyed when he pours out his wrath. **This number, as stated earlier, is heard by John. However, he sees something very different. In 7:9, John sees a vision of the actual number of God’s people. It is far more than 144,000. The true number of God’s people is “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages”.** The second half of chapter 7 isn’t a vision of the saints on earth being protected from God’s wrath. It is a vision of the saints worshiping before the throne. They have been delivered! None of them were damaged by the wrath of God. This innumerable multitude has joined the elders and living creatures and angels described in Revelation 4 and 5. This vision should bring great encouragement to the saints today as they suffer on earth. None of the saints will be lost. All of the saints will be delivered.

12 saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”¹⁶⁴

7:13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes,”¹⁶⁵ and from where have they come?” **14** I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.”¹⁶⁶ They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

7:15 “Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with
his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;

¹⁶⁴ These words demonstrate that the saints and all the beings in heaven understand the greatness of our God and they joyfully celebrate his perfection. It is significant that the article “the” appears in the Greek before each of the items listed in verse 12. “**The** blessing and **the** glory and **the** wisdom and **the** thanksgiving and **the** power and **the** might belong to our God forever and ever.” This is an indication that **all** of the blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, power, and might belong to God. See also 5:13.

¹⁶⁵ White robes (sometimes referred to as white garments or white clothing or white linen) are a significant symbol in the book of Revelation. The white robes are a symbol of righteousness. The fact that the saints are wearing white robes means God has counted these people as righteous and, because of this, they are welcome in his presence. This is not because these people have never sinned. These people have been cleansed of all sin because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and because of their faith in him (see Ephesians 2:1-10, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Hebrews 9:11-22, and 1 John 1:7). The white robes are a sign that these people have conquered. The white robes are a sign of the righteous deeds they have done. See 3:4, 3:18, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 7:11, 7:13, 19:14. See also Daniel 11:35 and 12:10.

¹⁶⁶ The people standing before the throne have come out of “**the great tribulation**”. The nature of “the great tribulation” is defined in verses 16-17. It is a time of hunger, thirst, blinding sun, scorching heat, and many tears. These things are all symbolic of the many difficulties the saints face on earth. When is this time of great tribulation? Based on the fact that this book is intended to encourage suffering churches in all places and from all time periods that they must conquer, and based on the fact that, at the time this book was written, churches were already suffering greatly, it appears that this great tribulation is a description of the entire period from Christ’s death until his second coming. This means Christians today are already suffering in “the great tribulation”. The fact that the great tribulation has begun, however, does not mean that it will remain the same until Christ returns. There have been times when suffering has increased. And there have been times when suffering has decreased. There are places where suffering has been greater. And there are places where suffering has been less. However, the New Testament seems to indicate that the tribulation will grow stronger as Christ’s coming draws nearer. Significant Old Testament passages **related** to this time period of tribulation include Deuteronomy 4:29-31 and Daniel 12:1. The words “great tribulation” are also used in Matthew 24:21 and Revelation 2:22.

the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

- 17** For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,¹⁶⁷
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ See Psalm 23. Regarding living water, see Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13, Ezekiel 47:9, Zechariah 14:8, John 4:10-11, and 7:38.

¹⁶⁸ This last phrase is a quote from Isaiah 25:8. Isaiah 25 should be read in connection with this chapter. See also Revelation 21:4.

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.

Revelation 8

8:1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.¹⁶⁹ **2** Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. **3** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints¹⁷⁰ on the golden altar before the throne, **4** and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. **5** Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.¹⁷¹

8:6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to

¹⁶⁹ Like the strange stillness before a great storm, all of the citizens of heaven are silent because God has roused himself in anger. It is significant that Revelation 8 speaks of silence in heaven. It does not speak of the people on earth being silent. The lack of silence on the earth demonstrates that the people on earth do not take God seriously. They do not consider the wrath of God to be a serious matter (see Revelation 9:20-21).

This verse is connected to Zechariah 2:13: “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.” All people (not just those in heaven) are called to be silent because God “has roused himself”. He has “roused himself” so that he might punish the nations because of how they have treated his people. Zechariah 2 is closely related to the events in Revelation and should be read carefully. See also Habakkuk 2:20. This passage, like Zechariah 2:13, calls the earth to be silent because God is coming in wrath. Habakkuk 3 is closely related to the events in Revelation and should be read carefully.

¹⁷⁰ The fact that the “prayers of the saints” are being presented as an offering to God demonstrates that the local church is still in view in this chapter (see also Revelation 5:8). The saints on earth are praying as God’s wrath is being poured out on the earth. The fact that the prayers are brought before God means that God is paying attention to the prayers. He knows the needs of the saints and he is answering their prayers! We are not told what the saints are praying about. However, it seems likely that they would be praying that God would, through the outpouring of his wrath, be glorified. Beyond this, the saints would be asking God to deliver them from the troubles they are facing. They would be asking God to fill them with his power and enable them to speak the name of Jesus with great boldness. They would be asking God to open doors so that the gospel might be heard in every place. And they would be asking God to bring many to repentance. A prayer like this is offered in Acts 4:23-31. It is helpful to read the prayers (or promises to pray) that have been offered by the saints during periods of intense suffering. See, for instance, Habakkuk 3:17-19.

¹⁷¹ See Revelation 4:5, 11:19, and 16:18.

blow them.¹⁷²

8:7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third¹⁷³ of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.¹⁷⁴

8:8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.¹⁷⁵

8:10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from

¹⁷² Seven trumpets were blown by seven priests before Jericho was destroyed (see Joshua 6:4-5). The destruction of rebellious Jericho is a small picture of the destruction that is coming upon the entire earth. In the same way that the reader of Joshua wouldn't focus attention on just one of the trumpets being blown before Jericho was destroyed, the reader shouldn't focus too much attention on any one of the trumpets described in Revelation 8 or 9. They are meant to be considered together.

¹⁷³ This chapter refers to wrath that is being poured out on the earth. However, this wrath is limited in its impact. For instance, only "a third" of the earth is "burned up". With the exception of the green grass, all of the judgments in this chapter are limited to "a third". Why is this? This isn't because only a third of the earth deserves judgment. Rather, God is showing mercy so that people might turn from their sins.

¹⁷⁴ These plagues are intended to remind the reader of the plagues that destroyed Egypt at the time of the first exodus (see, for instance, Exodus 9:18-26). In the same way that the Israelites needed to know that God was pouring his wrath out on Egypt, Christians who read these words need to know that God is pouring his wrath out on the earth. Knowledge of this keeps Christians from becoming confused about the events taking place on earth. But these words about God's wrath do more than just explain the way God is pouring out his wrath. These words about the outpouring of God's wrath are grace to Christians, because they are one of the ways he causes his people to walk in holiness. For the Christian, Revelation 8 and 9 are gracious words of warning. **These words are one of the ways God keeps his people from rebellion.** For the Christian, these are chapters of great grace! But these chapters serve another purpose as well. The Christians who read these words are to use them in their preaching and teaching. These words about the wrath of God demonstrate that God is angry about sin. They prove that he will punish all those who do not repent (see Revelation 9:20-21). These words are a gracious warning to the world that they must repent before they, too, are destroyed by the wrath of God.

Key elements of the first exodus are also present in Revelation. The Passover lamb is the key to deliverance of God's people in the first exodus. The Lamb is the key to deliverance of God's people in this second exodus. After their deliverance, the Israelites sang a song of praise (see Exodus 15). This song is repeated in Revelation 15:3-4.

¹⁷⁵ In the Egyptian plagues, the plague of blood impacted the Nile river and the fish living in it. The plague of blood in Revelation is many times worse than the Egyptian plague. The plagues striking rebellious Egypt were a small picture of the plagues that will strike the entire rebellious world. In the same way that Genesis 1-2 record the creation of the heavens and earth, this chapter records what some scholars have described as the **de-creation** of the heavens and the earth. This de-creation continues throughout Revelation.

heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. **11** The name of the star is Wormwood.¹⁷⁶ A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

8:12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.¹⁷⁷

8:13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”¹⁷⁸

Revelation 9

9:1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. **2** He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. **3** Then from the smoke came locusts¹⁷⁹ on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. **4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only

¹⁷⁶ See Jeremiah 9:14-15 and 23:15. Wormwood is the name of an herb with a very bitter taste. The herb was probably called wormwood because people used (and still use!) this plant to treat intestinal worms. Because of its extremely bitter taste, “wormwood” became a symbol for the judgment and great bitterness that is associated with sin (see Proverbs 5:3-6, Lamentations 3:15,19, Amos 5:7, 6:12). It is as if, because of its idolatry, the world has been completely infected with worms on the inside. God causes the world to drink bitter “**wormwood water**” because of this. It is what they deserve. See also Exodus 32:19-20 and Deuteronomy 29:18. Compare the bitter drink that brings death to the world to the springs of living water in Revelation 7:17. Also consider Exodus 15:23-25. In that passage, bitter water is made sweet.

¹⁷⁷ See Exodus 10:21-29.

¹⁷⁸ John has already referred to the prayers of the saints. However, he doesn’t refer to other things that the saints are doing on the earth because his focus, in this chapter, isn’t on the saints. It is on the wrath of God that is poured out on the wicked citizens of the earth. John has already described how God will protect the saints during this time period (see Revelation 7). Based on Revelation 7, the saints can be assured that their faith in God will not be damaged by the wrath of God when he pours his wrath out on the earth.

¹⁷⁹ See Exodus 10:1-20.

those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.¹⁸⁰

5 They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. **6** And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

9:7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, **8** their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; **9** they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. **10** They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.¹⁸¹ **11** They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

9:12 The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

9:13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, **14** saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." **15** So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.¹⁸² **16** The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their

¹⁸⁰ Again, the saints are referred to in this chapter. The "locusts" are not allowed to harm those who "have the seal of God on their foreheads" (see Revelation 7:1-8 and notes). Verses like these should bring great comfort to the church. God controls everything. If anything causes the church to suffer, it is only because he permits it. The local churches are being protected by God.

¹⁸¹ John carefully describes the locusts. Why is this? It is not so that we can connect them to something on earth (like, perhaps, a helicopter). They are symbols of something, and the reader is to think very hard about them. They are, at the very least, intended to remind the reader of the plague of locusts in Exodus 10:1-20. These demonic "creatures" in Revelation are called locusts. Like locusts, they swarm over all people and destroy everything. But these are worse than normal locusts. They don't disappear in a matter of days. Instead, these locusts have power to torment people for "five months". This is far longer than the life-span of an average locust. But even the great power of these "super-locusts" is limited. Again, wrath has been limited by God. The torment caused by the locusts is long enough to cause people intense suffering, however it ends after a relatively brief period. This should be seen as evidence that God is giving people a chance to repent. See 2 Peter 3:9.

¹⁸² God is in control of all events that are taking place. This should comfort the church. In the same way that the plagues in Egypt grew worse and worse, the plagues facing the earth will grow worse and worse.

number.¹⁸³ **17** And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. **18** By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. **19** For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

9:20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, **21** nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ John **sees** a powerful army and he **hears** the number of its “mounted troops”. There are 200 million warriors executing the wrath of God! The large number of “mounted troops” is symbolic. It is a demonstration that the wrath of God will not be small, and it will not be confined to one small area of the earth. It will be experienced by people throughout the entire world.

¹⁸⁴ The “limited” judgment poured out in chapter 9 should have caused the people of the world to repent of their sin and to worship God. However, like pharaoh at the time of the first exodus, the people of the world refuse to repent (see also Revelation 16:9-11). The rebellious people in the world continue to harden their hearts and continue in sin. Because of the world’s refusal to repent and worship God, the reader of Revelation should expect the coming chapters to speak of increased judgment. Indeed, as the reader moves through Revelation, the “limits” on God’s wrath are removed. In other words, no longer is judgment sent on a third of the people. Because of the world’s refusal to repent, judgment will come on all people. John’s words here are echoes of many Old Testament passages. See Psalm 115:4-8, 135:15-18, Isaiah 2:6-22, 17:7-8, Daniel 5:1-4, 22-23, Micah 5:10-15, and Nahum 3:1-4. The world acts as if it can behave by its own standards. However, the world is held to the standard outlined in the Ten Commandments. See Exodus 20:13-15.

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.

Revelation 10

10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.¹⁸⁵ **2** He had a little scroll open in his hand.¹⁸⁶ And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land,¹⁸⁷ **3** and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring.¹⁸⁸ When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.¹⁸⁹ **4** And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven

¹⁸⁵ It is possible that this is an angel (see also 18:21). However, John’s description of this “mighty angel” suggests that this is more than just an angel. For instance, John says that a rainbow is over the head of the mighty angel. In Revelation 4:3, the reader is told that a rainbow is around the throne of God. John says that the mighty angel’s voice is “like a lion roaring”. Jesus is described as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5). The face of the mighty angel was “like the sun”. Jesus is described in this way in Revelation 1:16. The mighty angel seems to be Jesus himself! But if the mighty angel is Jesus, why doesn’t John say that it is Jesus? Why does he use all of the symbolism? He does this, it appears, because the symbolism forces the reader to think more carefully about the person John is describing. It is significant that, in his visions, John doesn’t normally name the members of the Trinity. He prefers describing them or giving them a name other than the most common name (see, for instance, John’s description of Jesus in Revelation 19:11-13).

¹⁸⁶ It is likely that this **little scroll** is the same scroll as the scroll described in Revelation 5. Jesus has broken all seven seals (see Revelation 8:1). Now that the scroll is opened, John, as the prophet of God, is to read the scroll and to “prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings”.

¹⁸⁷ This fact is repeated twice in this chapter. This emphasizes that this mighty angel is in control of all areas of the earth. This seems to be a deliberate contrast to the beasts described in later chapters of Revelation. In Revelation 13, the beast rises out of the sea (see 13:1). In 13:11, a second beast rises out of the earth. The mighty angel is over both of these realms.

¹⁸⁸ See Hosea 11:10 and Amos 3:7-9.

¹⁸⁹ In the Old Testament, the voice of God is often compared to thunder. Many of these uses are in the context of judgment. See Exodus 9:23-24, 19:16-19, Job 37:2-4, 1 Samuel 2:10, 7:10, 12:17-18, Psalm 29:3-4, and Jeremiah 25:30.

It is probably significant that the Greek article “the” is used before the words “seven thunders”. This is an indication that “**the seven thunders**” may be a known group that can be identified from Scripture. The words “the seven thunders” are not found anywhere else in Scripture. However, some scholars have noted that “seven thunders” may refer to the seven references to the “voice of Yahweh” in Psalm 29. In this Psalm, the voice of Yahweh is compared to thunder. **Seven different times**, this Psalm refers to “the voice of the LORD” and the things that happen at his command (29:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). Psalm 29 is a call for God’s people to “ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” and to “worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness”.

thunders have said, and do not write it down.”¹⁹⁰ **5** And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven **6** and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay,¹⁹¹ **7** but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled,¹⁹² just as he announced to his servants the prophets.¹⁹³

10:8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me

¹⁹⁰ It is interesting that John is allowed to hear “the seven thunders”, but he isn’t allowed to write what they have said. Instead, he is told, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down”. This is peculiar, for Revelation is not a book of sealing things up (see Daniel 8:26, 12:4, and 12:9), but of unveiling (see Revelation 22:10). Why, then, is the voice of the seven thunders mentioned, and why do the readers need to know that what was spoken has been sealed? **The voice of the thunders may have been sealed because the things spoken by the seven thunders are not going to take place.** The reason this seems likely is the reference to the word “delay” in 10:6. It appears that the things spoken by the seven thunders would have been a further delay in God’s plans (see 10:5-7). But they are sealed so that “there would be no more delay”. It is likely that the things spoken by the seven thunders would have described, like the judgments seen in Revelation 8-9, additional limited judgments that would have provided people with another opportunity to repent. However, because the people have ignored God’s judgments to this point, and have refused to repent (see 9:20-21), the “mighty angel” announces that there will be no more delay. The full force of God’s judgment against unrepentant mankind will commence immediately.

¹⁹¹ Why has God delayed? The answer is found in 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”. God has delayed so that people might repent and be saved. In these verses, we see that there will be no more delays. Mankind will not repent. Therefore, mankind will be punished.

¹⁹² The “mystery of God” seems to be a reference to the events described in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision recorded in Daniel 2. The word “mystery” is used just eight times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is significant to note that **all eight uses are in Daniel 2** (see verses 18-19, 27-30, and 47). This chapter records King Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. In this vision, Nebuchadnezzar saw a large statue. The statue represented the kingdoms of the earth. As Nebuchadnezzar watched the statue, a stone was cut out of a mountain. This stone smashed the giant statue. The statue “became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors”. The wind came and blew all of the now-smashed kingdoms away (this is an allusion to Psalm 1:4). The stone that struck the statue wasn’t blown away. Instead, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). Again, eight different times, this vision in Daniel 2 is described as a mystery. This is the mystery of God described in Revelation 10:7. According to this verse, the time for this mystery to be fulfilled has come. It will be delayed no longer.

¹⁹³ Even though Daniel was the only prophet to use the word “mystery”, according to John, all of the prophets wrote about this mystery. All of them were speaking about the kingdom of God becoming the only kingdom and Christ being exalted over all. See 1 Peter 1:10-12.

again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”¹⁹⁴ **9** So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, “Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”¹⁹⁵ **10** And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. **11** And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ This is the second time that the reader is reminded that the “mighty angel” is standing on the sea and the land (see 10:2).

¹⁹⁵ The fact that John eats the scroll seems to be symbolic of the fact that the saints will be essential in carrying out the plan of God. God will not do the plan alone. The churches will fully taste all parts of the plan—the glory and the suffering. The scroll is sweet to the taste. This means that the idea contained within the scroll is pleasing. However, once John eats the scroll, it won’t taste pleasing. It will be very bitter. It is sweet to think that God is bringing about worldwide worship. The idea of this is sweet to all who love God. However, the only way for God to bring about this worldwide worship involves a great deal of suffering by the saints. This makes the scroll sweet and bitter at the same time. See also Ezekiel 3:3.

¹⁹⁶ This is another connection to the book of Daniel. See Daniel 3:7, 4:1, and 6:25.

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.

Revelation 11

11:1¹⁹⁷ Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff,¹⁹⁸ and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there,¹⁹⁹ **2** but do not measure the court outside the

¹⁹⁷ The world has refused to repent (see 9:20-21). Because of this, the “mighty angel” has declared that there will be no more delays (see 10:6). The earth will be judged and the kingdom of God will become the only kingdom. The church is the key witness in the “trial” of the world.

It is significant to note that this chapter follows immediately after John “eats” the little scroll. The reader should assume that the things spoken of in this chapter are the sweet and bitter things found in the little scroll. The little scroll was sweet in John’s mouth. This seems to mean that it will result in good things: praise to God and joy to his people. However, the scroll was bitter in John’s stomach. This seems to mean that it will be painful to the people of God. In this chapter, the reader is allowed to taste the sweetness and the bitterness of the little scroll.

The symbols used in this chapter are all, in some way, connected to the city of Jerusalem and people groups or things that are associated with it. This doesn’t necessarily mean that John is thinking of the literal city of Jerusalem located in modern day Israel. The reader needs to remember that apocalyptic literature makes frequent use of symbols. Symbols are representative of something else. Thus, the reader shouldn’t automatically assume, for instance, that a reference to “the temple of God” is a reference to a physical temple made of real stone in Jerusalem.

¹⁹⁸ John continues to use symbols that are drawn from the Old Testament. The **measuring** in this chapter is similar to the measuring referred to in Zechariah 2:1-13 and Ezekiel 40-48. The measuring in all of these passages is meant to comfort the people of God and to give them hope. The measuring demonstrates that God knows the true “dimensions” of his people and that they have a place where they can worship. This place, and the people who live in it, cannot be damaged. **All that is measured by God is protected by God. All who have been measured by God have fellowship with him.** In this chapter, the “**sweet**” news (see 10:9) is that God has measured his people (and their place) and they are, therefore, safe. They will stand before God at the end. The “**bitter**” news is that God’s people will be trampled by the nations and will be conquered by the beast (see 11:7).

The measuring in Revelation will resume in 21:15-17. That passage, however, is very different from Revelation 11. In that passage, which is also connected to Ezekiel 40-48, there is no bitterness mixed with the sweetness. At the end of Revelation, there is no more bitterness.

¹⁹⁹ This is not a reference to a physical temple in Jerusalem. The reader needs to remember that John is using symbols in his teaching. He will continue to use symbols throughout the book. The temple being measured here is a **symbol** of the church (see John 2:18-22, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22, and 1 Peter 2:4-5). **In the same way that the 144,000 are sealed in Revelation 7, here, the worshipers of God and the place of worship are “measured”.** This is symbolic of the fact that God knows the exact “dimensions” of his people and he will protect all of them. None of them will be lost. This does not mean, however, that the saints will escape suffering.

temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations,²⁰⁰ and they will trample the holy city²⁰¹ for forty-two months.²⁰² **3** And I will grant

²⁰⁰ See Psalm 2:1. This is a description of the rebellious nations that “rage” against Yahweh and against the Christ. Christ must reign until every enemy, including the rebellious nations, are under his feet (see Psalm 110:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

²⁰¹ The “holy city” is a **symbol**. It is not a reference to the literal city of Jerusalem that is located in modern day Israel. The city of Babylon will be referred to later in Revelation. This, too, is a symbol. It is not a reference to a literal city in modern day Iraq. The “holy city” is a symbolic reference to the “place” occupied by the people of God on earth. The saints need to know that, even as they are worshiping God (see verse 1), they will be persecuted by the nations for “forty-two months”.

²⁰² Even though the temple and the worshipers have been measured and, therefore, are protected by God and cannot be truly damaged, the “outer courts” are not safe. They will be overrun by the “nations” for “forty-two months”. Numbers in apocalyptic literature are symbolic. Therefore, this number should be seen as symbolic. This number, or different ways of saying the same number (“3 1/2 years”, “1,260 days”, “a time, times, and half a time”), appears several more times in this book (see Revelation 11:3, 12:6, 14, and 13:5). Why is this particular number an appropriate symbol for the time of the church’s suffering? There are at least three reasons. **The first reason** is that Jesus’ ministry was about this length of time. The church is following in Christ’s footsteps. This includes suffering and rejection by the world (see Matthew 10:24-25). Careful study of Christ’s life should encourage the churches, for he was delivered by God. **A second reason** 3 1/2 years is appropriate is because a period of tribulation lasting 3 1/2 years is described in Daniel 7:25, 9:27, and 12:7-12. Careful study of these passages should encourage the churches, for 3 1/2 years is a brief time period. These passages make clear that victory for God’s people will follow after this brief time period. **A third reason** 3 1/2 years is appropriate is that this is the exact time of the drought and famine in Elijah’s day (see James 5:17). During this 3 1/2 year period, the saints in the land were “trampled” by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. At the same time, however, God used one of Ahab’s own servants to keep some of God’s prophets alive (see 1 Kings 18:13). Despite their efforts during this 3 1/2 year time, Ahab and Jezebel were not able to “stamp out” faith in God. Elijah’s story should encourage the churches, for all of God’s enemies were destroyed. It is significant that the ministry of Elijah is clearly alluded to in this passage in Revelation.

Why is this time period described with different numbers (i.e, sometimes John uses “3 1/2 years”, sometimes he describes this same time period as “forty-two months”, and sometimes he describes this time period as a “time, times, and half a time”)? It is likely that doing this allows John to connect this time period of testing to more Old Testament passages than would be possible if he used just one description. 3 1/2 years connects this passage to Elijah and to the book of Daniel. The number forty-two may connect this passage to the Israelites in the wilderness. As some commentators have noted, the Israelites camped in “**forty-two**” different places in the wilderness before they crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land (see Numbers 33:1-48). The number **forty-two** in Revelation reminds Christians today of the suffering of the Israelites during the time in the wilderness. God was faithful to care for the Israelites then, as he will be faithful to his people now.

authority to my two witnesses,²⁰³ and they will prophesy for 1,260 days,²⁰⁴ clothed in sackcloth.”²⁰⁵

11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands²⁰⁶ that stand before the Lord of the earth.²⁰⁷ **5** And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.²⁰⁸ **6** They

²⁰³ The **two witnesses** are **symbolic of something**. What is it? There are probably **two reasons** two witnesses are referred to here. **First**, it is significant to note that **under Old Testament law two witnesses were needed to confirm a charge against a person who had been charged with a crime**. The two witnesses are symbolic of the churches testifying to the truth of God’s words. The nations are on trial. The churches have been given authority as witnesses in this trial. As witnesses, they boldly charge the nations with the “crimes” they have committed against God. This is a call for the nations to acknowledge their guilt and to repent. The nations reject the testimony of the witnesses. See Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 12:6, 19:15, Luke 10:1-24, John 8:17, and 2 Corinthians 13:1. **Second**, Revelation 11 compares the prophetic witness of the two witnesses to the ministry of Moses and Elijah. Thus, the ministries of Moses and Elijah were small shadows of the ministry of the church.

²⁰⁴ 1,260 days is another way of saying 3 1/2 years. 1,260 days is also referred to in Revelation 12:6. That passage and this passage are referring to the same time period.

²⁰⁵ The two witnesses are clothed in sackcloth because they are mourning over the sins committed by the nations. See Genesis 37:34, 2 Samuel 3:31, and Nehemiah 9:1.

²⁰⁶ The two witnesses are described as **olive trees** and **lampstands**. Both of these symbols appear in Zechariah 4, a passage of scripture focused on the rebuilding of the temple in spite of great opposition. That is what the “two witnesses” (the local churches) are doing in Revelation 11. By their prophesying, the local churches are working to rebuild the true temple in spite of great opposition. It is a great help to the reader to remember that **lampstands** were defined as **local churches** in Revelation 1:20. In Revelation 2 and 3, the focus is on seven lampstands. The number **seven** was representative of all churches in all places during all time periods. In this chapter, the focus is on **two** lampstands. As discussed earlier, this is representative of the church taking the place of the two witnesses required in a trial. It is also representative of the church ministering with the authority and power of Moses and Elijah.

²⁰⁷ In the same way that Elijah stood before Yahweh (see 1 Kings 17:1), the two witnesses (the local churches) stand before the Lord of the earth. This means they are welcome in his presence, they listen to his words, and they speak for him. Because they stand before the Lord, they walk in the authority of the Lord. This means they have power to accomplish the task that is assigned to them. The power of the churches to accomplish their task is like the power Elijah was given to accomplish the task that was assigned to him.

²⁰⁸ Again, the power of the two witnesses is compared to the power of Elijah the prophet. He called fire from heaven to destroy his enemies (see 2 King 1:9-12). The churches, by their testimony, are doing the same thing. It is important for churches today to think hard about John’s vision in this chapter. It may seem as if local churches are powerless. All they have are their words. However, based on this vision, the words of the church are as powerful as Elijah was in his ministry. See Jeremiah 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying,²⁰⁹ and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood²¹⁰ and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.²¹¹ **7** And when they have finished their testimony,²¹² the beast²¹³ that rises from the bottomless pit²¹⁴ will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,²¹⁵ **8** and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.²¹⁶ **9** For three and a half days²¹⁷ some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,²¹⁸ **10** and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.²¹⁹ **11** But after the three and a half days a breath of life

²⁰⁹ See 1 Kings 17:1.

²¹⁰ See Exodus 7:17.

²¹¹ Here, the power of the local churches is compared to the power of Moses. Again, this is symbolic of the true power of the church. The church is not weak. Like Moses and Elijah, the words of the church cause events to take place on the earth.

²¹² It should encourage the churches to know that the testimony of the churches will be finished. This testimony will not be silenced until the churches have completed the task of testifying to the truth of God.

²¹³ This is the first reference to the “beast” in Revelation. The beast is Satan’s “false Christ” (see Revelation 13:1-5). This wild and dangerous creature is focused upon in chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20. The “beast”, like the two witnesses, works within a time period of 3 1/2 years (see 13:5). Thus, even while the saints are proclaiming the truths about God, the beast is fighting against them. It is important to know that the beast cannot destroy the churches until they have finished their testimony. His “victory” will be very brief. Their victory will be forever.

²¹⁴ See 13:1. See also Daniel 7:3.

²¹⁵ See Daniel 7:19-22.

²¹⁶ The suffering of the saints is compared to the suffering of the Lord Jesus. See Psalm 79. This Psalm has many connections with Revelation 11. These two chapters should be read together.

²¹⁷ The witnesses are able to prophesy for a relatively long period of time (3 1/2 years). The beast’s victory over the witnesses is very brief (just 3 1/2 days).

²¹⁸ The world will think it has achieved complete victory over the church. The fact that the nations refuse to “bury” the witnesses (the church) is a symbol of the shame that will be heaped upon the church. The world wants the weakness of the church exposed for all to see. See Psalm 79:3.

²¹⁹ This is an indication that the world did not repent.

from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet,²²⁰ and great fear fell on those who saw them. **12** Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud,²²¹ and their enemies watched them.²²² **13** And at that hour there was a great earthquake,²²³ and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake,²²⁴ and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.²²⁵

11:14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”²²⁶ **16** And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, **17** saying,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,

²²⁰ This is a reference to Ezekiel’s prophecy of the dry bones coming to life and standing on their feet. See Ezekiel 37:10.

²²¹ The church, again, is following the pattern set by Elijah. See 2 Kings 2.

²²² This is the second time in Revelation that we have seen the church standing in heaven. The church was also seen in heaven (“before the throne”) in Revelation 7:9-17. See also 14:1-5 and 15:1-4. These repeated references to the church standing before the throne is evidence that **Revelation frequently repeats the story of the saints. Different visions allow John to tell the story of the churches from different perspectives.** These repeated references to the church standing before the throne should bring great encouragement to the saints. Even though Satan is trying to defeat the church, it cannot be defeated. All of God’s people will be safely brought to the presence of God.

²²³ See 6:12 and 16:18. See also Ezekiel 38:19-21 and Zechariah 14:4-5.

²²⁴ This seems to be another connection to Psalm 79. In Psalm 79, the saints pray, “Return **sevenfold** into the lap of our neighbors the taunts with which they have taunted you”. God destroys **7,000 people**. See 1 Kings 19:18 and Romans 11:4. It is significant to note that God preserved 7,000 people for himself in the days of Elijah. Here, he destroys 7,000 people. This may be an indication that the days of mercy have come to an end.

²²⁵ Some understand the nations giving “glory” to God as an indication that a large number of people have repented based on the resurrection of the “two witnesses”. This is possible. However, it seems significant that repentance is not mentioned. Based on the rest of Revelation, it seems more likely that this is a reference to the nations recognizing God’s power even while they are refusing to repent. This passage, as was stated earlier, is connected to Ezekiel 38-39. It is significant to note that Ezekiel 39:21 speaks of God’s glory appearing to the nations: “I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them”. A similar form of “praise” to God by the disobedient nations occurs in Revelation 6:16-17.

²²⁶ This should bring great encouragement to the churches! The nations will not be allowed to rebel forever. All rebels will be destroyed and only God will be exalted.

who is and who was,²²⁷
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.

18 The nations raged,²²⁸
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

11:19 Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.²²⁹ There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.²³⁰

²²⁷ **God’s name has, in this instance, been changed.** In Revelation 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8, God the Father is referred to as “**him who is and who was and who is to come**”. In this passage (and in 16:5), God is no longer referred to as him “who is to come”. There is no more waiting for God to come! He has come. He has come in judgment against the world! And he has come to deliver and to reward his saints!

²²⁸ See Psalm 2:1.

²²⁹ The ark of the covenant stands as a reminder that the emphasis in this chapter has been on the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

²³⁰ This phrase is repeated throughout Revelation. It marks divisions in John’s visions. See Revelation 4:5, 8:5, and 16:18.

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).

Revelation 12

12:1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.²³¹ **2** She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.²³² **3** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.²³³ **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.²³⁴ And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.²³⁵ **5** She gave birth to

²³¹ This is a new vision. It is intended to remind the reader of Genesis 3:15. Even though this is a new vision, it is clearly connected to the events recorded in Revelation 11 (the number 1,260 days is referred to in 11:3 and 12:6).

The woman is representative of the people of God. The imagery here is similar to the imagery in Joseph's dream before he was sold to Egypt (see Genesis 37:9-11). The 12 stars represent the 12 tribes of Israel. There is also a connection between the language in Revelation 12 and the language in Psalm 8.

²³² **The woman** (the people of God) is giving birth to a **male child**. John declares that she has great birth pains when she delivers the child. These are clear references to God's words in Genesis 3:15-16. John wants his readers to connect Genesis 3:15-16 with this vision. Genesis 3:15 records God the Father's words to Satan. God tells Satan how he will be defeated: "I will put enmity between you and **the woman**, and between your offspring and **her offspring**; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel". **The "male child" in Revelation 12 is the "offspring" of the woman referred to in Genesis 3:15.** It is this child's destiny to defeat the dragon ("he shall bruise your head"). This is why the dragon wants to destroy him. The "birth pains" (Genesis 3:16) represent the great persecution and struggle that was suffered by the people of God prior to the birth of this child. **The male child is Jesus.** The dragon gives all of his attention to destroying him. But the dragon doesn't destroy Jesus. Instead, Jesus is raised to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. The dragon cannot destroy Jesus. Because of this, he tries to destroy Jesus' followers.

²³³ The dragon is described in some ways that are very similar to the Lamb. He has many horns and many crowns. However, unlike the Lamb, the dragon has many heads. He is like the beasts described in Daniel 7. The reader doesn't need to wonder about the identity of the dragon. It is identified in verse 9. The dragon is the "ancient serpent" first seen in Genesis 3:1. While the dragon appears as a serpent in Genesis 3, his true nature is exposed as the story in the Bible progresses. As the story in the Bible progresses, the serpent "grows" to become a dragon or a sea monster. In some poetic books, the dragon is called by the name "Rahab" (see Job 26:12, Psalm 89:10, Isaiah 51:9).

²³⁴ This is a reference to Satan defeating many saints in the time period before the death and resurrection of Christ. The people of God have just been referred to as stars (Daniel 8:10 uses similar language to describe the death of the saints).

²³⁵ One example of the dragon trying to "devour" the child is when Herod killed the children in Bethlehem after the birth of Christ. Of course, this was not Satan's only attempt at killing the Christ.

a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,²³⁶ but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,²³⁷ 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.²³⁸

12:7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael²³⁹ and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated,²⁴⁰ and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown

²³⁶ This is a reference to the promise made regarding the Christ in Psalm 2:8. See also Revelation 19:15. Those who conquer will share in this promise. See Revelation 2:27.

²³⁷ It is absolutely critical for the saints to know that Jesus is reigning right now. He is **currently** the King over all kings.

²³⁸ **1,260 days** is also referred to in Revelation 11:3. This is one of the clues that these visions are referring to the same events and to the same time period. The churches need to hear these different visions because all of the visions provide help and encouragement. **1,260 days** is one of three different ways John refers to a time period of **3 1/2 years** in Revelation: (1) 1,260 days (11:3 and 12:6), (2) forty-two months (11:2 and 13:5), and (3) “a time, and times, and half a time” (12:14). A “time, times, and half a time” is also referred to in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. All of these references are different ways of describing the time period when Satan (the dragon) will be oppressing the saints. All of these references to 3 1/2 years are to the time period between Jesus’ resurrection and his second coming.

Several words in this verse should encourage the saints. God has **prepared a place** for the saints. Beyond this, the saints will be **nourished** in that place. Even though the saints on earth are in a wilderness, God has not forgotten them. He has made preparations in advance for their care and nourishment.

²³⁹ Michael is an angel who has been commanded to protect the people of God from Satan. See Daniel 10:13, 21, and 12:1. See also Jude 9.

²⁴⁰ Satan has been defeated. Because of the gospel event (the death and resurrection of Jesus), he cannot defeat the people of God and he cannot stop the plan of God. However, the fact that Satan has been defeated does not mean that he is no longer dangerous. As this chapter makes clear, because of his defeat, Satan will focus all of his energy on destroying the people of God.

down with him.²⁴¹ **10** And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”²⁴² **11** 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.²⁴³ **12** Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is

²⁴¹ This vision of the battle in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels represents events that have already taken place. Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan was constantly accusing the saints of guilt before God. This is why he is called “the accuser of our brothers”. Satan’s power is vividly described in this verse. He is the enemy of the entire world. Satan’s “place” in heaven was like the place a witness has in a courtroom trial (see, for example, Job 1:9-12 and Job 2:1-6). Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, however, Satan no longer has a place in the courtroom of heaven. He can no longer accuse the saints of great guilt, for, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the saints have been declared innocent. The saints are innocent because Jesus’ death satisfied the wrath of God (see Romans 3:21-26). This should bring great encouragement to the saints! Satan has forever been cast out of “heaven’s courtroom”. The Great Judge (God the Father) has declared that the saints are innocent! Satan’s voice of accusation is no longer heard in heaven!

²⁴² This verse should bring joy to the people of God. The Kingdom of God has already come! Christ is already reigning! He has already been given authority over all things! Right now, those living on earth can only see the Kingdom of God and the rule and reign of Christ by faith. It often appears that Satan has not been defeated. However, God’s word makes it clear that Christ is **already** reigning. He has **already** been given all authority (see Matthew 28:18-20). He will reign until every enemy is under his feet (see Psalm 110:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:25). The book of Revelation tells the “story” of Christ’s reign during the time period when the saints are being persecuted.

²⁴³ The saints have been declared innocent because of the death and resurrection of the Lamb. This allows them to defeat Satan. They are, because of the gospel event, sons and daughters of God. But the saints do more than just rely on the blood of the Lamb to defeat Satan. They use their own words to defeat Satan. The saints love God’s good words more than the works and words of Satan. The first Adam didn’t use his words to stand against Satan. He was defeated. The saints, because they are related to the second Adam (Jesus), use their words to stand against the lies of Satan.

The saints conquer Satan by being conquered by Satan. They conquer him because they love God’s good work and God’s good words more than their own lives. This means they conquer Satan by being killed! All those who are counted worthy of heaven will conquer Satan in this way. This doesn’t mean that every Christian will die a martyr’s death. It does mean, however, that every Christian will have this attitude. The sons and daughters of God love God more than they love their own lives. This is a surprising kind of conquering.

short!”²⁴⁴

12:13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. **14** But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness,²⁴⁵ to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.²⁴⁶ **15** The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. **16** But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. **17** Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring,²⁴⁷ on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.²⁴⁸ And he stood on the sand of the sea.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ This is a warning to the saints living on earth. The saints need to constantly remember that a wild and dangerous dragon is loose on the earth. He is furious because his plans to defeat the “male child” (Jesus) did not succeed. Because of this, he will attempt to destroy all those who love Jesus and seek to follow him. The final words of verse 11 should bring great joy to the saints: “**his time is short**”. The saints must persevere during this short period of Satan’s wrath. This short period is the time period referred to as **1,260 days** in this chapter.

²⁴⁵ This language of the people of God being given the wings of an eagle is intended to remind the reader of Exodus 19:4: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself”. See also Isaiah 40:31.

²⁴⁶ See 12:6. These verses are describing the same time period. This is a reference to the time period when the churches are cared for by God. It is not intended to describe 3 1/2 literal years. It is intended to describe the “short time period” when the churches need to be protected from Satan’s wrath by God.

²⁴⁷ This verse is, like 12:1-5, connected to Genesis 3:15. The “offspring” of the woman referred to in the beginning of this chapter is Christ. He is the one who defeats Satan. However, Christ is not alone. The words “the rest of her offspring” demonstrate that Christ has many brothers and sisters (see Romans 8:29). They, like Christ, also give up their lives in order to conquer Satan.

²⁴⁸ The people of God are known by their words and by their deeds.

²⁴⁹ The dragon stands on the edge of the sea. His place at the edge of the sea connects him to the “beast” that comes out of the sea (see 13:1). It is as if the dragon is the creator of the beast. He calls him into existence out of the sea. It is significant that the sea is the “setting” for the original creation story—see Genesis 1:1-2. Satan is imitating God the Father in these verses. He is creating something in his image. Satan’s “creation” will war against God’s creation.

The reference to the sea also connects this verse to Daniel 7:1-3. In Daniel, the “beasts” that attack the people of God come out of the sea. In Revelation 13, a beast rises out of the sea. The dragon is the one who is behind all of these beasts.

Revelation 13

13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea,²⁵⁰ with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.²⁵¹ **2** And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth.²⁵² And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. **3** One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal

²⁵⁰ This beast was first introduced to the reader in Revelation 11:7. In that verse, the beast “rises from the bottomless pit”. Here, the beast rises from the sea. These are not contradictions. The sea and the bottomless pit are both symbolic of the evil birthplace/homeland of the beast.

²⁵¹ This beast is described in ways that are very similar to the dragon—they both have ten horns and seven heads (see 12:3). However, the beast is not equal to the dragon. The beast serves the dragon and does what the dragon wishes. The beast has no power on its own. All of its power comes from the dragon. The dragon wants the beast to persecute the saints. But the beast isn't just like the dragon. He is an evil imitation of Christ! The beast is described in ways that are clearly intended to remind the reader of Christ. They both have crowns. They both have names written on them. They both have power and authority over the tribes of the earth. They both receive worship. And they both have experienced a resurrection. Christ's resurrection, of course, was real. The beast's “resurrection” is an evil imitation of Christ's true resurrection.

²⁵² This beast is similar to the four beasts described in Daniel 7:1-8 and 7:17-27. The four beasts in Daniel 7 represent four different world kingdoms that opposed God and persecuted the people of God. These four beasts in Daniel, while they were described in different ways, were all similar in that they all waged war against the people of God and tried to prevent worship of God from taking place. These kingdoms tried to force the saints to worship them! These beasts were the tool Satan used to persecute the saints before the coming of Christ. This beast in Revelation is more deadly than the four beasts in Daniel because it is a combination of all of the beasts! It has features of the different beasts. And the four beasts in Daniel, when combined, have seven heads. The one beast in Revelation also has seven heads!

Again, the beasts in Daniel represented different empires or kingdoms that ruled the world and persecuted the people of God. The beast in Revelation should be seen in the same way. This beast is a symbol of human government which, at the urging of Satan, tries to stamp out worship of the true God. At the time Revelation was written, people reading this book would have connected this beast with the Roman Empire. But this beast didn't die when the Roman Empire came to an end. This one massive beast is still resisting Christ and is still trying to stamp out the church. It does this in different ways in different countries of the world. Satan causes this beast to constantly war against the church. The beast will be warring against the church until the second coming of Christ. See 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 2:7-9, 2 Timothy 3:12-13, and 1 Peter 4:12-19.

wound was healed,²⁵³ and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. **4** And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”²⁵⁴

13:5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority²⁵⁵ for forty-two months.²⁵⁶ **6** It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those

²⁵³ The ESV reads, “One of its heads **seemed** to have a mortal wound”. Most English texts are worded similarly (see NIV 2011, HCSB, NLT, NET). **All of these English texts emphasize the fact that the beast only appears to have suffered a mortal wound.** However, the Greek text doesn’t say that the beast **seems** to have died. A better translation would be something like, “And [I saw] one of its heads **as slain** until death”. John is emphasizing the fact that when he looked at the beast he saw that one of its heads had suffered a mortal wound. Yet, in spite of this mortal wound, the beast was still alive! It is significant to note that the same Greek words are used in the description of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6: “I saw a Lamb standing, **as though it had been slain**”. This text isn’t saying that the Lamb only seemed to have been slain. The text is emphasizing the fact that the Lamb actually has been slain and John recognized this fact! In the same way, this beast has suffered a mortal wound and John has seen the death wound. However, even though the beast has a mortal wound, it has continued to live. It will finally be destroyed when Christ throws it into the lake of fire (see Revelation 19:20). See also 17:8.

How did the beast suffer this mortal wound? He was “wounded by the sword” (see 13:14). It seems likely that John is describing Jesus’ victory over the beast at the cross (see Colossians 2:15). Christ’s death resulted in the beast receiving a mortal wound (see Genesis 3:15). Of course! The honor of killing the beast has been given to Christ! However, even though the beast has been given a death blow by Christ, it is still roaming the earth! Christians, like their Savior, also need to do battle with the beast. It appears, at least to the world, that the beast wasn’t harmed by this mortal wound at all. The beast has, in imitation of Christ, experienced a resurrection. Unlike the resurrection of Christ, however, the beast’s resurrection will be short-lived.

²⁵⁴ The world does not see anyone who is equal to the beast. The saints know that Christ is King over all kings. He is the one who already defeated the beast at the cross. He is defeating the beast as the saints stand against the beast and refuse to worship the beast or the dragon. And he will finally defeat the beast when he throws the beast into the lake of fire (see Revelation 19:20). The praise of the world for their counterfeit Christ is like the praise given to Yahweh after he safely led his people through the Red Sea (see Exodus 15:11).

²⁵⁵ God is in control over all things. He gives the beast authority to “make war on the saints and to conquer them”. This should comfort the saints. The beast can do nothing that is not permitted by God the Father.

²⁵⁶ In Revelation 11, the churches (described as “two witnesses”) had authority to prophesy for **1,260 days**. Here, the beast is given authority for **forty-two months**. These are different ways of describing the exact same length of time. The reader is to connect these events. Thus, during the time period when the saints are prophesying (like Moses standing before pharaoh and Elijah standing before Ahab in the Old Testament), the beast will have authority to be warring against them and to conquer them.

who dwell in heaven. ²⁵⁷ **7** Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. ²⁵⁸ And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ²⁵⁹ **8** and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. ²⁵⁹ **9** If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

13:10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
 to captivity he goes;
 if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
 with the sword must he be slain. ²⁶⁰

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. ²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ The beast is allowed to conquer the saints. This does not mean he has authority to take their faith. He does have authority to persecute them and to take their lives! The fact that the beast is allowed to conquer the saints does not mean that the saints are ultimately defeated by the beast. Rather, the saints conquer the beast even as they are being conquered by the beast (see 13:7 and 15:2)!

²⁵⁸ Again, John describes the authority of the beast (Satan's false christ) in ways that are similar to his description of the authority of the true Christ.

²⁵⁹ This is a very encouraging verse. It means that the people whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb **will not** be deceived by the beast and they will not follow it and they will not worship it.

²⁶⁰ This is a quotation from Jeremiah 43:11. During the "reign" of the beast, many saints will suffer terrible persecution. Some will die and some will be imprisoned. This verse indicates that persecution cannot be avoided. The churches need to know this truth and they need to persevere no matter the circumstances.

²⁶¹ John summarizes this passage with words directed to the church. The people of God will need endurance and faith if they are to persevere during the time period when the beast is exercising authority on the earth. John does the same thing in 14:12. He knows that he is describing terrible days. He knows that Christians will need great endurance and great faith in order to stand firm until the end. Sometimes, Christians avoid hard passages like these because they do not want to know about difficult things that are coming. They find passages like these too frightening to study. That is unwise. These passages are grace from God. **Study of these passages will not produce frightened saints. It will produce prepared saints.** Passages like these produce endurance and faith in those who meditate upon them. These words have been written to help the saints persevere. See also Hebrews 6:12 and James 5:7-11.

13:11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth.²⁶² It had two horns like a lamb²⁶³ and it spoke like a dragon. **12** It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.²⁶⁴ **13** It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,²⁶⁵ **14** and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.²⁶⁶ **15** And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast

²⁶² The churches learn that corrupt human kingdoms (whether governments or culturally dominant ways of thinking) are not the only beast they need to be concerned about. A second beast has been given authority to persecute the saints. This second beast is the third member of Satan's unholy trinity (see 16:13). The dragon imitates God the Father. The first beast imitates God the Son. And this second beast imitates the Holy Spirit. In the same way that the Holy Spirit draws all attention to Christ, this second beast draws all attention to the first beast. It is significant to note that Job 40 and 41 describe two beast-like creatures. One of these beasts is land-based and one is sea-based. The book of Job emphasizes that Yahweh rules over both of these beasts. This should bring great encouragement to the saints.

²⁶³ In this vision, John **sees** a beast that looks a little like a lamb. However, when he listens to the beast, he **hears** the voice of a dragon. This beast is deceptive. It is associated with false worship. Its goal is to cause people to give their allegiance to the first beast. This second beast uses false prophecies, false miracles, and intimidation to cause people to turn from the true God and to "worship" the first beast. This beast doesn't just attack the church from the outside. As is clear from the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, this beast attempts to work from within the churches! For instance, "the Nicolaitans" were trying to deceive the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:6). Fortunately, the Nicolaitans didn't succeed in Ephesus. However, they gained a foothold in the church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:15). Pergamum was also infected by "the teaching of Balaam" (Revelation 2:14). And a false prophetess named "Jezebel" was "seducing" the church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:20). This second beast was very active in these churches. And it is still very active today! Churches are constantly being pressured to "practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). Churches need to recognize that spiritual compromise is one of the ways Satan attempts to destroy the people of God. In the same way that the serpent deceived Eve by changing God's words (see Genesis 3:1-5), so Satan will use false teachers from many religions (including from within the church) to try and destroy the people of God. There are many, many warnings about false teaching and false teachers in the New Testament. See, for instance, Matthew 7:15-20, 24:5, 11, 24, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 2 Peter 2:1-3, and 1 John 4:1-6.

²⁶⁴ Notice, again, the emphasis John places on the fact that the first beast has been wounded. This should bring encouragement to the saints. See also 13:14.

²⁶⁵ This beast is a false-version of Elijah.

²⁶⁶ This beast is referred to as "the false prophet" in later chapters of Revelation (see 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10). This title emphasizes the connection between this beast and false teaching/religion.

might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.²⁶⁷ **16** Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,²⁶⁸ **17** so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.²⁶⁹ **18** This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ This is an echo of the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3. Believers today, like these three young men, must stand firm even when threatened with death.

²⁶⁸ Compare this mark to the sealing of the saints described in Revelation 7:3 and 14:1.

²⁶⁹ This second beast doesn't just use words to influence people to worship the first beast. If words do not succeed, it will try to force people to worship the first beast. It does this by declaring that no one can eat or drink or buy or sell unless he or she worships the first beast! In the first centuries, Christians were sometimes told that they must declare "Caesar is lord!" or they could no longer do business in the city. This was something, of course, which saints could not say, for Jesus is Lord. While saints are no longer required to say, "Caesar is lord", this "beast" still attempts to force Christians to deny their faith. This happens in different ways in different countries. Satan does not care how he deceives people.

²⁷⁰ In Revelation 7:3, the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads (see the note connected to 7:3). Here, the followers of the beast are also marked on their foreheads. The seal on the foreheads of the saints was symbolic. It symbolized the love of the saints for God and the care of God for the saints. It symbolized that he owned them and would protect them. The number on the foreheads of those who worship the beast should, also, be seen as symbolic. It symbolizes that these people love the beast and want to follow him. The beast does not, however, love them or care for them, for the beast loves nothing. He will not protect them, for he cannot protect himself. He, and all those with him, will be destroyed. The number 666 is, like most numbers in apocalyptic literature, symbolic. Seven is a number of fullness (i.e., seven days of creation, seven spirits of God, seven churches). Six is less than seven. It is an imperfect number. This is a symbol of the imperfection of the "beast's" kingdom. By repeating the number three times—666—the imperfection of the beast's kingdom is emphasized. Those who take the number of the beast demonstrate that they too are beastly.

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.

Revelation 14

14:1²⁷¹ Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,²⁷² and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.²⁷³ **2** And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, **3** and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. **4** It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.²⁷⁴ It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.²⁷⁵ These have been redeemed from mankind

²⁷¹ The previous chapter ends with a picture of the nations raging against God and against the Lamb. This is the defiance of the nations prophesied in Psalm 2:1-3. Two beasts are leading this rage against God, the Christ, and the people of Christ. Can the church survive? This chapter provides the answer. **The saints are delivered! All of the saints are saved!** The nations will be judged. The churches need to hear this message because the pressure from the two beasts is so great that the temptation will be to flee from Christ and from the persecution that comes to all those who follow him.

²⁷² This is a reference to Psalm 2:6. God's King—Jesus Christ—has been established on Zion: "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill". The Lamb is not alone. 144,000 people have joined him. The mention of the name written on the foreheads of the saints connects this chapter and the previous chapter. The saints did not take the name of the beast on their foreheads (see 13:16). Instead, the name of the Lamb and of God the Father is on their foreheads (14:1). To be identified with the name of the Lamb and God the Father is a treasure of greatest worth. This privilege is only granted to those who conquer (see 3:12).

²⁷³ The number 144,000 is symbolic. It is a reference to the full number of the saints. See Revelation 7 and the notes concerning that chapter. The 144,000 are not ashamed to bear the name of God the Father and the name of the Lamb. See Matthew 10:31-32.

²⁷⁴ This is symbolic language. This means that those who follow the Lamb (the saints) have not worshiped other gods. These people are "virgins" in the sense that they have not committed "sexual immorality" by having intimate relations with other gods. While the symbolic language in these verses refers to men, this is only because of the symbol that is used. But this group of "virgins" in Revelation 14 does not refer to men alone. The 144,000 consists of men and women who have kept themselves spiritually pure. It consists of people who are single and people who are married. Sexual language is commonly used in the Bible to describe a person's worship. Sometimes, this language becomes quite graphic. In Hosea, for instance, Israel is called a whore because, like a prostitute, the nation had "sexual relations" with Baal (see Hosea 2:5). This symbolic sexual language is used throughout Revelation (see, for instance, 2:14, 2:20-23, 14:8, and 17:1-2). See also Ezekiel 16 and James 4:4.

²⁷⁵ Jesus frequently commands those who love him to follow him. See, for instance, Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21, 19:27, and John 21:19-21. Jesus' followers even follow him to death!

as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, **5** and in their mouth no lie was found,²⁷⁶ for they are blameless.

14:6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. **7** And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”²⁷⁷

14:8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,²⁷⁸ she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”²⁷⁹

14:9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”²⁸⁰

14:12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep

²⁷⁶ This is a quote from Isaiah 53:9 and Zephaniah 3:13. Both of these passages should be studied closely in connection with this passage. The dragon is the “father of lies” (see John 8:44). The beasts speak the language of the dragon. The 144,000 do not listen to the dragon or his two beasts.

²⁷⁷ The emphasis in this proclamation of the “eternal gospel” is on judgment. This verse explains why the nations will be judged: they do not **fear God**, they will not **give him glory**, and they refuse to **worship him** as Creator. See Romans 1:18-23.

²⁷⁸ This is the first reference to Babylon in Revelation. This “city” will become a major theme in chapters 17-18. Babylon (the city of the wicked) is contrasted with the new Jerusalem (the city of the saints). Revelation 17-18 is a description of the evil of Babylon and a celebration of the fall of Babylon. Revelation 21:9-22:5 is a description of the purity of the new Jerusalem and a celebration of the establishment of the new Jerusalem.

²⁷⁹ The 144,000 are “virgins”. Compare this to the citizens of the city of Babylon. This city is known for its “sexual immorality”. This is a reference to idol worship.

²⁸⁰ These are symbolic descriptions of real events that will happen to those who follow after the beast and who take its mark (see 13:16-18). This warning is grace to the church. It is one of the means by which God keeps his people from following after the beast. Warnings like these, like a fence next to a steep cliff, keep people from death. This warning is also grace to the world. It is one of the means by which God calls people to Christ. These passages must be preached. That is why they are included in the Scriptures.

the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.²⁸¹

14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”²⁸² “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”²⁸³

14:14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man,²⁸⁴ with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. **15** And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” **16** So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.²⁸⁵

14:17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. **18** And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud

²⁸¹ See 12:17 and 13:10 and the notes connected to those verses. These verses are written so that the saints will endure. They also describe the saints. The saints obey God and they keep their faith in Christ. This requires diligence on the part of the saints.

²⁸² There are seven “blessed” statements in Revelation. All of these statements are intended to bring encouragement to the saints so that they might persevere. See 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14. These “blessed” statements should be studied closely.

²⁸³ Verse 13 seems to be connected to verses 14-16. As in other parts of Revelation, John **hears** one thing (verse 13), and he **sees** another thing (verses 14-16). In verse 13, he **hears** about the blessedness of those who “die in the Lord”. In verses 14-16, he **sees** “one like a son of man” reaping the earth. The “son of man” seems to be bringing the righteous to himself. The saints are his harvest (see John 4:35). These verses should bring great encouragement to the saints. Even though they may die because of the dragon and his beasts (see 12:11, 13:7, 13:9, and 13:15), the saints will be blessed by God. They will receive the reward spoken of in 14:1-5.

²⁸⁴ The “one like a son of man” is intended to remind the reader of the “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7:13 (see also Revelation 1:13). “Son of Man” was Jesus’ favorite title for himself. Jesus is the “son of man” spoken of in Daniel 7. Revelation chapters 12-14 are closely connected to Daniel 7. Daniel 7 speaks of beasts that torment the saints. These beasts do not remain in power. In fact, the final beast is killed and “burned with fire”. Daniel 7 goes on to speak of the “son of man” coming and receiving “dominion and glory and a kingdom” (Daniel 7:14). The chapter ends with words of great encouragement for the saints: “And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (Daniel 7:27).

²⁸⁵ In verses 14-19, two harvests are pictured. The first harvest (verses 14-16) is gathered by “one like a son of man”. This seems to be a reference to Jesus gathering his saints (see Matthew 13:30 and Mark 4:26-29). See the first half of Joel 3:13.

voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.”

19 So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.²⁸⁶ **20** And the winepress was trodden outside the city,²⁸⁷ and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ See the second half of Joel 3:13. Joel 3 is closely related to the events described in Revelation 14. This chapter should be studied carefully. See also Isaiah 63, Matthew 13:36–43, and Revelation 19:15.

²⁸⁷ A great slaughter takes place “outside the city”. This city is not named in this verse. However, it is likely that John is referring to Zion—the city of Jerusalem. At the beginning of this chapter, the saints are with the Lamb in Zion—the new Jerusalem. The saints are finally safe. They are in their home city. Outside of their city there is great destruction (see Revelation 20:8–9). This fits with John’s use of Joel 3 in this chapter. In Joel 3, judgment by God of the wicked nations takes place outside the city of Jerusalem in “the Valley of Jehoshaphat” (see Joel 3:12). See, again, Matthew 13:36–43. See also Matthew 25:31–46.

²⁸⁸ This is a judgment of immense proportion. Based on the Old Testament, the one treading the winepress in this great judgment is the Christ. This connection between the Christ and the treading of wine is first seen in Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49:11. Isaiah builds on this theme in Isaiah 63:1–6.

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.

Revelation 15

15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.²⁸⁹

15:2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire²⁹⁰—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name,²⁹¹ standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.²⁹² **3** And they sing the song of Moses,

²⁸⁹ For God to be holy (which means, in part, completely separated from all evil), he cannot ignore sin. God's wrath must be "satisfied". If God never poured out his wrath, this would mean that sin was, in some way, acceptable to him. But sin is not acceptable. It is a crime against the living God. It is a crime worthy of eternal punishment. The saints should rejoice that God loves his holy name too much to allow sin to remain forever. God loves the saints too much to allow them to be persecuted forever. This chapter demonstrates that there will be an end to all evil.

²⁹⁰ The sea of glass is "mingled with fire". This fire seems to represent the judgment of God. All those who worship the beast and its name and number will eternally experience the wrath of God. See Matthew 3:10, 13:30, 40-42, 50, 18:8-9, and 25:41. In the same way that the ancient Israelites passed through the Red Sea, the saints will safely pass through God's wrath. The saints are able to do this because Jesus has taken God's wrath for them.

²⁹¹ For a brief period, the beast is allowed to conquer the saints (see 11:7 and 13:7). However, the saints ultimately conquer the beast. They do this by their endurance and by their faith (see 13:10 and 14:12). They do not worship the beast and they do not take its mark. Temporarily, this brings them great suffering. During this time period, the saints defeat the beast by being defeated. There will come a day when the beast is no more and the saints will be triumphant. See also 12:11.

²⁹² In the same way that the Israelites after the crossing of the Red Sea stood on the shore and sang to Yahweh because he had delivered them, John sees a vision of the saints in this "second exodus" standing on the other side of the sea. They, like the Israelites in the first exodus, will sing a song of praise to the One who has delivered them. The sea of glass is also referred to in Revelation 4:6.

the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,²⁹³ saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,

O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways,

O King of the nations!

4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”²⁹⁴

15:5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, **6** and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests.²⁹⁵ **7** And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, **8** and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

²⁹³ The “song of Moses” is not a song about Moses. It is a song about the greatness of God. Because Moses was the deliverer God used in the first exodus event, this song was originally named the “song of Moses”. But this song is not just called the “song of Moses”. Notice, according to verse 3, there are now two names for this song. Because of the gospel event, this song has been renamed. It is now known as the “song of the Lamb”. This song first appears in Exodus 15. “Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD” after Yahweh opened the Red Sea and saved the Israelites and closed the Red Sea on the Egyptians (Exodus 15:1). **This song was a celebration of salvation and a celebration of judgment. Both of these themes can be seen in Exodus 15:1-2.** This song celebrates the fact that Yahweh is a warrior. This song is repeated, in different forms, throughout the Old Testament. Psalm 18:15, Psalm 118, and Isaiah 12:2 all are connected to this song. The events taking place at the first exodus were, in many ways, a very small picture of the events described in Revelation. This song demonstrates that the entire first exodus event was about worship. God was showing his power to the entire earth. The fact that this song is repeated in Revelation demonstrates that the entire second exodus event is about worship. God will, in an even greater way, show his power to the entire earth.

²⁹⁴ God’s righteous acts include acts of salvation (for the saints) and acts of judgment (against his enemies and the enemies of the saints). This song includes quotations from several different Old Testament passages. See Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 86:9, 111:2, 139:14, 145:17, and Jeremiah 10:7.

²⁹⁵ This is a surprising image. The seven angels are dressed in a way that emphasizes their purity (see also Revelation 1:14). The wrath of God isn’t wicked. It is holy. The world deserves the “seven plagues” that will come from the seven angels.

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.

Revelation 16

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”²⁹⁶

16:2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.²⁹⁷

16:3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

16:4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.²⁹⁸ **5** And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ The “limits” on judgment seen earlier in the book of Revelation are no longer seen. The angels are commanded to pour out THE seven bowls of wrath. To this point in Revelation, seven has been a number associated with fullness. The same is true here. The seven bowls symbolize God’s complete wrath. When these bowls have been poured out, there will be no more wrath.

The “**bowl**” of wrath is also symbolized by a “**cup**” in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 51:17 and 22). Old Testament passages connected to nations drinking the cup of God’s wrath include Isaiah 51:22, Jeremiah 25:15-35, Lamentations 4:21, Ezekiel 23:31-34, and Habakkuk 2:15-16. All of these passages should be carefully studied. It is significant that Jeremiah 25:30 compares Yahweh’s shouting at the time of the outpouring of his wrath to the shouting of “those who tread grapes”. The outpouring of God’s wrath is, once again, compared to the trampling of grapes at the time of the grape harvest (see Revelation 14:17-20)! Christ is clearly connected to this trampling of “grapes” in the winepress of God’s wrath. See Genesis 49:11, Isaiah 63:1-6, and Revelation 19:13-15.

²⁹⁷ These bowls are intended to remind the reader of the plagues that destroyed Egypt. See Exodus 9:8-12. The fact that these plagues are written down in Revelation is a demonstration of God’s great grace. The words about these plagues are gracious warnings to the saints that they must persevere. Words like these are one of the ways God keeps his people from falling into sin. These passages must be preached. And words like these are a gracious call to the wicked that they must repent before it is too late.

²⁹⁸ See Exodus 7:14-24. In the plague of blood at the time of the first exodus, the springs of water did not turn to blood. In Revelation, this plague is no longer limited. People will receive exactly what they deserve.

²⁹⁹ Here, God the Father is called “who is and who was”. This is a change from the earlier chapters in Revelation. In Revelation 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8 his name includes “who is to come”. When this name appeared in Revelation 11:17 and 16:5, the description “and who is to come” was not included. He is not called “who is to come” any longer. He has come in judgment. The saints—and the world—are no longer waiting for him to come. He has come to bring deliverance to the saints and he has come to bring judgment to the wicked.

for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!”³⁰⁰

16:7 And I heard the altar saying,
“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”

16:8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.³⁰¹

16:10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.³⁰² People gnawed their tongues in anguish **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.³⁰³

16:12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.³⁰⁴ **13** And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.³⁰⁵ **14** For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the

³⁰⁰ Here, the reader sees what the blood symbolizes. This is also what the blood of the Nile symbolized at the time of the first exodus. Often, people ask if a good God would pour out judgment like this. The angels give the answer to this question. God’s judgments are “true and just”. He gives people what they deserve. God is “just” and “holy”.

³⁰¹ The nations should repent. Like pharaoh, they will not repent. They refuse to give glory to God. This is a crime of the greatest magnitude. The nations deserve God’s wrath. If he didn’t punish the nations for this crime, it would be an indication that his glory is not great and is not worthy of praise. See also Revelation 9:20-21.

³⁰² See Exodus 10:21-29.

³⁰³ Again, the nations should repent, but they refuse.

³⁰⁴ The nations will not repent. Instead, they listen to demons and assemble to fight against God. John uses language that is connected to Ezekiel 38 and 39 in these chapters. Those chapters describe the nations coming together to fight against God.

³⁰⁵ See Exodus 8:1-15.

Almighty.³⁰⁶ **15** (“Behold, I am coming like a thief!³⁰⁷ Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”)³⁰⁸ **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.³⁰⁹

16:17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”

18 And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.³¹⁰ **19** The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine

³⁰⁶ The “great day of God the Almighty” is “the day of the LORD”. This is the day when God alone is exalted and all his enemies are defeated.

³⁰⁷ See Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4, and 2 Peter 3:10.

³⁰⁸ This is an important verse! The description of the demonic spirits going out to deceive the world is interrupted by words from the Lord Jesus himself! He warns the saints to be wide awake and to keep their garments on so that they won’t “go about naked and be seen exposed”! The fact that Jesus himself “interrupts” this vision demonstrates the power of the temptations. The deception will be so powerful that, apart from God’s grace, even the saints would be deceived. Even the saints would commit “sexual immorality”! This is another demonstration that the saints will be on earth during this time period. Passages like this passage need to be preached. They are grace from God. They are one of the means by which he keeps the saints from being deceived. To “stay awake” is to keep one’s mind on the kingdom of God and to remember the truth. To “keep one’s garments on” is to avoid sin and to be busy doing what Jesus has commanded. Before his death, Jesus gave four parables about this very thing. See Matthew 24:36-25:46. If the saints were to take their garments off, they would be like the “great prostitute” described in Revelation 17! Their spiritual adultery would be exposed for all to see. See Ezekiel 16:37 and Nahum 3:5-6.

³⁰⁹ This is describing the final gathering of Satan and his forces to battle against God, the Lamb, and the people of God. This final gathering of Satan and his forces is also described in 19:19 and 20:7-9. The battle is no battle at all. Satan and his forces are defeated by the glory of Christ. See 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 and 2:8.

³¹⁰ See also Revelation 4:5, 8:5, and 11:19. John has used this as a “marker” in his book. Here, the lightning, thunder, and earthquake are worse than any of the other times. There are no more warnings. God is pouring out all of his wrath!

of the fury of his wrath.³¹¹ **20** And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.³¹² **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.³¹³

³¹¹ This sentence is a summary. It describes what happens when God pours his wrath out on “Babylon the great” (see also 14:8). The next two chapters (Revelation 17-18) describe the punishment poured out on “Babylon the great” in far greater detail. These chapters also describe why Babylon the great needs to be punished. The language in Revelation 17 and 18 regarding Babylon is taken from many Old Testament passages. The Old Testament passages aren’t just referring to a literal city of Babylon. These passages describe the destruction of various cities that have warred against God and against his people (including Nineveh and Jerusalem). This is a demonstration that these chapters are not describing the punishment of a specific literal city that will be on the earth at some time in the future. Rather, these chapters are describing the punishment of “spiritual” Babylon—the true city of the wicked. Readers of the Bible are introduced to the idea of Babylon in Genesis 10:10. A man named Nimrod establishes a city named Babel (the Hebrew word for Babylon). This city, as Genesis 11:1-9 makes clear, was built so that people might make a name for themselves. The citizens of this city disobey God’s commands to fill the earth with his glory (see Genesis 1:28 and 9:7). Instead, the citizens of this city want to make a name for themselves and to worship gods of their own choosing. By God’s grace, Babel was never completed. However, the “spirit of Babylon” was never destroyed. Revelation 17-18 describe the destruction of this great city.

The saints are not citizens of Babylon (even though they live “in the shadows of Babylon”). The saints have not followed her into “sexual immorality”. The saints have been tempted but “have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins” (see 14:4). This does not mean that the saints are all men and that they are all literal virgins. This means that the saints have not committed spiritual sexual immorality. They have not had relations with the great prostitute Babylon. They worship God alone.

³¹² The same language is used in Revelation 6:14.

³¹³ See Revelation 8:7 and 11:19. See also Exodus 9:13-35 and Joshua 10:11.

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.

Revelation 17

17:1³¹⁴ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the

³¹⁴ In chapters 19 and 20, John will describe the judgment that comes upon the dragon and his two beasts. Remember, these beasts make up a false trinity. However, before he describes the defeat of this satanic trinity, he describes the punishment of another “enemy” of the people of God. In chapters 17 and 18, John describes the punishment that comes upon “Babylon the great”. (Babylon the great was first introduced to the reader in Revelation 14:8.) **Satan and his two beasts are a false version of the true Trinity. Babylon is a false version of the true church.** The true church worships the true Trinity. The true church looks to God for its needs to be met. Babylon worships the false trinity. Babylon looks to itself for its needs to be met. Both the church and Babylon are trying to persuade the world to worship. The church preaches the true gospel to persuade the world to worship the true God. Babylon uses a false gospel. It promises riches and prosperity and approval. People accepting this false gospel do not know that they are worshipping Satan (see Ephesians 2:1-3) and the beast. But that is what the “church” Babylon causes people to do.

It is significant that Babylon appears after the description of the dragon and its two beasts. The dragon (Satan) appears first because it is the ultimate enemy of the people of God. The dragon tries to use different weapons (the first beast, the second beast, and Babylon) to defeat the saints. The saints need to remember that Satan is the ultimate source of their trouble. The descriptions of the judgments of these enemies take up a good portion of the book of Revelation. These descriptions allow the saints to see, ahead of time, the sure destruction of their enemies and to take courage for the days ahead.

great prostitute³¹⁵ who is seated on many waters,³¹⁶ **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality,³¹⁷ and with the wine of whose sexual immorality³¹⁸ the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”³¹⁹ **3** And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.³²⁰ **4** The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with

315 See Ezekiel 16:15. This is Satan’s imitation of the church. This is the capital city of the people who refuse to worship God. Babylon is called “the great prostitute” because, like a prostitute, it has relations outside of the relationship it should have with God. Babylon should be leading people to worship the true God. Instead, in the same way that a prostitute gives his or her body to another person, Babylon leads people to worship other gods. Notice the many references to buying and selling and products in the descriptions of Babylon. This city seduces people by focusing on their desires. The saints are always in danger of being seduced by Babylon. It is significant that, in the story of Israel conquering Jericho, a man named Achan disobeyed God because he “saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from **Shinar**, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels” (Joshua 7:21). Babel was built in the land of Shinar (see Genesis 11:2). Achan’s temptation is similar to the temptation all Christians face from “Babylon”. Babylon promises satisfaction. Instead, like Achan, it leads one to disobey God. Those who love the treasures of Babylon will, like Achan, be destroyed. See also Isaiah 1:21.

Compare the angel’s words in 17:1 to the angel’s words in 21:9. In 17:1, the angel says, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute”. In 21:9, the angel says, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb”. The angel wanted John to make a connection between these two “women”. John wants his readers to make this same connection. In the same way that the beast is a satanic substitute for the Christ, the great prostitute is a satanic substitute for the “wife of the Lamb”. Both the great prostitute and the bride are cities. People on earth fall in love with one city or the other. Those associated with the “great prostitute” will receive the judgments described in Revelation 17:1-18. Those associated with the “Bride” will receive the rewards described in Revelation 21 and 22. Why are we shown these things? We are shown these things so that we might choose correctly! We are shown these things so that we might persevere in faith. We are shown these things so that we might flee from Babylon before it is too late. The saints are known by their love of the true city of God. See Hebrews 11:13-16.

316 See Jeremiah 51:13.

317 Compare this to the description of “Jezebel” in Revelation 2:20-24. The true church and Babylon were mixing together in Thyatira!

318 Sexual immorality is a theme in Revelation. This refers to far more than physical sexual immorality. It is a reference to worship that is directed toward anyone or anything other than the true God of heaven and earth.

319 See Jeremiah 51:7-9. See Revelation 18:3, 9.

320 The woman rides upon Satan’s “beast” (see Revelation 13:1-10). This does not mean that the woman controls Satan’s beast. The beast hates the prostitute and will destroy her (see 17:16). However, it is important for readers to know that the woman is not safe. She is a prostitute herself, and she is connected to the beast. They work together to destroy the saints.

gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.³²¹ **5** And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.”³²² **6** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.³²³

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. **7** But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. **8** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction.”³²⁴ And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world³²⁵ will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and

³²¹ Babylon is, like the new Jerusalem, covered with precious stones. See Revelation 21:9-21.

³²² Babylon is presented as the source of the earth’s evil. Contrast this with Galatians 4:26. According to Paul, the Jerusalem from above “is our mother”.

³²³ Babylon hates the saints and kills the saints. God must punish this “city”.

³²⁴ Two different times in this verse, the beast is described in ways that demonstrate how weak it is compared to the living God. Remember, God the Father is called, “him who is and who was and who is to come” (see 1:4, 8, 4:8, 11:16, and 16:5). The beast is called by names that sound, at first, very similar. But the names are very different. They highlight the great differences between God and the beast. In the beginning of this verse, the beast is described as the one who “was and is not and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction”. The beast “was”, this seems to mean that it had trampled the saints in earlier time periods (see Daniel 7). The beast “is not” because Christ mortally wounded him. In spite of this mortal wound, “it is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction”. At the end of the verse, the beast is described as the one who “was and is not and is to come”. These names serve several purposes. First, the contrast in the names highlights the greatness of God. Second, they mock the power of the beast. Third, they remind the saints that they must not follow the beast. If they do, they, like the beast, will “go to destruction”. These names remind the saints that they should not fear the coming of the beast. He will not come in victory. He will go to destruction. The saints should fear God.

Regarding the beast being “about to rise from the bottomless pit”, see the descriptions of the beasts rising in Daniel 7:3, 17, and 23-24. Regarding the beast going “to destruction”, see the descriptions of the beast being destroyed in Daniel 7:11 and 26.

³²⁵ “whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”. These words should bring great encouragement to the saints! Their names have been written in a book—from before time began—and they will not be deceived. See Psalm 69:28, Isaiah 4:3, Daniel 12:1, Revelation 3:5, and 20:11-15.

is to come.³²⁶ **9** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated;³²⁷ **10** they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. **11** As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.³²⁸ **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.³²⁹ **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”³³⁰

17:15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.³³¹ **16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, **17** for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. **18** And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

³²⁶ **The beast “was and is not and is to come”.** This name should remind readers of the name of God the Father. God the Father is called, “him who is and who was and who is to come” (see 1:4, 8, 4:8, 11:16, and 16:5). The beast is called the one who “was and is not and is to come”. See also verse 11.

³²⁷ This is another description of the beast. The beast is, again, representative of the kingdoms of the earth in opposition to God. It is significant to note that the city of Rome was built on seven hills. Rome is a picture of the evil city that loves itself and refuses to worship God.

³²⁸ Scholars differ regarding the identification of these kings. These kings are probably leaders throughout world history who work in partnership with the beast. The reader can be helped by this passage even without knowing the precise identity of these kings. The main point is that the saints need to persevere during the dark days of these kings. The reign of the kings, like the wrath of the dragon, will be very brief (see Revelation 12:12). See also Daniel 7:20-27.

³²⁹ Again, it is not necessary to identify the kings being talked about in these verses. The point is that all of the enemies of God will join together in an effort to throw off his rule. See Psalm 2.

³³⁰ See Revelation 19:11-16.

³³¹ This is a demonstration that “Babylon” is not just referring to one specific city on earth. It is referring to people throughout the entire earth.

Revelation 18

18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!”³³²

She has become a dwelling place for demons,

a haunt for every unclean spirit,

a haunt for every unclean bird,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.³³³

3 For all nations have drunk

the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,³³⁴

and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,

and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,

lest you take part in her sins,

lest you share in her plagues;³³⁵

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,³³⁶

³³² See Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:8.

³³³ “Babylon” looked beautiful. The city tempted the whole world—even the saints. Achan’s sin is one picture of the danger of Babylon (see Joshua 7:21). Paul’s description of his former co-worker Demas is another picture of the danger of Babylon: “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (see 2 Timothy 4:10). John’s vision of Babylon in these chapters is very important because it demonstrates the true nature of Babylon and the future of Babylon. Babylon may appear to be filled with beautiful things. In reality, however, it is “a dwelling place for demons”. This is why a city filled with unclean birds and beasts is a fitting image for Babylon. See Isaiah 13:19–22, 34:8–17, and Jeremiah 50:39–40. These chapters help the saints see this city with heavenly eyes.

³³⁴ Babylon’s influence is not small. It has brought immorality to every nation. See also 18:23.

³³⁵ In the same way that Lot needed to flee Sodom or he would have been judged with it, so the church is to flee Babylon. This was difficult for Lot. He needed to be dragged from the city (see Genesis 19:16)! These stories are written to instruct us! The church and Babylon have nothing in common. They serve different kings. They worship different gods. They find pleasure in different things. See Ezra 9:1, Isaiah 48:20, 52:11, Jeremiah 50:8, 51:6, 51:45, and 2 Corinthians 6:17.

³³⁶ See Genesis 18:20.

and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,³³⁷
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.³³⁸

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
'I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.'³³⁹

8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,³⁴⁰
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

18:9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. **10** They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

"Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!

³³⁷ Babylon may seem innocent. However, these verses indicate that Babylon's sins have, like stones, reached all the way to heaven. It is significant that people at the building of the first Babel wanted to build a tower that reached to heaven (see Genesis 11:4). These verses in Revelation demonstrate that the builders of Babylon succeeded in doing just that! Their tower of sin has reached heaven. See Psalm 137:8. This entire Psalm should be considered with this topic.

³³⁸ See Jeremiah 25:15-16, 51:7.

³³⁹ See Isaiah 47:8. This entire chapter should be read and carefully considered. The prostitute's words are similar to the words spoken by the church in Laodicea. See Revelation 3:17.

³⁴⁰ See Isaiah 47:9. See also Revelation 18:10, 17, 19. Destruction will come on Babylon suddenly. The Lord Jesus warned his followers about the sudden destruction that was to come.

For in a single hour your judgment has come.”³⁴¹

18:11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, **12** cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen,³⁴² purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, **13** cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.³⁴³

18:14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

18:15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

18:16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!³⁴⁴

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”
And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose

³⁴¹ The “kings of the earth” are the first group in a series of **three groups** who cry out in agony because Babylon (the counterfeit “church” that led the world to worship the beast) has been destroyed. The second group is described in 18:11-17. These are the “merchants of the earth”. The third group is described in 18:17-19. These are the “shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea”. The wailing of these three different groups demonstrates how greatly Babylon impacts the entire world. All people of the earth (except the saints) mourn because Babylon has been destroyed! They mourn because their hopes and dreams were connected to Babylon. The saints have, like Abraham before them, chosen better treasure.

³⁴² Again, notice that Babylon and the new Jerusalem are both filled with precious things. The saints are not choosing poverty when they choose to follow the Lamb. They are choosing to wait for the city with real foundations! See Hebrews 11:13-16.

³⁴³ See Ezekiel 27. This list is like the list of Esau’s possession in Genesis 36:6. Moses (the author of Genesis) notes that Esau acquired his possessions “from the Canaanites” and “in the land of Canaan”. Possessions gained apart from God will not endure.

³⁴⁴ Babylon decorated itself with fine linen, gold, jewels, and pearls. It cannot keep any of these treasures: “all this wealth has been laid waste”. It is significant that all of these things are listed in the description of the new Jerusalem. Unlike Babylon, the new Jerusalem will keep its wealth forever. See Matthew 6:19-33.

trade is on the sea, stood far off

18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

18:19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city

where all who had ships at sea

grew rich by her wealth!

For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,

and you saints and apostles and prophets,

for God has given judgment for you against her!”³⁴⁵

18:21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,

and will be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,

will be heard in you no more,

and a craftsman of any craft

will be found in you no more,

and the sound of the mill

will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp

will shine in you no more,

and the voice of bridegroom and bride

will be heard in you no more,³⁴⁶

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,

and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,

and of all who have been slain on earth.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Heaven (and all those connected with heaven) does not mourn over Babylon's destruction. Instead, it rejoices over God's judgment.

³⁴⁶ See Jeremiah 7:34, 16:9, and 25:10.

³⁴⁷ Babylon is not a safe “city” for those who love Christ. It hates the saints and the prophets.

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.

Revelation 19

19:1³⁴⁸ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,³⁴⁹

“Hallelujah!”³⁵⁰

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for his judgments are true and just;

for he has judged the great prostitute³⁵¹

who corrupted the earth with her immorality,³⁵²

and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”³⁵³

19:3 Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”³⁵⁴

19:4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying,

³⁴⁸ This chapter is divided into three parts. Verses 1-5 are related to the destruction of Babylon. Verses 6-10 are related to the “marriage of the Lamb”. Verses 11-20 are related to “the great supper of God”. Even though Babylon has not yet been destroyed, by reading about it ahead of time, the saints are allowed to pre-live this event and are able to rejoice in its destruction ahead of time.

³⁴⁹ It is significant that shortly after three groups on earth are heard “crying out” in great anguish because of the destruction of Babylon (see Revelation 18:9-20), three groups in heaven are heard “crying out” in joy because of the triumph of God over the prostitute. The first of the heavenly groups is “a great multitude” (see Revelation 19:1-3). The second heavenly group is made up of “the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures” (see 19:4). The third heavenly “group” isn’t a group at all. It is a “voice” speaking “from the throne” (see 19:5).

³⁵⁰ This is a word taken from Hebrew. It means “Praise Yahweh”.

³⁵¹ The enemies of the saints are judged in the exact opposite order of the way they appear in Revelation. The first enemy to appear in Revelation is the dragon. He will be the last enemy judged. The last enemy to appear in Revelation is Babylon. But the “great prostitute” is the first enemy to be judged.

³⁵² See Nahum 3:4.

³⁵³ The prayers of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 have finally been answered! A great deal of suffering by the saints took place between the recording of the prayer in 6:10 and the answer that is finally given in this verse.

³⁵⁴ The eternal punishment of Babylon is another reminder that the saints must not store up their treasure on earth (see Matthew 6:19-21). Only treasure that is stored up in heaven will be preserved. New Testament scriptures related to the eternal punishment of the wicked include Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 14:11, and 20:10-15. See also Isaiah 34:8-10.

“Amen. Hallelujah!” **5** And from the throne came a voice saying,
“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great.”

19:6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.”³⁵⁵

7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,³⁵⁶
for the marriage of the Lamb³⁵⁷ has come,

³⁵⁵ See 11:17.

³⁵⁶ The “great multitude” is rejoicing and exulting because, finally, the wedding of the Lamb to his bride has come.

³⁵⁷ The “marriage of the Lamb” is a poetic way of describing the final and eternal joining of Christ and his people. No longer is the Lamb separated from his “Bride” (the people of God). No longer is she presented as needing purifying (see the descriptions of the churches in Revelation 2-3). She is pure. In this chapter, we see the two, finally, coming together. There are many, many Scriptures related to this idea. See, especially, Psalm 45 and John the Baptist’s words regarding Christ and his people in John 3:29. See also Isaiah 61:10, 62:, Jeremiah 33:10-11, Matthew 9:15, 22:1-14, 25:1-13, Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:33-35, and Luke 12:35-40.

and his Bride has made herself ready,³⁵⁸

8 it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure” —³⁵⁹

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.³⁶⁰

19:9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”³⁶¹ **10** Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of

³⁵⁸ The “Bride” is ready for the marriage ceremony. According to this verse, this means that “it was granted her to clothe herself”. It seems likely that this is intended to remind readers of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This seems to be the case because Revelation is emphasizing the defeat of the “ancient serpent” (see Revelation 12:9 and 20:2) and the “rebuilding” and “repopulating” of the Garden of Eden (see Revelation 21 and 22). The story of Adam and Eve is being told again, except with a perfect ending! If Christ is like Adam (see Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45), then the church is like Eve. She is to be the perfect bride for the perfect husband! The first chapters of Genesis emphasize that Adam and Eve were naked (Genesis 2:25 and 3:7). The nakedness of Adam and Eve seems to be a sign that they had not been tested yet. They would be clothed with the clothing that matched their deeds. If they did righteous deeds (by loving God’s words, obeying God’s commands, and, thus, defeating Satan), they would have been clothed like rulers and priests. It is significant to note that clothing enters the story immediately after Adam and Eve sinned. But the clothing wasn’t the clothing of a ruler or of a priest. At the time Adam and Eve sinned, they clothed themselves with fig leaves (see Genesis 3:7). The fig leaves were Adam and Eve’s unsuccessful attempt to cover their sin. This clothing did not cover their sin. Later, “the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). The clothing God clothed them with successfully “covered” their sin because an innocent animal died in their place (this innocent animal was a picture of Christ). Even though God’s set of clothing covered their sin, this “clothing” was still related to the guilt of Adam and Eve. In Revelation, however, the bride’s clothing isn’t a picture of guilt. It is a picture of righteousness. The Bride has been tested and has been found holy. That is why the Bride is granted fine linen for clothing. Like the first Eve, the church has been tested by the serpent. Unlike the first Eve, however, she has passed the test! She has not listened to his lies and has not denied God. Revelation is bringing the readers back to the beginning of the story! In Revelation 21 and 22, the readers will enjoy seeing “Eve” (the church) as she walks in the Garden of Eden with her perfect husband! See Isaiah 61:10-11, 62:1-12, Revelation 21:2, 21:9, and 22:17.

³⁵⁹ See Ephesians 5:25-32 and, again, Isaiah 61:10-11.

³⁶⁰ If fine linen represents the righteous deeds of the saints, the clothes of the “prostitute” represent the wicked deeds of the citizens of Babylon. We are judged by what we do. Our actions are a reflection of our beliefs. See James 2:14-26. See also Matthew 3:8-10, 7:16-20, 12:33, 13:23, 21:43, Luke 8:14-15, and John 15:1-6.

³⁶¹ Those who are invited to the marriage supper are those who have, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, conquered the dragon and the beasts and Babylon.

prophecy.³⁶²

19:11³⁶³ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True,³⁶⁴ and in righteousness he judges and makes war. **12** His eyes are like a flame of fire,³⁶⁵ and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.³⁶⁶ **13** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood,³⁶⁷ and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. **14** And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure,³⁶⁸ were following him on white horses. **15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,³⁶⁹ and he will rule them with a rod of iron.³⁷⁰ He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **16** On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.³⁷¹

19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come,

³⁶² Verse 10 is very similar to Revelation 22:8-9. In both passages, John says that he fell down to worship an angel. In both passages, the angel tells him not to do that, but that he must worship God. Why does the reader need to know this? Something similar happened when Cornelius tried to worship Peter (see Acts 10:25).

Prophets are commissioned by heaven to speak about the Christ. This was true even in the time of the Old Testament. See Luke 24:26-27, Acts 2:18, 24, and 1 Peter 1:10-12.

³⁶³ Verses 11-21 describe the second coming of Christ. See Paul's description of events that are to take place at the second coming in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12. See also Jeremiah 10:25 and Isaiah 66:15-16.

³⁶⁴ See Psalm 72:2, 96:13, 98:9, and Isaiah 11:3-4.

³⁶⁵ See Revelation 1:14. In the beginning of Revelation, Jesus appeared with flaming eyes to judge the churches. Here, he comes to judge the world.

³⁶⁶ See Revelation 2:17.

³⁶⁷ See Genesis 49:9-12 and Isaiah 63:1-6.

³⁶⁸ See 19:8. The “bride” and the “armies of heaven” are described in the same way. Both are symbols of the church. It should encourage the churches to know that they will see the defeat of Babylon, the beast, and the false prophet. See also Psalm 110:3: “Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, **in holy garments**”.

³⁶⁹ This reference to Christ conquering the nations is drawn from Psalm 2, Isaiah 11, and Isaiah 63. While Christ has **already** conquered Satan and is, thus, **already** ruling over the nations, he has **not yet** completed his rule. Believers today enjoy the “first fruits” of Christ's victory. One day, they will enjoy the “full fruits” of his victory. Regarding the “sharp sword” coming from his mouth, see Revelation 1:16.

³⁷⁰ This is a reference to Psalm 2:8. See also Revelation 12:5.

³⁷¹ See 1 Timothy 6:15. See Revelation 17:14.

gather for the great supper of God,³⁷² **18** to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.”³⁷³ **19** And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.³⁷⁴ **20** And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.³⁷⁵ **21** And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him³⁷⁶ who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

³⁷² Two “suppers” are described in this chapter: the “marriage supper of the Lamb” prepared for the “bride” and “the great supper of God” prepared for the birds. The “great supper of God” is described in Ezekiel 39:17-20. Birds are commanded to “gather” in both Revelation 19 and Ezekiel 39:17.

There are many connections between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 19-20. It is clear John wants his readers to think of the events recorded in Ezekiel 38 and 39 when they read Revelation 19 and 20. Revelation provides details that are missing from Ezekiel. Ezekiel provides details that are missing from Revelation. However, the stories are the same. This is a great help for the reader in interpreting Revelation 19 and 20. The connections between Ezekiel and Revelation demonstrate that the passages in Revelation should be connected together. These are not referring to different time periods.

³⁷³ See Ezekiel 39:18-20.

³⁷⁴ See Ezekiel 38-39.

³⁷⁵ The reader is able to rejoice because of the capture and punishment of the beast and false prophet. This should build the faith of the churches as they face these beasts. The churches need to remember that the beasts will be defeated by the Lord Jesus at his coming. Notice, there is not a description of a great and difficult battle between the Christ and the two beasts. These two great enemies of the church are captured and thrown into the lake of fire within the space of one short verse! Paul’s words regarding the defeat of “the lawless one” in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 are very similar: “then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming”. The very brief description of the defeat of the two beasts demonstrates the great weakness of the two beasts when compared with the great strength of the Lord Jesus. It may surprise the reader that the defeat of Satan, the other member of the satanic trinity, is not described in this verse. The defeat of Satan is described in 20:1-10.

Regarding the lake of fire, see 20:10 and 14.

³⁷⁶ See Revelation 1:16.

Revelation 20

Four great truths to help the churches 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 without fear, knowing that God has put a “leash” on the dragon. Truth number two tells 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.

Revelation 20

20:1³⁷⁷ Then I saw³⁷⁸ an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. **2** And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan,³⁷⁹ and bound him³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Revelation 20:1-10 concerns events that take place during and immediately after a **thousand year time period**. This period is sometimes referred to as “the millennium”. These verses about the **thousand years** should be deeply encouraging to the saints for several reasons. **First**, these verses encourage the saints to continue obeying Jesus’ commands because they demonstrate that Satan is limited in what he can do to the churches. He cannot, at the present time, lead all the peoples of the earth together in a united effort to wipe out the church. This means the church is currently being protected so that it can finish its task of testifying to the greatness of Jesus. **Second**, these verses encourage the saints because they clearly show the reward waiting for those who die in this present age. These verses demonstrate that the saints who die are immediately raised with Christ and begin ruling with him. **Third**, these verses encourage the saints by reminding them of Satan’s destiny. He will be cast into the lake of fire.

³⁷⁸ The words “**Then I saw**” do not mean that this **thousand year** time period takes place after the events recorded in Revelation 19 (and, thus, after the second coming of Christ). The words “**Then I saw**” simply mean that John saw this vision after the vision he saw in Revelation 19. This is the way John separates the different visions that he sees.

³⁷⁹ It is somewhat unusual for John to explain a symbol that appears in the visions. Notice, however, that John very carefully explains what the dragon symbolizes. John does the same thing in his description of the dragon in Revelation 12:9. He clearly wants his readers to understand who the dragon is. The dragon is the “ancient serpent”—the same serpent that appeared to Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3). The dragon is the devil and Satan.

³⁸⁰ This vision portrays Satan being **bound** for a thousand years. John tells his readers why Satan is bound. He is bound “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer”. Verse 8 explains this binding in greater detail: **Satan is bound so that he cannot gather all of the nations together to war against the church**. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released from his chains. At that time, because he will no longer be chained in this way, he will gather all the nations together to war against the church. This great worldwide war against the saints is portrayed several other times in Revelation. See 11:7, 16:14, 17:14, and 19:19.

The gospels also speak of Satan being bound. When Jesus was speaking about driving out demons, he said, “But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first **binds the strong man**. Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Mark 3:27). Thus, according to Jesus, Satan was bound during the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry. However, this does not mean that Satan was powerless. Satan was doing many evil things during the time of Jesus’ ministry (see, for instance, Matthew 16:23, Mark 4:15, Luke 22:31, and John 13:27). It is likely that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 should be understood in this same way. This vision portrays Satan being bound with a chain. This chain keeps him from gathering all of the nations together to destroy the church. This does not mean that he is bound from other things that he might do (like persecuting the saints, leading the world to worship the beast, tempting people to sin, etc.).

The binding spoken of in Mark 3:27 and in Revelation 20 is connected to Isaiah 49:24-25.

for a thousand years,³⁸¹ **3** and threw him into the pit,³⁸² and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any

³⁸¹ **Numbers in apocalyptic literature are typically symbolic.** This has been the case throughout Revelation. This is almost certainly the case with this **thousand year** period.

Even though this vision appears immediately after John has described Christ's second coming (Revelation 19:11-21), **it is likely that these verses are not describing events that occur after Christ's second coming.** Rather, these verses provide the churches with yet another view of the time period before Christ's second coming. Here are three reasons why these verses about "the thousand years" should be seen as referring to events taking place before Christ's second coming:

1. This passage is clearly connected to two other passages in Revelation that speak of events taking place BEFORE the second coming of Christ. Revelation 16:13-16, 19:17-21, and 20:7-10 all refer to a battle that is also described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. All three passages use language taken from Ezekiel 38 and 39. In fact, Revelation 16:14, 19:19, and 20:8 refer to the nations being gathered for "**the war**" (note: the ESV does not use the article "the" in any of these verses). Because the war in each of these chapters is described in the same way and is tied to the same Old Testament passage, it is likely that each of these chapters in Revelation is referring to the same war—the "war of all wars" that will take place immediately before the second coming of Christ. This war is also described in Zechariah 14.

2. The fact that death occurs on a massive scale in this passage means that this passage cannot be describing a "thousand year" time period after the second coming of Christ. Rather, the deaths that take place during this time period prove that this thousand year time period is before the second coming of Christ. According to 1 Corinthians 15:23-26, all of Christ's enemies, including death, are defeated **at the time of the second coming of Christ.** Death is clearly taking place in Revelation 20 (see 20:9), therefore this passage must be speaking of the time period before Christ's second coming. The new bodies that Christians receive at the time of the second coming are a sign of Christ's victory over death. They are proof that death has been defeated (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 and Isaiah 25:8).

3. The fact that this passage speaks of the eternal judgment (20:11-15) means that this passage cannot be describing a "thousand year" time period after the second coming of Christ. According to Matthew 25:31-46, the eternal judgment takes place at the time of Christ's second coming: "**When the Son of Man comes in his glory**, and all the angels with him, **then** he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." While some may argue that this judgment is different from the final judgment, this is highly unlikely. Jesus himself declares that this judgment is in regard to people's "eternal punishment" or "eternal life" (see Matthew 25:46). The final judgment is spoken of in Revelation 20:11-15. That judgment, again, takes place at the time of Jesus' second coming. Therefore, the events recorded in the first part of Revelation 20 (verses 1-10) must take place before, or at the time of, Jesus' second coming. See also 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

³⁸² See Isaiah 24:21-22. See also Isaiah 27:1. The Greek text of Isaiah 27:1 is very similar to Revelation 20:2. See Luke 10:18-20. See Revelation 12:9.

longer,³⁸³ until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.³⁸⁴

20:4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word

³⁸³ The purpose of Satan's binding and being sealed in the pit is "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer". The meaning of this is explained in verse 8. In verse 8, after Satan's release, he comes out "to deceive the nations ... to gather them for battle". This universal attack against the church seems to be what the binding of Satan is currently stopping. There will come a day when Satan is allowed to deceive all of the nations in this way and the nations will, together, mount an attack against the church. The fact that Satan cannot currently do this should bring great encouragement to the churches! **Satan will not be able to mount a world-wide attack against the churches until the time of Christ's second coming.** At that time, he will be defeated. The fact that Satan is currently bound in this one particular way does not mean that he cannot attack and harm the saints in other ways. Revelation (and the rest of the Bible) teaches that he is currently warring against the saints in many ways!

This interpretation of the dragon being bound in Revelation 20:1-10 until the time of the end perfectly matches with John's words about the defeat of the "two witnesses" in Revelation 11. These two witnesses, remember, are symbols of the church. They will prophesy for "1,260 days" (this symbolizes the time period between Christ's resurrection and the second coming) and the world will not be able to stop them. However, there comes a point in time when the saints are defeated. Carefully read 11:7: "**And when they have finished their testimony**, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them". This is very similar to Revelation 20:1-10. Both of these passages emphasize that Satan will not be able to successfully make war on the saints and conquer them until the time of the end. The churches will finish their testimony! Only when they have finished their task will Satan be allowed to lead a united attack against the churches. This should bring great encouragement to the church at large.

³⁸⁴ Satan is released so that he might gather the nations to battle against the church. Satan's final deception of the nations will demonstrate that God is just in his judgment of the earth. The fact that all of the nations follow Satan demonstrates that the nations will not repent and that their leader is Satan. Carefully consider Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 explaining why God allows Satan to deceive the nations: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, **because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness**".

of God,³⁸⁵ and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.³⁸⁶ They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.³⁸⁷
5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.³⁸⁸ **6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power,³⁸⁹ but they will be priests of God and of Christ,

³⁸⁵ Compare Revelation 20:4 with Revelation 6:9. The language in these two passages is very similar. Revelation 6:9 refers to saints who have died and who are living in heaven before the second coming of Christ. They have not yet received their resurrected bodies (they will receive their new bodies at the time of the second coming of Christ). These saints are calling on the “Sovereign Lord” to judge the earth. Because of the similarities between these passages, it is likely Revelation 20:4 is describing saints in the exact same circumstances. In Revelation 6, the saints are beneath the altar. That is because Revelation 6 is emphasizing that their lives were an offering to God. In this passage, however, the emphasis is not on the saints being an offering to God. The emphasis is on their ruling with Christ. That is why John emphasizes the thrones. The saints in Revelation 20:4 are saints who are living in heaven before the second coming of Christ. They, like the saints in Revelation 6:9, have not yet received their resurrected bodies. They are currently ruling and reigning with Christ. See also Revelation 14:13.

³⁸⁶ This is another warning that the saints must not compromise with the beast. Only those who have conquered the beast will inherit eternal life and will rule and reign with Christ. See Revelation 13:15–16.

³⁸⁷ This passage of Scripture concerns a thousand year period when the saints who have taken part in the “first resurrection” rule with Christ. The focus of this vision is not on Christ. It is on the saints! These verses are meant to encourage the saints. If the saints persevere during this present age on earth, they will join their Lord in heaven and rule with him! It is important to note that, according to many New Testament passages, Christ is ruling now (see, for instance, Matthew 28:18, Acts 2:36, Romans 1:1–4, Ephesians 1:20–23, and Colossians 1:13, 2:10, 15). This means that he currently has all authority in heaven and on earth. The rule of Christ is happening right now—during the time period before Christ’s second coming. He is ruling even though the nations are actively warring against him. He is ruling “in the midst of [his] enemies” (see Psalm 110:1–2)! If this is true of Christ now, what about the saints who have died? Based on verses like Revelation 2:26–27 and 3:21, the conquering saints who have died are also ruling with their Lord right now!

³⁸⁸ This is the only reference to the “first resurrection” in the Bible. However, the word “first” is a very helpful description of this event, because it demonstrates that there must also be a “second” resurrection. The first resurrection is described in these verses. It is an event reserved for the “blessed and holy” (Christians). The first resurrection appears to be a reference to the experience that all saints have when they die during this present age. When a saint dies, he or she immediately goes to be with the Lord. See 2 Corinthians 5:1–10, Philippians 1:19–30, and Revelation 6:9–11.

³⁸⁹ The “second death” is a reference to the eternal punishment that will be experienced by all those who are “not found written in the book of life” (Revelation 20:15). The saints will not experience the second death. See also Revelation 2:10–11.

and they will reign with him for a thousand years.³⁹⁰

20:7 And when the thousand years are ended,³⁹¹ Satan will be released from his prison **8** and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog,³⁹² to gather them for battle,³⁹³ their number is like the sand of the sea.³⁹⁴ **9** And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,³⁹⁵ but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,³⁹⁶ **10** and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night

³⁹⁰ See 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6. The reign of Christ is celebrated throughout the Scriptures. He will not begin reigning someday. He is reigning now. The saints who have died are reigning with him. See Revelation 2:26-27 and 3:21.

³⁹¹ This passage speaks of a thousand year period when Satan cannot deceive the nations. This thousand year period is symbolic of the time between Christ's resurrection and shortly before his second coming. At the end of this thousand year period, Satan will be allowed to deceive the nations.

³⁹² See Ezekiel 38:2.

³⁹³ Again, the Greek reads, "the war". This is a reference to the war above all wars. See also 16:14 and 19:19. This seems to indicate that the same war is being referred to in all three passages! This is the war described in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

³⁹⁴ All people, except the saints, will follow the dragon. See Ezekiel 38:15-16.

³⁹⁵ The "camp of the saints" and the "beloved city" are symbols of the church. This vision is of Satan's final attack against the churches. See Ezekiel 38:9-15 and Revelation 11:2.

³⁹⁶ This is a symbolic way of describing the second coming of Christ. See also Revelation 19:11-21. See also Jeremiah 10:25 and Isaiah 66:15-16.

The words "fire came down from heaven and consumed them" are almost an exact quote from 2 Kings 1:10 and 12. In that passage, Elijah rebuked the wicked king of Israel for his idol worship. Because of this, the king wanted to capture Elijah. Elijah sits alone on a hill. The king sends a captain and 50 men in order to capture Elijah. Instead, "fire came down from heaven and consumed [the captain] and his fifty". The king ignores the warning and sends another captain with 50 more men. The same thing happens to them. The king ignores that warning as well and sends a third captain and 50 more men! The fact that the Greek text of Revelation 20 matches the Greek text of 1 Kings 1:10 demonstrates that these passages are to be read together. The church is like Elijah (the church was also compared to Elijah in Revelation 11). It is pictured as being alone and on a hill. Satan and the nations of the earth are like the captain and his men. They will, before Christ's second coming, try to conquer the church. But they will be destroyed. The church will be delivered by God. Old Testament passages like this should bring great encouragement to the saints. Satan will not be successful in destroying the church. At the same time, Old Testament passages like these are gracious warnings to the enemies of God. They will, like the men who tried to capture Elijah, be defeated if they do not repent. See also Paul's description of the second coming in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12.

forever and ever.³⁹⁷

20:11³⁹⁸ Then I saw a great white throne³⁹⁹ and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.⁴⁰⁰ And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.⁴⁰¹ **13** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. **14** Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.⁴⁰² This is the second death,⁴⁰³ the lake of fire. **15** And if anyone's name was not found

³⁹⁷ Revelation 20:1-10 reminds the reader of the weakness of Satan and the ultimate defeat of Satan. Knowing these things about Satan gives grace to the people of God so that they might resist temptation.

³⁹⁸ See also Matthew 25:31-46. That passage is also describing the final judgment.

³⁹⁹ The throne is white, emphasizing the purity of judgment taking place on the throne. The throne is large, emphasizing its importance. This is **God's** judgment seat. See Psalm 1:5, 11:4, and Daniel 7:9.

⁴⁰⁰ For God to be worthy of worship, he must judge sin. He cannot ignore it. If God ignored sin or if he did not punish it, it would make him guilty of sin. The **books** are symbolic of the fact that every single deed will be remembered. God is perfect, therefore he does not forget anything. This fact should put great fear in the hearts of all those who have not turned from their sin.

Regarding the book of life see Philippians 4:3.

⁴⁰¹ This is not the first description of the final judgment in the Bible. The final judgment is described in different ways in different passages of Scripture. See, for instance, Matthew 25:31-46.

⁴⁰² See 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.

⁴⁰³ See Revelation 20:6 and 21:8.

written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁴ The fact that these words about the lake of fire are recorded in Revelation is not a demonstration of God's cruelty. It is a demonstration of God's grace. He does not want any to perish! These words about the lake of fire are a gracious warning to the saints. This warning is one of the means by which God keeps his saints from eternal punishment. And these words are a gracious warning to those who do not yet trust Christ. Words like these are one of the means by which God calls people to repent and put their trust in Christ.

Sometimes, people say that a good God would not punish people in hell eternally. This is not the case. God would not be good if he did not punish those who do evil. If he did not punish those who do evil, he would not be just and would not be worthy of worship. It is important to know that Jesus spoke about hell with great frequency. See Matthew 5:21-30, 10:28, 18:8-9, 23:15, 23:33, 25:41-46, and Mark 9:43-48. Jesus' teaching about hell is true and it is grace from heaven! His words are intended to cause people to turn from their sins and to place their trust in Christ.

Revelation 21-22:5

New heaven and 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.

Revelation 21

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,⁴⁰⁵ and the sea was no more.⁴⁰⁶
2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,⁴⁰⁷ prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.⁴⁰⁸ **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”⁴⁰⁹ **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,

⁴⁰⁵ See Isaiah 65:17-25, 66:22-23, and 2 Peter 3:13. When the first heaven and earth pass away, the curse will also pass away (see Genesis 3:17 and Revelation 22:3)! See also Romans 8:18-25. In this passage, Paul speaks of the current creation waiting “with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God”. When this event happens (at the second coming), then “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”.

It may be helpful to read Genesis 1-3 before reading Revelation 21-22, for these two sections of the Bible are very similar yet very different!

⁴⁰⁶ This is symbolic language. The sea is associated with judgment, chaos, and danger in the Bible. One example of the danger associated with the sea is that the beast rose “out of the sea” (Revelation 13:1). In the new heaven and new earth there will be no more places where dangerous things live and hide. All of the earth will be filled with goodness. The sea is also associated with sin. In Revelation, the merchants trading Babylon’s products were traveling on the sea (see Revelation 18:15-19). In the new heaven and new earth, there will be no people doing any business with Babylon. It, and everything connected with it, will be destroyed.

⁴⁰⁷ John sees the new Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth. This demonstrates that, after the second coming, “heaven” will no longer be located away from this earth. It will be on earth. In fact, heaven and earth will be joined. God will dwell with his people! The true city of God has been the hope of the saints even before the time of Christ. Carefully consider Hebrews 11:10-16. According to the writer to the Hebrews, Abraham was “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God”. The author goes on to speak of others who “died in faith”. These people, according to the writer, were “seeking a homeland”. The writer goes on to say, “they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”. The prophets wrote of this place (see Isaiah 2:2-5, 60:15-22, Ezekiel 20:40-44, Zephaniah 3:14-20, and Zechariah 1:14-17). Saints today should imitate these saints and long for the new Jerusalem (see Hebrews 13:14). These verses about the new Jerusalem should cause the church to walk in holiness and to avoid Babylon. Even now, the saints are to consider themselves citizens of the new Jerusalem (see Galatians 4:26, Philippians 3:17-21, and Hebrews 12:22-24). Psalm 107 tells the story of God’s people coming “from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (107:3) to “a city to dwell in” (107:7).

⁴⁰⁸ See Isaiah 61:10.

⁴⁰⁹ The promise that God will dwell with his people should cause God’s people to walk in holiness. See Leviticus 26:11-12, Jeremiah 31:1, Ezekiel 37:27, Zechariah 2:6-12, and 2 Corinthians 6:16-18.

neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”⁴¹⁰

21:5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”⁴¹¹ Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” **6** And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”⁴¹² **7** The one who conquers⁴¹³ will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”⁴¹⁴ **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”⁴¹⁵

21:9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will

⁴¹⁰ See Revelation 7:17 and Isaiah 25:8. The “former things have passed away” means that everything associated with sin and the curse will pass away at this time.

⁴¹¹ See 2 Corinthians 5:17. Those who trust in Christ are new creations. However, newness on the inside is only a partial gift from God. He promises to make all things new.

⁴¹² This passage about the new Jerusalem is supposed to make people “thirsty” for God. God promises that all those who are thirsty will be satisfied. See Isaiah 55:1 and John 7:37.

⁴¹³ The churches must conquer. See Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, and 3:5, 12, 21.

⁴¹⁴ This is a reference to 2 Samuel 7:14. Once again, promises that applied to the Lord Jesus are applied to the saints because they are “in him”. Readers should carefully examine 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

⁴¹⁵ Sinners have no place in the new Jerusalem. It is important for all people to carefully consider those who are counted as sinners in this verse. Not only are “murderers” excluded from the new Jerusalem. Other, seemingly smaller, categories of sinners are also excluded: the “cowardly” and the “faithless”. This is a gracious warning from God. **He takes all sin very seriously.** Those who call themselves saints need to examine their lives and see if they truly are conquering in the way that is described in Revelation. **Only those who conquer** will have the new Jerusalem as their heritage (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, and 21). All others will be thrown into the lake of fire. See Revelation 20:11-15. See also Matthew 25:31-46.

show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”⁴¹⁶ **10** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain,⁴¹⁷ and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,⁴¹⁸ **11** having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. **12** It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— **13** on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. **14** And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.⁴¹⁹

21:15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.⁴²⁰ **16** The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured

⁴¹⁶ “Come, I will show you ...”. The story of the bride begins exactly like the story of the prostitute Babylon (see Revelation 17:1). By using the same language, it is clear that John wants his readers to compare both cities and to decide which city they want to live in and which city they want to recognize as their home.

The “bride” is described here as a city. However, in Revelation 19:7-8, the bride is a description of the people of God. Is the bride a city or is it a people? **The bride is the people of God in their perfected state.** No longer are the people of God like the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. They are now clothed in white. In the same way that Babylon is a symbol of the wicked people who follow Satan and his beasts, so the new Jerusalem is a symbol of the righteous people who follow Christ. Regarding the saints as the bride of Christ, see Ephesians 5:22-33.

⁴¹⁷ The fact that John is brought to a “great, high mountain” is probably intended to remind the reader of key Old Testament passages related to the kingdom of God. For instance, in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision recorded in Daniel 2, a giant image (representing various human kingdoms) is destroyed by a stone. The image becomes like chaff and blows away (this is intended to remind the reader of Psalm 1:4). At this point, the reader’s attention is no longer on the image. It is on the stone, which begins growing: “But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (verse 35). The stone is representative of Christ. The mountain seems to represent Christ and the people of God. John’s reference to a “great, high mountain” in Revelation 21 demonstrates that the events pictured in Daniel 2 have come to pass! There are no more human kingdoms standing in opposition to God. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom! See also Exodus 15:17, Psalm 48:1, and Isaiah 2:2-3.

⁴¹⁸ See Revelation 3:12.

⁴¹⁹ Verse 12 refers to the “twelve tribes of the sons of Israel”. Their names are written on the gates of the city. Verse 14 refers to the “twelve apostles of the Lamb”. Their names are written on the wall of the city. These 24 names symbolize the unity of the people of God. There are not two peoples of God (i.e., Israel from the Old Testament and the church from the New Testament). There is one people of God. See Ephesians 2:11-22.

⁴²⁰ The temple was measured in Revelation 11:1-3 and Ezekiel 40-48. In both of those passages, the measuring was symbolic. This is also symbolic.

the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.⁴²¹ **17** He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.⁴²² **18** The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.⁴²³ **19** The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, **20** the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.⁴²⁴ **21** And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

21:22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.⁴²⁵ **23** And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.⁴²⁶ **24** By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, **25** and its gates will never be shut

⁴²¹ The new Jerusalem, in this vision, is a perfect cube. This is symbolic language. It is significant to note that the Holy of Holies in the ancient temple was also a perfect cube (see 1 Kings 6:20). The new Jerusalem is an enormous Holy of Holies! The entire earth has become like the Holy of Holies! The second Adam (Jesus) has done what the first Adam did not do. He has brought God's presence into all the earth! See Genesis 1:26-28.

⁴²² The walls of the city are massive. This is symbolic of the great strength of this city.

⁴²³ The Holy of Holies in the ancient temple was also pure gold. Again, this is symbolic of the fact that the entire earth has become like the Holy of Holies.

⁴²⁴ In the Old Testament, Aaron the High Priest wore a garment with 12 stones on it. The 12 stones represented the people of God (see Exodus 28:15-29). This is representative of the precious value of God's people. The fact that these stones are all different may represent the differences between God's people. God's people come from every tribe and tongue. While they are different, all are precious.

⁴²⁵ The meeting place between God and man will not be a building. It will be face-to-face! The citizens of this city, every one of them, will be priests!

⁴²⁶ This is, again, symbolic language. This does not mean that there will be no sun shining on the new earth. This does not mean that we will never again enjoy a sunrise or see a sunset. It means that all brightness will come from God. See Revelation 22:5. Passages like Isaiah 30:26 demonstrate that the language regarding the sun is symbolic. Regarding the Lamb being the lamp, see Revelation 1:16.

by day⁴²⁷—and there will be no night there.⁴²⁸ **26** They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.⁴²⁹ **27** But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ In ancient cities, the gates of the city could be shut during the day to keep evildoers from entering the city. The gates would be shut at night to keep evil from coming in while the people in the city were asleep. The open gates are symbolic of the fact that there will be no evil that could come into this city. All will be safe all of the time.

⁴²⁸ See also 22:5. This is symbolic. It does not mean that there will never be sunsets in heaven. It does not mean that there will never be a full moon again. Darkness is connected with danger and with crime. This passage is emphasizing that there will be no more evil or danger.

⁴²⁹ This, too, is symbolic. No longer are nations trying to exalt themselves. Rather, all people are submitted to God's authority.

⁴³⁰ This is another gracious warning from God. Only those who are written in the book of life will see the new Jerusalem. See Philippians 4:4 and Revelation 20:11-15.

Revelation 22:1-5

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.⁴³¹ The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.⁴³² **3** No longer will there be anything accursed,⁴³³ but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. **4** They will see his face,⁴³⁴ and his name will be on their foreheads.⁴³⁵ **5** And night will be no more.⁴³⁶ They will need no light of lamp or sun,⁴³⁷ for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.⁴³⁸

⁴³¹ There are two symbols in 22:1-2: the **river of the water of life** and the **tree of life**. These are clearly intended to remind the reader of the garden of Eden. It is significant to note that immediately after the tree of life is first mentioned in Genesis 2:9, a river flowing out of Eden is also mentioned (see 2:10). Again, the new Jerusalem is the fulfillment of what was planned in the garden of Eden! The river and the tree of life also appear together again in Psalm 1 and Ezekiel 47:1-12. Both of these passages should be studied carefully as they are connected to the life Christians already have in Christ and, as Revelation 22 teaches, to the age to come. Although John's words in Revelation 22 about the new Jerusalem concern the time period after Jesus' second coming, it is clear from Jesus' words in John 4:7-15 and 7:37-39 that believers can already partake of the water of life. Based on Jesus' words in John 15:1-11 and Paul's words in Galatians 5:22-23, believers can already taste the fruit of the coming age. Fruitfulness is already being seen in the lives of believers! Other passages connected to these images in Revelation 22:1-2 include Psalm 46:4, Joel 3:18, Zechariah 14:8, and Revelation 2:7. These should be studied carefully.

⁴³² See Ezekiel 47:12.

⁴³³ See Genesis 3:17 and Romans 8:18-25.

⁴³⁴ In Exodus 33:20, Yahweh told Moses, "... you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live". In Deuteronomy 18, Moses said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me". Jesus is the one who sees God face to face! However, because we know him, no longer is anything between God and man. All separation between God and man has been removed! See John 1:18.

⁴³⁵ See Revelation 3:12 and 14:1.

⁴³⁶ This is symbolic language. This does not mean that the saints will never again enjoy a beautiful sunset or see the moon reflecting on the water. The reader needs to remember that, in this present age, night is often associated with sin and danger. For instance, this is often the time when thieves break into houses. Darkness is associated with crime. The fact that there will be no more night means there will be no more danger anywhere.

⁴³⁷ This, again, is symbolic language. It does not mean, for instance, that the warm glow of a candle will never again be enjoyed. This is symbolic of the fact that God's presence will be everywhere.

⁴³⁸ See Daniel 7:27. Notice, the emphasis is not on Christ reigning. It is on the saints reigning. John's words are meant to make people think very hard about their own destiny. Will they be reigning, or will they be thrown into the lake of fire?

Revelation 22:6-21

Conclusion⁴³⁹

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).

⁴³⁹ These comments related to the conclusion of Revelation are almost identical to the comments related to the introduction.

Revelation 22

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.

Revelation 22:6-21

22:6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”⁴⁴⁰

22:7 “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”⁴⁴¹

22:8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, **9** but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”⁴⁴²

22:10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”⁴⁴³ **11** Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”⁴⁴⁴

22:12 “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.”⁴⁴⁵ **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁰ The words “what must soon take place” are very significant as they are tied to words appearing in Daniel 2:28-29. These words also appear in Revelation 1:1, 1:19, and 4:1. See the note regarding these words at Revelation 1:1. The word **soon** is very important. Christians are to live expectantly. They are to be watching for these things to happen. Jesus’ parables in Matthew 25 about the Ten Virgins (25:1-13) and the Talents (25:14-30) were reminders that we must not forget that he is coming back! We must be ready for him!

⁴⁴¹ See Revelation 1:3. Those who read this book are expected to obey what is written in it.

⁴⁴² See also Revelation 19:10. These two passages emphasize that spiritual beings like angels are not to be worshiped. God alone is to be worshiped.

⁴⁴³ The book of Daniel was to be “sealed” because the events were not going to take place for a long time (see Daniel 12:4, 9). Revelation was not to be sealed because the time “is near” (see Revelation 1:3-4). This book is not meant to be ignored. Its message is important. It was written so that churches would read this book and obey the things that are written in it.

⁴⁴⁴ See Ezekiel 3:27 and Daniel 12:10 and Isaiah 56:1.

⁴⁴⁵ Everything in Revelation is connected to the second coming of Jesus. This event will, according to Jesus, take place soon. At his “second coming,” Jesus will “repay each one for what he has done.” This is a gracious warning that the judgment is coming very quickly. These words should encourage Christians who are suffering now to persevere. Their suffering will end soon. Jesus will then reward them. Jesus’ words are a gracious gift to the wicked. They are a call to repent before it is too late.

⁴⁴⁶ See the note connected to Revelation 1:8.

22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes,⁴⁴⁷ so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. **15** Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.⁴⁴⁸

22:16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.⁴⁴⁹ I am the root and the descendant of David,⁴⁵⁰ the bright morning star.”⁴⁵¹

22:17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.⁴⁵²

22:18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, **19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.⁴⁵³

22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!⁴⁵⁴

22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴⁷ See Isaiah 1:18-20.

⁴⁴⁸ This does not mean that evildoers will be camped outside of the new Jerusalem. This is a simple statement that there are two groups of people and these two groups of people live in different places. The first group of people are “those who have washed their robes”. They live in the city. The second group of people are “the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (see Romans 1:29). They have no right to enter the city. These people are thrown into the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:15).

⁴⁴⁹ See Revelation 1:1. Revelation is intended to be read by the churches and obeyed by the churches. This book brings grace and blessing to those who read it and obey it.

⁴⁵⁰ The promises spoken to David about a son who would sit on the throne forever are all fulfilled in Jesus. See 2 Samuel 7:1-17, Psalm 2, Isaiah 9:1-7 (especially verse 7), Isaiah 11 (especially verses 1 and 10), Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:32-33, 69-70, Romans 1:3. See also the note connected to Revelation 5:5.

⁴⁵¹ In the same way that the rising of the sun takes away the night, Jesus is the bright star in the world that causes all darkness to flee. See 2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 2:28. See also Numbers 24:17, Psalm 107:10, Malachi 4:2, Matthew 2:1-2, and Luke 1:78-79.

⁴⁵² See Isaiah 55:1 and John 7:37.

⁴⁵³ See Deuteronomy 4:2. This is another indication that this is a book of prophecy to the church. This, like the warning given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4, is intended to cause the church to walk in perfect obedience to God’s commands.

⁴⁵⁴ See 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 3:11.

⁴⁵⁵ See 2 Thessalonians 3:18.

NOTES



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