



REVELATION

.....

JOHN P.
SCHARLEMANN

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

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STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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REVELATION

JOHN P. SCHARLEMANN

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SYMBOLISM IN NUMBERS

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 1:1–8

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“In our own church body, the study of Revelation has been discouraged and there are some good reasons for its neglect. There are many passages that seem obscure and confusing. The imagery is violent and frightening and its mysterious style seems bizarre to the modern reader.



The Revelation to John attracts more curiosity than any other book of the Bible. Self-styled media evangelists are eager to distort John’s images and symbols into a day-by-day countdown of the world’s destruction. Some authors have used Revelation to accumulate minor fortunes. There is a simple explanation for all this curiosity. We all inwardly wish to find some specific indication of our own future. To some degree, Revelation fulfills this curiosity, but only to the extent that Scripture as a whole prophesies the destructiveness of sin and the promise of man’s salvation through Jesus Christ.

In our own church body, the study of Revelation has been discouraged and there are some good reasons for its neglect. There are many passages that seem obscure and confusing. The imagery is violent and frightening and its mysterious style seems bizarre to the modern reader. Martin Luther had doubts at first about Revelation even as he had doubts about the Apocrypha (those books between the Old Testament and the New Testament). Indeed, Luther once said, “My spirit cannot adapt itself to this book.” Even though Martin Luther came to reject the Apocrypha, he accepted Revelation wholeheartedly because of its messages of warning and comfort.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle to the modern reader is Revelation’s chronology. Modern readers are accustomed to stories which progress in a linear fashion. One event follows another. Each period of time succeeds the previous in chronological order. If we were to interpret Revelation in this linear fashion (as, for example, does Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth*), we would find that the world is to be destroyed five different times and will endure two general resurrections! Jesus indicates in the Gospels

that there will be only one general resurrection at the end of time. Second Peter 3:10–13 is quite clear that the destruction of the cosmos will be a single event upon the coming of the Lord in judgment.

In contrast to this linear method, Revelation must be interpreted in a cyclical fashion. Have you ever bought a Christmas tree? When inspecting that tree, did you look at the tree from one side only? If we examine the tree from one side only, we may miss seeing the crooked trunk, the brown patch, or the missing branch. Revelation approaches the history of the world in the same fashion as we approach a Christmas tree; it looks at the same event from a number of different perspectives.

The Greek word from which we translate “Revelation” is *apokálypsis*. We are familiar with the word “apocalypse” and understand it to mean some sort of massive universal destruction (as in the movie *Apocalypse Now*). But what did it mean to John’s readers? The Greek *apokálypsis* means “uncovering” or “unveiling.” Besides Revelation, there are several other apocalyptic writings in existence. The most notable is Daniel 7–12. In the Apocrypha, 2 Esdras and 2 Baruch exhibit apocalyptic features.

What are some features of apocalyptic writing? First, apocalyptic writing is not given in clear, self-evident language. It uses symbolic language, that is, images which represent concepts. We do the same thing in political cartoons, for example, when we use Uncle Sam to represent the United States and a bear to represent Soviet Russia. If we were to interpret political cartoons in a straightforward manner, or if we were ignorant about the meaning of these cartoon figures, we would puzzle over the image of a bear struggling with a man wearing striped pants and a top hat. Because we recognize the symbols, we can understand the cartoon as a description of the struggle between two world superpowers. Revelation must be interpreted in a similar fashion. If we absorb the imagery in a straightforward manner, the book will appear no better than an hallucination. If we understand its imagery in the same way it was understood by the people of John’s day, the book will have significance. John’s readers were accustomed to all these symbols. We are not. Our task is to put ourselves in their shoes.

Second, apocalyptic literature focuses primarily on the end of time and to a lesser degree on the Messiah. That is why we dare not become obsessed with this book. Those who focus their Christian proclamation on Revelation alone will, by and large, skip the main message of Scripture; we are saved by the grace of God through the blood and sacrifice of His Son on the cross. In this sense, Revelation is a poor introduction to an understanding of the Christian faith.

*When he authored this book, John was growing old.
The other apostles had already reached their heavenly
home and John longed to be with his Lord as well.*



The author of the Apocalypse identifies himself simply as “John.” There is no reason to doubt that this is the Lord’s apostle, John, the son of Zebedee. Revelation was written during the reign of the despicable Emperor Domitian (AD 81 to 96). Domitian was the second son of the Emperor Vespasian. Vespasian became emperor through the loyalty and devotion of his army. He was politically competent with great personal integrity. For political reasons, Vespasian supported a growing emphasis on the worship of the goddess Roma, symbol of the empire and emperor. Vespasian did not persecute the Christians and never took the claim of his own personal deity seriously.

When Vespasian died, his second son, Domitian, ascended the throne. He was incompetent and succeeded only because of the loyalty of the armies to his father. The Roman aristocrats and philosophers hated Domitian. Domitian responded by emphasizing his deity and commanding that all Rome worship him. During his reign, it was the practice throughout the provinces to call a suspected Christian into court and confront him with the idol images of Domitian and Roma. The suspected Christian was asked three times about his faith. If he confessed to Christianity, the court commanded that he curse Jesus and offer incense to idols. If he refused, he was executed. It was an age in which courage became the Christian’s calling.

When he authored this book, John was growing old. The other apostles had already reached their heavenly home and John longed to be with his Lord as well. We can feel the bitter sorrow John experienced as a result of the world’s incorrigible evil, mixed with his great joy at knowing that he, too, would soon live with his Lord in eternity. May we enter these pages with the same mixture of awe and great joy.

SYMBOLISM IN NUMBERS

The recurrence of some numbers throughout the Apocalypse cannot be ignored. Most noticeable are the numbers 4, 7, 10, and 12. To the Hebrew mind of John’s day, the number seven denoted completion. Ten, being a round number, was understood as a suggestion of indefiniteness and of magnitude. Four was a symbol of the visible creation (as in “the four corners of the earth”). Twelve was an appropriate symbol for the Old and New Testament churches (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles). By extension, we can begin to sense the meaning of other numbers to which John refers, particularly the numbers 666, 1,000, 12,000 and 144,000. We will discuss these numbers in a later unit.

Other numbers used in Revelation with varying degrees of symbolism: 2, 3, 3-1/2, 5, 6, 24, 42, 1260, 1600, 7000. Be aware of numbers! They are used for a reason!

PERSONAL APPLICATION*REVELATION 1:1-8*

1. Through whom does God send His revelation? (1:1; Hebrews 1:1-2)

How do we receive His revelation? (1:3; Romans 10:17)

2. John is described as the one who “testifies to everything he saw” about the Lord’s Word. Do we do the same? Why or why not?

3. John, along with his brother James, is called one of the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Why is he called this? (See Luke 9:51-56)

4. How is this nickname appropriate to his authorship of Revelation?

5. Verse 3 records a blessing on those who hear the words of Revelation and take it to heart. What blessings do we routinely hear at the end of our worship services?
Numbers 6:24-26

2 Corinthians 13:14

In what way does the blessing of Revelation 1:3 differ from the Aaronic or Apostolic benedictions used at the end of Lutheran worship services?

6. John warns that the end of time is near (1:3). Yet, he wrote these words more than 1,900 years ago. Should we be concerned about the Lord’s delay? Why or why not? (2 Peter 3:8-9)

7. If the number seven is a symbol for completion, what does John imply when he sends his letter to the seven churches?

How should this affect our personal response to Revelation?

8. In verses 4 and 5, “grace and peace” come from (1) the Lord’s divine name of the Old Testament, (2) the seven spirits (or sevenfold spirit) before the throne, and (3) Jesus Christ. What name do we give this threefold source?

9. Jesus is called “faithful witness” (verse 5). How has the Lord been a faithful witness in your life?

10. If Jesus was the “firstborn from the dead” (verse 5), what does that mean about our own resurrection? (1 Corinthians 15:23–24)

11. For what reason are we to be “a kingdom and priests” (1:6; Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5 & 9)?

12. Describe how Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection (Acts 1:9–11). How will we come again? (1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17)

How does the description of the Lord’s return coincide with the angel’s promise of Acts 1:11?

13. Read Zechariah 12:10 and compare it to Revelation 1:7. Who is it that was pierced? Why was He pierced?

Of what significance is the prophecy in Zechariah that they will mourn as for “an only child,” and “a firstborn son”?

14. What does it mean for our evangelism work when John says that at the Last Day every eye will see the Lord Jesus — “even those who pierced him” (1:7)?

15. How would we in 21st century America translate the phrase, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8)?

16. In verse 8, God calls Himself the one, “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” What does this mean to you?



REVELATION

REVELATION 1:1–8

GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

REVELATION 1:4–8

7

PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 1:9–20

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“The revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word “revelation” is in the singular. Be assured that it is incorrect to refer to this book as Revelations because John’s vision is comprised of one general revelation, that is, the triumph of God’s children over evil.

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THE PROLOGUE

REVELATION 1:1–8

The book of Revelation is recorded in the form of a letter. Like any organized letter, it begins with some introductory remarks, indicating what the letter is about, who it is from, and to whom it is written. It sets the mood for the heart of the message to follow. Many other books in the New Testament are also in letter form. Indeed, most of the New Testament books are written this way. That is why they are called Epistles. The word originates from the Greek *epistellein*, which means, “to send to.”

THE “REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST”

REVELATION 1:1–3

Notice how the first verse of chapter 1 begins with this introduction: “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word “revelation” is in the singular. Be assured that it is incorrect to refer to this book as Revelations because John’s vision is comprised of one general revelation, that is, the triumph of God’s children over evil.

Even though our book has been called “the Revelation of John,” notice again how the opening verse describes it as: “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” Certainly, the revelation is given to John, but it is from and about the risen and ascended Lord.



The express purpose of the revelation is to show God's people the many events which, by necessity, must soon unfold. Because John is given a peek at the inevitable sequence of events, the Lord's promise of Amos 3:7 is once again fulfilled: "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets." The revelation is "sent." The Greek word for "sent," *esmanen*, can more fully be translated "signed." This message is "signed" to John, supporting the contention that much of Revelation is in "sign language," that is, in signs and symbols. John is described as the believer who "bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." The apostle has no hesitation about sharing his message of victory in Christ.

John promises a blessing on those who hear and read the words of the revelation and take to heart its warnings and words of comfort. The blessing (v. 3) is the first of seven blessings found in the book. It echoes Jesus' words in Luke 11:28: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" For those who refuse the message, the moment of crisis is at hand.



GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

REVELATION 1:4-8

John's letter is addressed to the seven churches, which are in Asia. In John's day, the geographical area known as "Asia" consisted of far less territory than the continent with which we are familiar. Asia, in John's day, referred to the western third of the nation we know as Turkey. The seven cities to which John addressed his letter were located on the great circular road, which linked the wealthiest, influential, and populated parts of the territory.

The letter begins with a greeting. John calls for grace, the free gift of divine favor and peace, the state of spiritual contentment, which follows on those who heed his letter. He states that this grace and peace has a triple source.

First, it stems from “him who is, and who was, and who is to come.” Notice how this is a paraphrase of God’s name given in Exodus 3:14–15 when Moses is asked to rally God’s people for the Exodus. Moses wants to know the name of the authority commanding his mission. God answers from the burning bush, “I am who I am.” In the Hebrew this can also be translated, “I will be what I will be.” The Lord underscores His name in Exodus 3:15 by saying, “This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” To be sure, it is the divine name echoed here in John’s Prologue.

Grace and peace also come from the “seven spirits who are before his throne.” Remember, how the number seven denotes “completion”? The “seven spirits” may be a reference to God’s complete Spirit, the one we call the Holy Spirit.

Grace and peace flow from Jesus Christ as well. John describes the Christ with a threefold title:

1. “Faithful witness” – By Jesus’ very life, death, and resurrection, He gives witness to the truth of God’s salvation. The Greek word for “witness” is *martys* from which we get the word “martyr.” Isn’t a martyr one who has given faithful witness?
2. “Firstborn from the dead” – This is the title Paul gives Jesus in Colossians 1:18. By virtue of His resurrection, Jesus is declared supreme ruler of the Church.
3. “The ruler of the kings of the earth” – A title which originates in Psalm 89:27 where the Psalmist foresees a Messiah who will establish an everlasting kingdom. John declares this “threefold Christ” has released us from our sins because of His great love for us.

As a result of the Lord’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ, believers are molded into God’s kingdom. On Mt. Sinai, God promised His people He would form them into “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) if they would obey Him fully and keep His covenant. The early church considered itself to be the true Israel inheriting the promises of its predecessors. That’s why Peter describes Christians as a “royal priesthood” and “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). Believers in Christ comprise the kingdom promised to the people of Israel.

This is the kingdom that waits expectantly for the visible return of its king. In Daniel 7:13, Daniel has a vision in which he sees “one like a son of man” coming “with the clouds of heaven.” Zechariah 12:10 foresees the day in which the citizens of Jerusalem will “look on... him whom they have pierced” and “weep bitterly over him.” The message of these two prophets is joined by John in 1:7 to describe the Last Day on which the glorified Lord would return in Judgment.

Throughout Revelation, God calls Himself “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8, 21:6, 22:13). Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. By implication, God is not only the first and the last, but everything in between as well. He is the Lord who reigns through the entire course of human history. He is the “Almighty,” the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” This description is used to describe both God the Father and Jesus emphasizing their oneness in being eternal and almighty (Isaiah 9:6).

We’ve all written letters to friends or relatives. But how many of us have ever written about a vision directed from the “Alpha and Omega”? This is truly a special letter whose prologue confronts its reader with the Almighty and Eternal God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION*REVELATION 1:9–20*

Please read Revelation 1:9–20 and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit before answering the questions.

1. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples with the power to preach. Peter boldly proclaimed that the words of Joel were reaching fulfillment. “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). Assuming John was nearly 90 years old, how does the prophecy apply to his authorship? What does this suggest about when the last days began?

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2. John was sent into exile for his faith. Did it stop him from professing the name of Jesus?

Do American Christians suffer for their faith? Explain.

-
3. We are accustomed to remembering Jesus as a “Good Shepherd,” or a “sacrificial lamb,” or a “suffering servant.” In what way does John’s portrayal of the ascended Lord affect your image of Jesus?

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4. What does it mean that Jesus has the “keys of death and Hades?” (v. 18; Matthew 10:32–33)

Of what importance is this promise to the Church? (1 Corinthians 15:55–57)

-
5. There is a school of thought that toward the end of earth’s history, Christians will be taken to heaven while unbelievers suffer a period of “tribulation.” In Revelation 1:9, John says he is already a partaker with his fellow Christians in “tribulation.” What does this suggest about the concept of tribulation? (2 Timothy 3:12; Romans 12:1)

-
6. Has the Lord ever comforted you with the words, “Do not be afraid?” When?

How is the glorified Christ speaking to you about your present troubles?

-
7. Jesus’ voice is described like a “trumpet” (1:10). What sound initiates the general resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17?
-

8. Describe Jesus' appearance at His transfiguration. (Mark 9:3; Matthew 17:2)

How is He described in Revelation 1:16b?

Why the similarity?

9. Describe Jesus' clothes in 1:13.

What is the priest, Aaron, to wear in Exodus 28:3-5?

What role does Jesus fulfill in Hebrews 7:26-27?

What is the role of a prophet?

How does Jesus fulfill this role in 1:10-11, 19?

When Jesus holds the seven stars in His hand, what authority does He display?

Question 132 of Luther's Small Catechism asks, "For what threefold office was Christ anointed?" The answer: "Christ was anointed to be my prophet, priest, and king." How is this threefold office demonstrated in the first chapter of Revelation? List the verses for each office.

10. To what is God's Word likened in Ephesians 6:17?

Why is it appropriate to view God's Word in this fashion? (See Hebrews 4:12)

How can we use God's Word in a similar manner? (See Isaiah 49:2-3)

THE GLORIFIED LORD – REVELATION 1:12–16	12
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John hears a great voice like a trumpet blast behind him. It is the voice of the Lord Jesus. The voice commands John to write what he is about to see and send his writing to the seven churches.

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Several major prophets began their writing with majestic visions of God’s glory. Isaiah, when he was called by God, saw a vision of the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” with angels standing guard (Isaiah 6:1ff). Or how about Ezekiel who recorded those fiery visions of God in the opening chapters of his book? John continues the tradition in Revelation, seeing and recording a vision of the victorious, ascended Lord, Jesus Christ. The triumphant Christ overwhelms John, restores him, and appoints him to write to the seven churches.

THE COMMISSIONING

REVELATION 1:9–11

John explains a little bit about himself and the situation into which he has been led. John calls himself a “brother” to his readers, indicating a special relationship with his fellow believers. Their common condition is described in the context of “tribulation,” “kingdom,” and “patient endurance.” Tribulation arises from faithfulness to the principles of the Christian faith, the kind of tribulation Paul writes about to Timothy: “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet, by persevering through tribulation, Christians have the promise of God’s Kingdom.

John is on Patmos, a rocky, 16 square mile island in the Aegean Sea. Patmos was a penal colony to which Roman authorities sent offenders.

What was John's offense? He tells us, "The word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Remember, this was a time in which the Emperor demanded idol worship. Testimony about the deity of Jesus Christ was considered a criminal offense. Visitors to Patmos can still see the cave in which tradition says John lived when he saw his vision. Eusebius, an early church historian, records that John was finally released by the emperor Nerva (AD 96-98) and returned to Ephesus. Whether this is accurate or not remains questionable.

John says he was "in the Spirit" on the day of his vision. We need not conclude that "in the Spirit" meant some sort of trance-like or ecstatic state. For example, the term "in the Spirit" is used by Jesus in Matthew 22:43 as a way of describing David's state of inspiration upon composing Psalm 110. John was inspired by God to see, hear, and write the revelation. The vision takes place on "the Lord's Day," a technical term for the first day of the week, the day when Christ rose from the dead.

John hears a great voice like a trumpet blast behind him. It is the voice of the Lord Jesus. The voice commands John to write what he is about to see and send his writing to the seven churches.

THE GLORIFIED LORD

REVELATION 1:12-16

When John turns to find the source of the command, he is overwhelmed by the vision. There, in the middle of seven golden lampstands is one "like a son of man." In Revelation 1:20, the Lord explains that the seven lampstands represent the seven churches to which John's letter is sent. Who is the "one like a son of man"? The image comes from Daniel 7:9-10, 13-15. Let's look up these verses and explore them.

In Daniel, we have a vision of God the Father (the "Ancient of Days") with clothing "white as snow

and the hair of his head like pure wool." He sits on a fiery throne above blazing wheels of fire. As the Ancient of Days holds court, one "like a son of man" ascends and is presented before the Father. This "son of man" is given a universal eternal kingdom. (Remember how Jesus often referred to Himself as "the Son of Man"?) In Daniel, we witness the resurrected, victorious, ascended Lord Jesus being given His eternal throne. Even as the disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven amid all the clouds, so in Daniel we see the same ascension event, but from heaven's perspective!

Now, look what happens in Revelation. The appearance of the "son of man" resembles Daniel's "Ancient of Days"! His head and hair are like "white wool" or "snow." His face shines like the sun. The "son of man" has become one and the same as the Ancient of Days! The Son is reunited with the Father in eternal glory.

How else is Jesus described? He wears high priestly vestments — a full-length robe and a priestly girdle. It is appropriate to see the risen Lord dressed in this manner because His high-priestly sacrifice brought us forgiveness with God and everlasting life. He has the penetrating insight of one whose eyes are like fire. His feet have the strength and stability of burnished bronze and His voice carries the thunder of rushing waters. In His hand rest seven stars, which Jesus describes in verse 20 as the angels of the seven churches. Not only are all the churches protected by guardian angels, but the Lord Himself reigns as sovereign over the angels, holding them in His right hand. The "sharp two-edged sword" symbolizes the penetrating power of His Word — that's why the sword comes out of His mouth. Hebrews 4:12 describes the Word of God as "sharper than any two-edged sword."

How overwhelming is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ reigning in glory! We worry and fret about our daily problems while the most powerful force in the universe, the Creator who fashioned all things with a word, reassures us, “Don’t be afraid.”



JOHN’S RESPONSE

REVELATION 1:17-20

What does John do when he sees this overwhelming vision? What would you do? He falls to the ground as if dead. His knees buckle from fear. It’s the same kind of response Peter, James and John displayed at Jesus’ Transfiguration after the Father’s voice boomed, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). It’s the same reaction Paul experienced on the road to Damascus when the same glorified Lord thundered from heaven, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 26:14).

The terrifying vision before John intends something quite different than destruction. Jesus lays His hand on John and says, “Fear not.” The fact that Jesus has just been holding seven stars in His hand presents no problem. The entire experience is visionary and symbolic and should not be expected to fulfill literalistic requirements. The same hand that sustains and nourishes the heavens and the Church also raises and upholds the individual.

Many times John had heard His master say, “Don’t be afraid.” Jesus said that when He approached the disciples walking on the water (Matthew 14:27). John’s heart must have leapt for joy when he recognized His master’s voice. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus says. Why not? Jesus reigns supreme. He is “the first and the last.” He is the one who suffered the agony of the crucifixion but now lives into eternity. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus says. He Himself controls the keys of death and hell. He unlocks the prison of sin and damnation for those who trust in Him. Rather than being afraid, Jesus asks John to write down all that the vision will reveal.

How overwhelming is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ reigning in glory! We worry and fret about our daily problems while the most powerful force in the universe, the Creator who fashioned all things with a word, reassures us, “Don’t be afraid.” How pitifully our problems fade before the countenance of the glorified Savior and Redeemer. No longer do we see the frail form of a man ridiculed, scourged, and crucified. Before us stands the God whose power is unlimited and whose reign is everlasting!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 2:1-29

Prayerfully read chapter 2 and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you answer the questions.

Revelation 2:1-8

1. Who is the one “who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (2:1)? See Revelation 1:20

Who is “the first and the last, who died and came to life” (2:8)? See Revelation 1:17-18.

Who is the one “who has the sharp two-edged sword” (2:12)? See Revelation 1:16.

Who is the one “who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze” (2:18)? See Revelation 1:14-15.

Why do you think He is described in so many ways?

2. Even when a church is energetic, even when it remains true to the Word, what may be a danger? (2:4)

What is the remedy? (2:5)

3. Where do we first encounter the tree of life? (See Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24)

What happens when one eats from the tree of life?

What is the promise to those in Ephesus who overcome evil and tribulation (2:7)?

Revelation 2:8-17

4. Christians are born twice. Lutherans believe we are physically born from our mothers, then spiritually born in baptism. We call baptism our rebirth, when we are “born again.” Do we also die twice? If our physical death is the first death, what is the second death? (See Revelation 20:14-15)

What does the promise in Revelation 2:11 mean to those who overcome?

5. How can we be both poor and rich at the same time? (2:9)

6. What does this mean to you: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”?

To whom do these messages apply besides the seven churches?

7. How is our Christian faith attacked by modern “Balaams”?

How do they tempt us?

Revelation 2:18–29

8. Who was Jezebel and what did she do? (See 1 Kings 16:31)

What is so dangerous about the church of Thyatira tolerating the “prophetess Jezebel” (2:20)?

9. Who gives authority to the risen Lord (2:27)?

To whom does the risen Christ give this authority (2:26–27)?

What does this say about the strength and lasting power of the Church?

How do these thoughts echo 1 John 2:24?

10. The Lord is very concerned about the compromise of doctrine by some in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. How do these concerns coincide with John’s exhortation in 2 John 1:9–11?

11. Why is it appropriate to think of Jesus as the morning star?

12. In which of the four churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, or Thyatira) would you have felt most comfortable?

Why?



REVELATION

REVELATION 2:1-29

SMYRNA: FEAR OF PERSECUTION – REVELATION 2:8–11	17
PERGAMUM: COMPROMISE IN DOCTRINE REVELATION 2:12–17	18
THYATIRA: COMPROMISE IN DEED – REVELATION 2:18–29	19
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Even though the church seems on the verge of extinction, the Lord's power will surpass the might of Rome and the church will prosper.



EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMUM, THYATIRA

After revealing Himself to John in all His awesome splendor, the risen, ascended, and glorified Son of God addresses each of the seven churches. The first four churches are in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Each address follows a similar pattern. The church is commended for its God-pleasing deeds, rebuked for its failings, and exhorted to endure in the face of great evil.

EPHESUS: A LOSS OF ZEAL

REVELATION 2:1-7

Some have described the Ephesus of John's day as the "the Vanity Fair of the Ancient World." Three great roads converged on Ephesus, providing its inhabitants with lucrative trade. Because of its commercial importance, Ephesus offered a cornucopia of material goods: gold, silver, pearls, linen, ivory, wooden vessels, brass, iron marble, fragrances, cattle, wine and slaves. It was the Los Angeles of Asia Minor.

Ephesus carried great political importance as well. It was known as a "free city," enjoying the right of self-government. The Romans allowed Ephesus its own democratically elected governing body. Ephesus was also an assize (judicial inquest) city. The Roman governor would regularly visit assize cities to try the most important legal cases. Whenever he visited, much pomp and circumstance followed in his train. At times, Ephesus reflected the grandeur of Rome.



Ephesus possessed great religious importance as well. The great Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, graced the center of the city. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high with 127 pillars. Behind the curtain of the temple stood the image of Diana, a black, repulsive figure that served the Ephesians as a symbol of fertility. Temple worship was an ecstatic, hysterical, weird experience where all manner of shameless things occurred. As we might expect, the Ephesian character was notorious. They were considered superstitious and immoral, comprising one of the vilest cities in Asia.

But to the church, Jesus brings commendations for its patience and hard work. It had to be patient and hardworking to survive the city's moral degradation! The Ephesian church had retained its orthodoxy by testing the doctrine of those who claimed apostleship. It had been particularly successful in expelling the Nicolaitans, a heretical branch of Christianity, which claimed that the Christian could ignore God's Law and do anything he or she wanted. The Nicolaitans perverted Paul's teaching of Christian liberty into Christian license. Despite all the immorality and heresy, the church continued to discern between true and false prophets.

Yet, with all its energy and orthodoxy, the church had lost its first enthusiasm for the Christian faith. Because it had lost the feeling of God's magnificent activity among His people, the church is urged to repent, to shake off its indifference and apathy, and to fall on its knees in confession. Jesus warns that failure to repent will mean His rejection of the church. Rejection is symbolized by the removal of the church's lampstand. Repentance and perseverance, however, will bring the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is symbolized by the "tree of life" in God's Paradise.

SMYRNA: FEAR OF PERSECUTION

REVELATION 2:8-11

To the church of Ephesus, Jesus described Himself as the One "who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and who walks among the seven gold lampstands." To the church at Smyrna, Jesus describes Himself as "the First and the Last, the One who was dead, and came to life."

Smyrna was a great city. It lay 35 miles north of Ephesus and commanded a magnificent harbor. Its trade was particularly rich in wines. Smyrna was everything a city should be, straight spacious streets with a variety of heathen temples lining the main road. Smyrna hosted a fabulous stadium and a large library. Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a free city and an assize town. It claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. Unfortunately, for the Christians, it also boasted its position as the first and foremost in Caesar worship. Under Domitian, Caesar worship was compulsory. Nowhere was life more dangerous for the Christian than in Smyrna. Furthermore, Smyrna housed a very large Jewish population that exercised great influence on the authorities. In later days, the Jews of Smyrna would be responsible for one of the most famous martyrdoms in history, the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna.

Jesus commends the church for surviving through tremendous peril and poverty. Although Smyrna was one of the wealthiest cities in Asia, many Christians were destitute. In some cases, Christians were poor because their homes had been pillaged and plundered. They may have been materially poor, but John describes them as spiritually rich.

The Christians of Smyrna were also in danger from the "blasphemy" (KJV) of those who say they are Jews and are not. Perhaps it would be better to translate this as "slander." Because

the Jews in Smyrna enjoyed influence over the civil authorities, Christians constantly battled malicious gossip and false accusations. In this chapter, Jesus disinherits the Jews of Smyrna, claiming they are not His people and that their religion comprises the “synagogue of Satan.”

In the face of such persecution, the Lord encourages His church to remain fearless. Some of them will be imprisoned and endure “ten days” of tribulation. The ten days is not to be taken literally, but is John’s symbol for an indefinite period of time. If they endure through tribulation, they will receive the Lord’s crown of life. And they will escape the “second death!”

PERGAMUM: COMPROMISE IN DOCTRINE

REVELATION 2:12-17

Pergamum was the capital of its province in Asia. As a result, Pergamum carried a unique atmosphere. Its geographical position prohibited the sort of trade enjoyed by Ephesus or Smyrna, but its position as the capital gave it a definite claim to fame.

Pergamum had one of the most fabulous libraries in the world, consisting of 200,000 volumes (all written by hand, of course!). The city was the center of the Roman worship of the god Asklepios, god of healing, who was often called “Savior.” Sufferers from all over the ancient world trekked to Pergamum. The emblem of Asklepios was the serpent. Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple with tame snakes. During the night, sufferers would be “blessed”(!) with a snake slithering over him or her. It was thought to be the touch of the god himself. Aware of how the devil first appeared to Adam and Eve, is it any wonder Jesus describes the temple as “Satan’s Throne”?

The church of Pergamum dwelt where Satan’s authority was strong. Jesus, the One who wields the sharp two-edged sword, is aware of the church’s predicament. The church is commended for its faithfulness in a city where the devil’s power is rampant. It has held fast to Jesus’ name and did not deny the faith even when Antipas was martyred. We know nothing about this martyr. Legend says he was roasted to death in a bronze bull.

Yet, the church is stumbling. Jesus refers to those in the church who are teaching the doctrines of Balaam. In Numbers 25:1-3, the women of Moab are taught how to beguile the Israelites into acting against the Lord by worshiping false idols. Although there is no reference to Balaam at this point, Numbers 31:16 points to Balaam as the instigator. (Balak was the king of Moab who feared the Israelites and wanted to dilute them of their power, Numbers 22:1-6.)

We can deduce that those in Pergamum professing the teachings of Balaam were encouraging Christians to compromise their faith by eating “things sacrificed to idols.” In Pergamum, when a man sacrificed an animal in a heathen temple, only a small part of the animal was burned. The priest kept a portion of what remained and the rest was returned to the worshiper. It would be used for a feast among the worshiper’s friends. Very often, the feast would be held in the temple of the god. Part of these pagan festivities would involve immoral behavior. For Christians, the idea of joining such festivities was an abomination to their Lord.

The risen Lord demands these heretics repent and turn from their ways. Otherwise, He will “make war” against the church with the sword of His mouth. The divine Word would be directed against the compromisers.

But those who endure are given the promise of “hidden manna” and a “white stone, with a new name written on it.” One legend says that at the destruction of the Temple (587 BC), a golden pot of manna that the people had eaten in the wilderness had been hidden by Jeremiah and that he would produce it when the Messiah appeared. The promise of the hidden manna probably symbolizes the Second Coming of Christ.

The “white stone” could have a dozen or more plausible interpretations. Perhaps the most convincing comes from the ancient custom of jurors signifying innocence by casting a white pebble into an urn. Jesus promises that those who remain faithful are innocent before God through the merits of Jesus Christ. The new name of the stone is symbolic of the new life God gives to those who trust Him. Think of all those whose names were changed as an indication of new life in the Lord: Jacob who became Israel, Simon who became Peter, Saul who became Paul, and Levi who became Matthew.

THYATIRA: COMPROMISE IN DEED

REVELATION 2:18-29

It's very odd that the longest of the seven letters was written to the smallest and least important of the seven cities. Thyatira was, however, a respectable commercial town in which trade guilds flourished and pagan religious practices were the criteria for membership. Jesus praises the church at Thyatira for its love, faith, and perseverance. But there is one big problem — a prophetess styled after Jezebel. Remember, Jezebel was King Ahab's wicked wife who fostered in Israel the idolatrous worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:29ff; 2 Kings 9:30ff). John's contemporary Jezebel has seduced some Christians into joining pagan festivities, and compromising their faith in order to join the trade guilds. The promise of punishment follows. Jezebel's children (not literal offspring, but those who have embraced her doctrines of compromise) will be cast into great tribulation.

The Lord has no further criticism for those who have remained faithful. If they endure in the faith until the end, they will be given authority over the nations. The promise that the faithful will rule over the nations “with a rod of iron” etc., is from Psalm 2:9. Psalm 2 is a forecast of the Messiah's triumphant work. In Revelation 2:27, the Messianic promise is transferred from Christ to the Church. Even though the church seems on the verge of extinction, the Lord's power will surpass the might of Rome and the church will prosper.

The promise also includes the morning star. What is the morning star? In Revelation 22:16, the ascended Lord says, “I am...the bright morning star.” The promise to the faithful is the greatest of all prizes: Jesus Christ Himself!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 3:1-22

Prayerfully read chapter 3 and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you answer the questions.

Revelation 3:1-7

1. Along with its lucrative trading business, Sardis enjoyed a booming wool industry. Why is it appropriate that Christ would stress “white robes” to the church at Sardis?

2. How might a church be alive in the name but dead in Spirit?

3. How does Jesus’ warning of imminent judgment against the Sardis church compare to the description of Jesus’ Second Coming in Matthew 24:42-44? 1 Thessalonians 5:2? 2 Peter 3:10?

4. Jesus often describes His followers as wearing white robes. What does this symbol stand for? See Revelation 7:13-14.

5. In what context does the divine ledger of Revelation 3:5 first appear in Exodus 32:32-33?

6. Jesus promises that those who remain faithful will be acknowledged by Christ before His Father and all the angels. How do you think He will do that? (Matthew 25:32-34)

7. In Revelation 3:7, give Jesus’ description of Himself and the action He will take. (Isaiah 22:2)

Revelation 3:7-13

8. Read Matthew 24:4-13. How does Jesus’ description of the last days coincide with the warning and promise of Revelation 3:10-11?

9. Jesus promises that the believers of the Philadelphian church will have God’s name written on them. What is written on the foreheads of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1?

10. Jesus promises that a New Jerusalem will descend from heaven (3:12). Describe it from Revelation 21:1-2.

Revelation 3:14–22

11. Some Christians say “Āmen,” others say “Amen.” Either way, Jesus calls Himself the Amen. Look up the definition of “Amen” and apply it to Jesus.

Why do we use this word at the end of our prayers?

12. Jesus calls Himself the “source” or “origin” of all creation (3:14). How is that claim supported by John 1:1–5?

13. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches that we should not store up treasures on earth, but that we should lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). How does this compare with His exhortation in Revelation 3:18?

14. What are the two promises Jesus gave His disciples in Luke 22:29–30?

What is the promise of Revelation 3:20?

How about Revelation 3:21?

15. When we rule with Jesus in His Kingdom, will we rule over an earthly kingdom (as proclaimed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses)? See John 18:36.



REVELATION

REVELATION 3:1-22

PHILADELPHIA: KEEP THE FAITH! REVELATION 3:7-13	23
LAODICEA: THE CHURCH THAT JESUS SPITS OUT REVELATION 3:14-21	24
PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 4:1-11	26

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So repent! Turn from your blind ways, the Lord commands, and store up heavenly treasures. Time is running out. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He pounds on our hearts to get in. Why keep the door locked?

• • •

SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA, AND LAODICEA

Remember that we are in the middle of the risen Lord's address to the seven churches of Asia. He has already spoken to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Now He turns His attention to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. To each He brings words of commendation, reproof, and a call to repentance and endurance. Could these letters to the seven churches have been addressed to us? Of course! As the writer of Ecclesiastes stated: "There is nothing new under the sun."

SARDIS: THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING DEAD

REVELATION 3:1-6

Some thirty miles southeast of Thyatira lay the city of Sardis. Sardis enjoyed the intersection of five major roads in its center. As we might expect, the city was a magnet for trade and wealth. Even nature cooperated with its wealth. Through the city ran the gold-bearing river Pactolus. The people of Sardis were pleasure-seeking, luxury-loving, and decadent, and, as a result, were the object of contempt from other inhabitants of Asia Minor.

Sardis had once been a hardy frontier town in the Roman Empire, but its people had grown slack and lazy. They worshipped the god Cybele (thought to have the power of restoring the dead to life) in a wild, hysterical manner. Because Cybele, rather than Caesar, was the object of Sardis' worship, the city posed no special danger to the Christian. Christians in Sardis were tolerated more than in any other city of Asia Minor.



Jesus describes the Sardis church as one that has the name of being alive while, in reality, it is quite dead. Externally the church is flourishing, prospering, and maintaining its own. Spiritually, however, it has breathed its last. In what ways may the church have died? Perhaps it had grown more concerned with material goods than spiritual concerns. Maybe it evolved into a friendly club rather than a place of worship and Christian growth. A church can die when it is more absorbed in form than life, more concerned with liturgical perfection than heart-felt worship and outreach. A church can wither when it establishes its own past as an object of worship, retreating to tradition while neglecting Christian ideals and goals.

Because the church at Sardis remained relatively free from heresy and outside persecution, it had slipped into a deep, lethargic sleep. Its Christianity was perfectly inoffensive. The risen Christ, the One who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says He knows their works and there is very little to praise.

The exhortation comes: “Wake up!” Ring the alarm! Jesus’ words are particularly appropriate because the acropolis at Sardis had twice in its history fallen to enemy invasion due to a lack of vigilance by the city’s guards. Like the enemies who twice overcame the city’s defenses, Jesus proclaims He will come in judgment upon the church suddenly and unexpectedly.

Although most of the church’s members had grown apathetic and unconcerned about pagan influences, some had not yet “soiled their garments.” They were still clean in God’s sight. Those who have not been seduced by the secular world are promised a walk with Christ in white robes, a sign of purity and festivity in communion with the Lord. They have gained spotlessness in God’s eyes through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Those who overcome trial and temptation receive a threefold promise:

1. They will be clothed in white garments,
2. Their names will not be blotted out from the book of life,
3. Christ will acknowledge them before God the Father and His angels.

PHILADELPHIA: KEEP THE FAITH!

REVELATION 3:7-13

Remember W. C. Fields’ epitaph? “Frankly, I’d rather be in Philadelphia!” W. C. Fields’ memorial could have composed the early church’s motto. Of all the seven churches in Asia, the church at Philadelphia kept the faith!

Philadelphia lay 28 miles southeast of Sardis. It was a relatively new city, some 250 years old, strategically located on the corners of three countries — Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. Some have called it “the gateway to the East.” The city was originally built as an outpost of Greek civilization confronting the uncivilized tribes which lay beyond. In John’s day, Philadelphia was a potential launching pad for the Christian faith into new territory. That is one reason why Jesus says to the church in 3:8: “Behold, I have set before you an open door.”

Philadelphia stretched along the edge of a great plain at the base of a volcanic area. Its position was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, volcanic activity provided Philadelphia with abundantly fertile soil. On the other hand, volcanic disruption carried the ever-present threat of earthquakes. The city enjoyed an interesting temple custom. When a man honorably served his country as a magistrate, public benefactor, or priest, the city constructed a pillar in one of its many temples on which the honoree’s name was inscribed. Because of this tradition, the church at Philadelphia

could more deeply understand Jesus' promise to transform believers into pillars of God's temple.

In years to come, when Islam was sweeping across Turkey, Philadelphia would stand as the last bastion of Christianity. Even today, there remains a Christian presence in modern-day Philadelphia (now Alasehir), alongside a Muslim population.

When the ascended Lord addresses the church of Philadelphia, He refers to Himself as "the holy one, the true one" and the One "who has the key of David." Jesus is authentic. His word is sure and reliable. His title as the holder of David's key comes straight from Isaiah 22:22 where God gives His faithful servant, Eliakim, a key to the royal palace so that no one can enter or leave without Eliakim's consent. Eliakim is a type of Christ, foreshadowing Jesus' acquisition of the keys to the Kingdom of God. Jesus will open the gates of heaven to believers and close them to the faithless.

Despite its lack of strength, the church of Philadelphia is praised for its endurance. It has resisted many spiritual attacks and stayed faithful to God's Word. Jesus promises the defeat of the "synagogue of Satan" (those who claim to be God's chosen people while following the devil's bidding). He assures protection from the massive trials still to come. To those "who overcome," the eternal Christ promises a permanent place in His Kingdom.

First, each saint is assured that he or she will be a "pillar" in God's Temple, the Church — a citizenship to be fully realized in the "New Jerusalem."

Second, He will confirm that heavenly citizenship by writing the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and His own name on each believer. Each is thereby to be registered as belonging to Him. In the end, what the name of Jesus means for those who bear it will be fully made known!

LAODICEA: THE CHURCH THAT JESUS SPITS OUT

REVELATION 3:14-21

Laodicea rested 43 miles southeast of Philadelphia. The adult male Jewish population in the city numbered about 7,500, comprising a very influential bloc capable of bringing great pressure on the Roman government. Laodicea was the center of the banking business in Asia Minor. In AD 17 and in AD 60, the city was laid waste by earthquakes, but after the latter disaster, the citizens of Laodicea refused outside help for reconstruction. The city was sufficiently proud and rich to rebuild itself. Several garment factories in Laodicea produced cloaks that were exported all over the known world. Laodicea also housed an important medical school famous for its eye powder. Perhaps more than any other city in Asia Minor, the Laodicean's were people who put their trust in material prosperity. It is troubling to consider how closely Laodicea reflects our affluent American society.

When Jesus calls Himself the "Amen," He describes Himself as the affirmation of God's truth. Amen is the Hebrew word for "certainly," "truly," "so be it!" As the source of God's creation, Jesus is a faithful and true witness to the promises of God.

What is the problem with this church? It is lukewarm, tepid, blah! The members of the Laodicea church are "convenient Christians," maintaining a religion without enthusiasm. Very likely, the members of the church drew the line when religion began interfering with business. They possessed a "common sense religion." The Ten Commandments were all very proper, but when it required the conviction of the heart to love one's enemy, well, forget it! In the district around Laodicea, there were hot mineral springs. When the water became tepid, lukewarm, it tasted horrible! Jesus says lukewarm Christians taste just as rancid and He will spit them out.

Even though the Laodicean's feel materially rich, they lie in spiritual squalor. Rather than focus on earthly gold, factory-made garments, and world-renowned eye medicine, the Lord demands they turn to receive Jesus' gifts of forgiveness and life. These are true treasures, symbolized as heavenly gold, white robes, and heavenly salve to open spiritually blinded eyes. So repent! Turn from your blind ways, the Lord commands, and store up heavenly treasures. Time is running out. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He pounds on our hearts to get in. Why keep the door locked?

The promise to those who open the door is table fellowship. So what? To the mind of John's day, the sharing of a meal was an indication of affection and companionship. Jesus promises to share His heavenly throne with those who overcome. Christians will rule with Christ. The Lord Jesus endured suffering, tribulation, and death in obedience to the Father's will and so received an eternal kingdom. By the grace of God, we are promised a share in the Kingdom, co-rulers with the King of all creation.

Can we find a somewhat common, universal pattern in the disintegration of these seven churches? With the exception of Philadelphia, notice the progression:

The Seven Churches:

Ephesus:	A Loss of Zeal
Smyrna:	Fear of Persecution
Pergamum:	Compromise in Doctrine
Thyatira:	Compromise in Deed
Sardis:	The Church of the Living Dead
Philadelphia:	Keep the Faith
Laodicea:	The Church That Jesus Spits Out

When a church loses its zeal for the faith, a fear of persecution or suffering follows. Rather than suffer, a church may opt to compromise its doctrine. Once doctrine is compromised, active obedience to the Lord crumbles as well. A church will still call itself "Christian," but in word and deed, it will be dead. Faith is lost. The church is expelled from the Kingdom of God.

Beware of the loss of zeal!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 4:1-11

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read chapter 4 and write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided.

Revelation 4:1-11

1. Who also enjoyed the rare privilege of beholding the throne of God?

Ezekiel 1:1

Acts 7:54-60

2 Corinthians 12:1-6

1 Kings 22:19

Isaiah 6:1-3

2. From Exodus 19:16 describe the presence of God upon Mt. Sinai, and from Revelation 4:5 describe The Throne of God.

Exodus 19:16

Revelation 4:5

3. Compare the four living beings of Revelation 4:7-8 with Ezekiel 1:5-11. How are they alike?
-

How do they differ?

4. What rested above the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1:11)?
-

What stood above the gleaming crystal (Ezekiel 1:22, 26-28)?

How do the praises of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 compare to the praises of the living creatures in Revelation 4:8?

5. With what words do the living creatures define God's relationship to time (4:8)?
-

6. List the points found in the following verses regarding the throne of God.

Psalm 11:4

Psalm 47:8

Isaiah 6:1

Isaiah 66:1

7. To what event do the 24 elders refer in 4:11? (Genesis 1; John 1:1-5)

8. When the 24 elders cast down their crowns before the throne of God, they suggest our response to the gifts and blessing we've received from God. They are given to us for a while, but to whom do we return them (9-11)?

How?

9. It is exciting to see the honor and glory given to God by the 24 elders. If they represent God's people throughout history, how is their reign predicted by the following.

2 Timothy 2:12

1 Corinthians 6:2

Matthew 25:23

10. Does the vision of God's throne appear frightening? _____ Comforting? _____ Both? _____

Why?

11. For what reason did Moses return from the fire and smoke of God's presence on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 21)?

For what reason do you think John returns from his vision to write Revelation (1:3)?

12. How do the following verses express the honor and glory to be given to God?

Romans 16:27

Ephesians 3:21

Galatians 1:5

Jude 1:25

13. When do you feel you are giving the greatest honor and glory to God in your day-to-day living?



• • •

John, through picture language, opens the gates of heaven to provide us a glimpse of God's splendor and authority. Praise God that He condescends to use human language at all!

• • •

THE GREAT THRONE ROOM

REVELATION 4:1-11

Hold on to your hats (does anyone wear a hat anymore?! The Holy Spirit is going to sweep John into heaven itself! John has seen and heard the ascended Lord and he has recorded the risen Christ's message to the seven churches. Now the author is carried before the very throne of God and a new phase unfolds in the revelation. We cannot totally digest the unfolding because God's appearance is beyond any human comprehension. Yet John, through picture language, opens the gates of heaven to provide us a glimpse of God's splendor and authority. Praise God that He condescends to use human language at all!

Like Stephen, the first martyr of the faith, who upon his death saw a vision of Jesus standing by God's glorious throne (Acts 7:54-58), John now sees the door to heaven open. The Lord invites John to enter His throne room so that he might witness a vision of history. All events on earth are governed by God in heaven; it is natural that the only legitimate insight into history can be gained from the vantage point of God's throne.

John stands before the throne of God. On that throne sits God the Father. The Father does not appear in human form, but rather resembles the sparkling lights that reflect off brilliant jewels of jasper, sardius (ruby/carnelian) and emerald. The sardius is a blood-red stone named after the city of Sardis where it was found. The emerald is a green stone. The jasper,

according to Revelation 21:11, is translucent like glass. The sparkling luster of the jasper and the fiery red sardius are encircled by a halo of emerald green.

Around God's throne stand 24 other thrones with an "elder" dressed in white and wearing a crown sitting on each throne. Who are these 24 elders? Revelation does not explicitly say, but it gives a clue in 21:13-14 where, in the new Jerusalem, there are two sets of 12 figures upholding the city. The gates of the city are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the foundation stones with the names of the 12 apostles. The two sets combine to represent the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament churches. We can surmise that the symbol of the 24 elders is intended to convey a similar idea: the Church of God through history, that is, all God's saints ruling with the Lord.

As He appeared to the people of Israel on Mt. Sinai, so the Lord appears to John with the power of lightning and thunder. God discloses Himself frequently in the Old Testament through the dramatic activity of nature. Not only does He descend with thunder and lightning on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16ff), but He appears with thunder, lightning, and hail in an earthquake to David in Psalm 18:6ff, and Psalm 77:18. In Revelation, the symbols of thunder and lightning are always associated with God's throne and indicate an event of special importance. Before God's throne, the seven spirits are once more present in the symbol of seven flaming torches.

Stretching out before the throne is the sea of glass. We can imagine the crystal surface reflecting the multi-colored lights of the throne and adding to God's manifestation of power and glory. In Jewish thought, the sea was an ominous, dark aspect of nature. It represented the tumult

of confusion in a world of evil. So, for example, the uncreated nothingness of Genesis 1:1 is described as a deep sea. Again, Jesus' calming of the sea just as the disciples were about to drown (Matthew 8:23-27) impressed the disciples not only because their Master had control over the wind and waves, but also because He showed Himself Lord of the deep, dark forces of the sea. How fitting in Revelation that the King of all creation should have before His throne, and completely under His authority, a calm, tamed sea of glass. In the New Heaven and Earth (21:1), there is no more sea at all. It disappears! Evil is eternally banished from God's creation.

The throne of God is guarded by four strange-looking creatures. These creatures are covered with eyes — they see everything! Each being has a different appearance. One looks like a lion, the other like a bull, the third has a human face, and the fourth appears as an eagle. Each creature carries six wings. Could you draw a picture of these creatures as described by John? Of course not! We are dealing with visions designed to stir the imagination rather than lend themselves to the etchings of an artist. Who are these creatures? An early church father, Irenaeus (AD 170), with no basis but his own imagination, equated the living creatures with the four Gospels. The lion of strength represented John, he said. The bull or ox of service pointed to Luke, the man of intelligence to Matthew, and the eagle of high spiritual flight to Mark. There is nothing in Scripture, however, to support this flight of fancy.

The four creatures somewhat resemble the four beings which guard the throne in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1:5-14). They also suggest the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2-3, particularly because the seraphim ceaselessly praised God with similar words: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." We can at least be sure that the four creatures are

When the elders cast their crowns before the throne, they acknowledge the source of their authority, returning honor to the only One deserving universal praise. The elders' praise focuses on God's creative activity rather than the divine attributes worshipped by the four creatures. God is worthy of universal praise because through Him everything came into being.



an exalted order of angelic beings who guard the throne of God while leading the heavenly host in worship and adoration. Their worship is a unique aspect of Revelation. It should be of no surprise that the many great hymn writers have turned to these passages of Scripture for their images and lyrics.

The 24 elders now join in the worship. They rise from their thrones, fall on their knees, and lay their crowns at the foot of God's throne. Typically, a response to God's majesty involves falling on one's knees and prostrating oneself before Him. Indeed, the word "worship" originally contained the idea of bending down to kiss the feet of deity. When the elders cast their crowns before the throne, they acknowledge the source of their authority, returning honor to the only One deserving universal praise. The elders' praise focuses on God's creative activity rather than the divine attributes worshipped by the four creatures. God is worthy of universal praise because through Him everything came into being.

The early church confronted a perversion of the Christian faith called "Gnosticism." The Gnostics claimed that God, being all good and light, was incapable of creating this evil, material universe. Accordingly, God "emanated" lesser gods, one of which (the Demiurge) created the world. The bold claim of Revelation 4:11 is that God was intimately involved in the creation of the beautiful and unspoiled universe through His divine Word.

One of the interesting stylistic features of Revelation is its switching from heavenly to earthly scenes. The book opens with John's exile at Patmos, but quickly switches to a vision of the ascended Lord, then returns to the frustrated and persecuted churches on earth. Now, once again, we have returned to the throne room of God. This constant alternation of setting should not make us dizzy or confused, but rather should emphasize the close connection between heaven and earth, God and man. God is not somewhere in the outer limits. He is with us now.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 5:1-14

Heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to give me knowledge and wisdom so that I may apply Your Word to my life and guide me as I answer these questions. Amen.

Revelation 5:1-7

1. Notice how often the number 7 is used in this chapter. Since 7 is a symbol for completion, what does it mean that:

a. The scroll of history will be displayed through seven visions, one for each seal?

b. The Lamb has seven eyes?

c. The Lamb has seven horns?

d. The Lamb is praised with a sevenfold blessing (5:12)?

List them:

1.

3.

5.

7.

2.

4.

6.

2. Look up Ezekiel 2:9-10. Describe the scroll given to him.

What is noteworthy about the scroll in Isaiah 29:11-13?

Why can't anyone open it?

What does this tell us about why the scroll in Revelation 5:4 can't be opened?

Read Daniel's version of the end times in Daniel 12:1-4. What is Daniel to do with the scroll (12:4)?

When is the scroll to be unloosed (12:4)?

How do you think the Lamb's opening of the scroll in Revelation pertains to the times in which we are living?

3. How does the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1 describe the Messiah?

Which title in Revelation 5:5 does this suggest?

What does the prophecy of Genesis 49:9-10 say about the Messiah?

Which title in Revelation 5:5 does this fulfill?

4. Is it so foreign to think of the Lamb having seven eyes? Search Zechariah's vision, particularly Zechariah 4. What do the seven lights on the golden lampstand represent (Zechariah 4:10)?

Revelation 5:8-14

5. What an interesting concept: our prayers resemble incense offered to heaven (Rev. 5:8)! Is this idea unique to Revelation? Hardly! What does Psalm 141:2 say about prayer?

Why is prayer like offering incense?

6. For whom has the Lamb died (5:9)?

7. What does His death make us (5:10)?

8. How many angels are in heaven (v. 11)?

How many of these could Jesus have called on for help in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:53)?

How strong is an angel? (2 Chronicles 32:21)

9. In your own words, write a song of praise using the verses of Revelation 5:9-10, 12-13.

10. What does Paul say has happened to our Lord as a result of His sacrificial life on earth? (Philippians 2:9-11)

How is that confirmed in Revelation 4:9-11?



REVELATION

REVELATION 5:1-14

UNIVERSAL ADORATION – REVELATION 5:8-14	36
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As we move into Chapter 5, emphasis is placed on God as Redeemer. The presence of the Lamb afflicted with the marks of slaughter portrays the victory of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. The Lamb's mercy, love, and humility are as impressive as the Father's power and majesty.

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THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

In the previous chapter, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures worshipped God as Creator. Through the eyes of John, we witnessed a royal vision of God's power and majesty as the elders praised the One by whose hand all things came into existence. As we move into Chapter 5, emphasis is placed on God as Redeemer. The presence of the Lamb afflicted with the marks of slaughter portrays the victory of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. The Lamb's mercy, love, and humility are as impressive as the Father's power and majesty.

THE BOOK WITH THE SEVEN SEALS

REVELATION 5:1-7

The Father, sitting on his multi-colored throne, holds in his right hand a scroll. The scroll displays writing on both front and backside of the parchment and it is sealed with seven seals to insure the secrecy of its message. In John's day, books were in the form of scrolls, usually made of papyrus. The "codex" (a book with pages that could be turned) was just then being introduced. Usually, the sheets of papyrus which made up the scroll had writing on one side only, but occasionally, both sides were used.

The concept of a heavenly book or scroll containing the course of human history is reflected in Psalm 139:16: "In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." In the Jewish apocryphal book Enoch, written between the Old and New Testament periods, many references exist to a heavenly tablet



that contains the deeds of men throughout the generations. So, we can be sure that the scroll in the Father's hand is a record of mankind's deeds. In upcoming chapters, the seven seals of the scroll will be unloosed one by one permitting us several different views of human history. By and large, they will not be pleasant visions, but through them all, the theme of God's victory over evil will emerge.

Standing before us is a strong angel. He invites anyone who is sufficiently worthy to loose the seven seals. The challenge stretches to the far reaches of creation. Notice that the Father will not perform the task. He calls for a mediator, someone worthy to bring history to its God-ordained consummation. And no one steps forward! No one "in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth" is worthy.

John weeps at this lack. Unless the seals are broken and history unravelled, our Lord's plan for the universe will be thwarted. John weeps at the prospect of God's final plan never being realized.

Fortunately, one of the elders informs John that there is someone sufficiently worthy to open the scroll. Who could it be? "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered." It is Christ, the Lamb of God, who will unroll the scroll because of His decisive victory accomplished on the cross. He conquered through self-sacrifice and can now bring man's history to a victorious end.

The Lamb of God bears seven horns and seven eyes. He carries the wounds of His

slaughter. Imagine how this one image portrays the central theme of the New Testament — victory through sacrifice! The source of this imagery comes from the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:7: "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." John the Baptist summarized the symbol of the Lamb in his introduction to the Christ: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! There is no more helpless symbol than the Lamb. Later on in Revelation, we will confront a beast who combines the brutality of the leopard, bear, and lion. The Lamb, it would seem, is doomed. And yet, as the story unfolds, victory rests in the Lamb's sacrifice.

There is no value in trying to visualize this seven-eyed, seven-horned Lamb bearing the marks of slaughter. Again, the image is symbolical. Throughout the intertestamental period, Jewish writers used the image of the horn to represent power. Daniel relies heavily on this image in his vision (Daniel 7:7). Even Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praises God for raising up "a horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69). The fact that the Lamb carries seven horns and seven eyes indicates His complete vision and power. The eyes are further defined as "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6).

Praise the Lord! The Lamb marches up to the Father's right hand and takes the scroll. How does He do it? With his mouth? His hoof? It doesn't really matter because the symbolism is of utmost importance. It signifies His worthiness to open the seals.

The hymn of praise spreads into ever widening circles, finally incorporating “myriads of myriads” of angels. The word “myriad” literally translates into “10,000.” So, how many angels are present? Literally, there are ten thousand times ten thousand of them.



UNIVERSAL ADORATION

REVELATION 5:8-14

Universal adoration follows. First, the living creatures and elders fall down and worship the Lamb. Notice what this worship involves: singing, prayer, and praise. The harp was the traditional instrument used in the singing of Psalms, and the golden bowls are full of incense, symbolizing the prayers of the saints. Even though they may be despised on earth, prayers are so precious to the Lord that they are brought to Him in golden bowls.

The hymn declares the reason for the Lamb’s worthiness. He was sacrificed in order to purchase for God every person on earth — every tribe, nation, language. Because of His sacrifice, God’s people have become a kingdom of priests. The promise given to the Israelites at Sinai, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation,” is finally fulfilled in the establishment of the Lord’s Church as a result of the Lamb’s sacrifice. All believers will now share in Christ’s reign. Notice how the same kind of worship is offered in this chapter to the Lamb as was offered in the last chapter to the Father.

The hymn of praise spreads into ever widening circles, finally incorporating “myriads of myriads” of angels. The word “myriad” literally translates into “10,000.” So, how many angels are present? Literally, there are ten thousand times ten thousand of them. We might simply say they are countless. And all of them ascribe to Jesus seven qualities: power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. Finally, all creatures join in praise and worship. The praise encompasses both the Father on the throne and the Lamb who is worthy to loose the scroll.

Because the four living creatures were the first to offer praise, it is appropriate that they should bring it to an end as well. Notice how the four creatures’ praise is followed by the 24 elders, then sung by all the angels, reaching its climax with the praise of all creation, and closing with the thunderous word “Amen.”

This chapter may give us greater insight into our understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God. Even though “the Lamb of God” conjures a meek, quiet creature in the hands of the butcher; by His very obedience and sacrifice, Jesus offers victory and redemption to all mankind.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 6:1-17

Dear Heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to guide me as I study Your Holy Word and apply it to my life. Amen.

Revelation 6:1-2

1. Look up Zechariah 6:1-8.

What colors are the four groups of horses in this passage?

For what purpose has the Lord allowed them to “patrol the earth” (verse 8)?

Read Zechariah 5:1-4. Notice how a scroll is again so closely associated with the unusual colored horses. We start to feel as if John and Zechariah’s visions are more closely linked than we can fully comprehend.

2. Can you think of any nations in the past that were obsessed with conquest and subjection?

Are there any today?

Will there be any tomorrow? How do we know? (Matthew 24:6)

Revelation 6:3-6

3. Some millennialists believe the Lord will reign on earth for 1,000 years, during which time there will be total harmony among the nations of the world. Judging from the second seal, will there ever be “peace on earth” as claimed by some millennialists?

-
4. Give some examples of what it would mean to us if one day’s wages would pay only for the simplest of food.

-
5. Name some areas of the world currently suffering severe famine and starvation.

Scientists tell us there is enough food in the world to feed every person. But our surplus food isn’t reaching many hungry mouths. Judging by the third seal, will the world ever be totally nourished? (John 12:7-8)

Does that mean we should give up trying to feed the poor (Matthew 25:34-40)? Give reasons to substantiate your answer.

Revelation 6:7-11

6. Look up Ezekiel 14:21. What are the judgments that are to be sent to Jerusalem as a result of its idolatry?

How do they resemble the activity of the fourth horseman?

-
7. The Lord tells His martyrs to wait patiently until all His believers have witnessed and suffered for their faith. Then the end will come. For what reason do we endure a prolonged wait for the Lord's return according to 2 Peter 3:1-9?

Revelation 6:12-17

8. Look up Jesus' words about the end times in Luke 21:10-19. To which seals do they point?

What similarities do you find?

-
9. Look up Jesus' words about the end times in Matthew 24:29-30. To which seal do these words point?

-
10. List some ways in which the environment (nature) appears to be turning against mankind.

-
11. Why do we not need to fear and hide in caves as the people described in Revelation 6:15-17? (See Acts 2:19-21 and Romans 10:13.)
-

Notice how we can gain insight into the images of Revelation by referring to other books of the Bible.

This is the way in which a mysterious book like Revelation must be interpreted, not by our own guesswork and suppositions, but by relating other passages of Scripture to the images of Revelation. Revelation cannot give us new doctrines about our faith. It can only support doctrines already presented in Scripture.



MARTYRS' PRAYERS, NATURE OUT OF CONTROL REVELATION 6:9-17	40
PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 7:1-17	42



We now see the history of fallen man unraveled before our eyes. Six of the seals are opened in rapid succession, but the seventh seal will not be unloosed until chapter 8. Brace yourselves. We now witness the inevitable lot of man as long as he endures in this world. It is not a pretty picture!



THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

REVELATION 6:1-17

Remember how the vision of the glorified Son of Man led to the writing of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor? In the same way, the throne room vision leads to the opening of the scroll. We now see the history of fallen man unraveled before our eyes. Six of the seals are opened in rapid succession, but the seventh seal will not be unloosed until chapter 8. Brace yourselves. We now witness the inevitable lot of man as long as he endures in this world. It is not a pretty picture!

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

REVELATION 6:1-8

The opening of the first four seals comprise the vision often referred to as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” A different colored horse appears upon the breaking of each seal, and each rider is called into existence by the utterance of one of the four living creatures guarding the throne of God.

The first seal is broken by the Lamb. John looks and, to his amazement, sees a white horse. Mounted on the horse is one holding a bow, and a crown is given to him. In John’s day, white was the color representing conquest and militarism. In the Old Testament, the bow was a symbol for military power. God told Hosea He would “break the bow of Israel” (Hosea 1:5). Jeremiah 51:56 speaks of how the men of Babylon were captured and “their bows broken in pieces.” The crown, of course, is a symbol of victory.

Throughout the history of mankind, national and political leaders will arise whose sole purpose is to conquer. Nations will subjugate other nations with an unquenchable obsession. Rulers will dominate and exploit their people. People will try to control other people. The spirit of conquest is loosed upon the world, and in our fallen state, conquest, subjection, and slavery will be a constant fact of life.

When the second seal is removed, John sees a red horse whose rider is given a great sword. The rider represents war. Naturally, it is a red horse upon which the rider sits because red represents slaughter and bloodshed. The rider's mission is to remove peace from the world and cause men and women to slay one another.

This is the spirit of warfare unleashed to evoke hatred and armed conflicts ranging from primitive tribal warfare to the potential horrors of a nuclear holocaust. This rider, too, has authority to wreak destruction on a sinful, lost world.

Upon the command of the third living creature, a black horse rides forth whose rider holds a pair of scales. A voice from the throne room calls, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine." Strange words, indeed! But the black horse and its rider are suggesting to us the ravages and injustice of famine. A denarius was equal to one day's wages. So, for one day's wages, a man could buy only enough wheat for himself or enough of the less nutritious barley for three people. These were exorbitant prices even in John's day.

Notice, however, that there is a limit to the famine. The oil and wine, two staples of the nations' diet, were not to be touched. The third horse, with all its harmful intentions,

cannot bring destruction beyond a certain point defined by God. The scale in the horseman's hand represents how each staple food must be measured, rationed in order to restrict food to the minimum.

Famine, too, is an inescapable affliction. Even in our affluent 21st century world, horror stories filter in from Africa and Asia, pictures showing children on the verge of starvation, and reports from our own cities of malnourished families. The horseman reminds us of Jesus' realistic comment, "The poor you will have with you always."

When John sees the fourth seal unloosed, a horse appears whose color is that of a corpse. Its rider is Death, followed inevitably by his ally Hades. Authority is given to the rider and his horse to kill one-fourth of the population of the world by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. It is no surprise that death by wild beast should increase in a land already devastated by warfare, famine, and disease.

MARTYRS' PRAYERS, NATURE OUT OF CONTROL *REVELATION 6:9-17*

The fifth seal presents us with an altogether different vision. It deals with all the martyrs of the church. Before John's eyes stands an altar, beneath which are the souls of the faithful who have been killed for their trust in the Word of God. In the Old Testament, bulls were sacrificed and the blood poured out at the altar's base. Because the souls of the martyrs lie at the base of the altar, God considers their untimely deaths an offering to Him. From beneath the altar arises the cry for vindication: "How long, Sovereign Lord...until you avenge our blood?" The Old Testament is full of cries for divine vindication, not from a personal desire for revenge but rather out of an interest in God's reputation as one who is just and righteous.

Each martyr is given a white robe, a garment of glory in recognition of the blessedness and purity won by Christ's sacrifice. They are asked to be patient, to wait a while longer for the Lord's return in Judgment because there are still a number of believers who must be martyred before the old world is destroyed and the new heaven established.

When the sixth seal is opened, we begin to witness the great cosmic disturbances that foreshadow the last days. There is no longer reliable order to the universe. Nature is in disarray. The images here are common to apocalyptic literature and should not be taken as completely literal. However, the sixth seal does give us a highly descriptive account of nature itself turning against mankind. We see the following events occur:

1. A great earthquake. Often an earthquake is associated with the Lord's presence. Remember how God descended on Mt. Sinai and the whole mountain quaked violently (Exodus 19:18)? Isaiah says people will hide in caves from the Lord when He arises to shake the earth (Isaiah 2:19).
2. The sun turns black, the moon blood red. At Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel concerning the last days as a time when the sun would be darkened and the moon turned to blood.
3. The stars fall to the earth and the sky will be removed like an unrolled papyrus scroll that breaks in the middle and rolls quickly back on

either side. Isaiah, too, describes the host of heaven disappearing like leaves falling from a fig tree (Isaiah 34:4).

4. The mountains and islands move from their places. This is also descriptive of the Lord's coming in judgment as described by Nahum 1:5, "The earth is upheaved by His presence, the world and all the inhabitants in it."

The end times will be so cataclysmic, so awful, that even those who should feel most secure will "head for the hills." The commanders, the kings of the earth, the rich, the strong and the great will beg that the mountains fall on them to protect them from the presence of God. The image here gives fuller meaning to Malachi's question, "Who can endure the day of His coming... for He is like a refiner's fire?" (Malachi 3:2). John's portrayal of terror resembles Isaiah's description of the Lord's return when men will seek to hide in the caves and rocks (Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21).

Please do not have nightmares tonight after studying this chapter. The images portrayed here are nothing new. They simply show the world as it has been throughout history and will be until the coming of the Lord. Praise God we have His promise of deliverance and salvation through all the trials and tribulations endured on earth. Praise God we have a Savior who died for us and rose again to show us graphically that death is defeated and eternal life is now our destiny!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 7:1-17

Dear Lord God, guide my study of Your Word and let the Holy Spirit give me wisdom as I answer these questions. Amen.

Revelation 7:1-3

1. We witness four angels engaged in unusual activity in Revelation 7:1. What are they doing?

2. In John 1:3, we read that God created all things. Would this include angels? _____

We are not told specifically when the angels were created. Do you think Genesis 1:1-2:1 helps to pinpoint such a time?

3. Are angels flesh and blood or are they immaterial spirit? (See Hebrews 1:14)

Can they appear as flesh and blood? (See Genesis 19:1-11)

Why did they appear as they did in Genesis 19?

Do you think you have seen an angel in human form? (See Hebrews 13:2) If so, when?

4. Did God's Son die on the cross for fallen angels as well as fallen man? (See 2 Peter 2:4)

For whom did Jesus die? (2 Corinthians 5:15; Romans 3:23-24)

Revelation 7:4-12

5. In Romans 11, Paul discusses the return of a remnant of God's chosen people to the Savior. How does the sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel imply to some extent the salvation of this remnant?

Was Paul part of the remnant of Israel who was called to salvation through Jesus Christ? (1 Corinthians 1:1; Romans 11:1)

What organizations today invite a remnant from Israel to trust in Jesus as the Messiah?

Revelation 7:13–17

6. One of the elders asks John about the multitude wearing white robes. What is the elder's explanation for their unusual attire?

How does Paul support this imagery in 2 Corinthians 5:1–4?

How is the same image used in Zechariah's vision of Joshua in Zechariah 3:3–9?

How do Isaiah's words compare in 1:18?

7. There are few promises more exciting than the ones found in Revelation 7:15–17. The redeemed will serve the Lord into eternity and there will be no more hunger, thirst, heat, or sorrow. God will dwell with men. How does Isaiah 4:4–6 describe this glorious future?

A similar description is used to describe Israel's return from captivity in Isaiah 49:8–10. How do these verses compare to Revelation 7:15–17?

How does Isaiah 25:6–9 compare?

When Isaiah was privileged to hear God's promise of release from exile, to what other event in the distant future was he also a partial witness?

8. God says He will feed His redeemed and lead them to living water (v. 17). Of what famous Psalm does this remind you?

If you do not know this Psalm from memory, now is a good time to commit it to memory. Perhaps your group would like to speak it aloud together.

9. Review the narrative about the Samaritan woman and Jesus in John 4:7–30. Why was she surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink?

What kind of water did Jesus offer her?

Describe Jesus' comparison of the two kinds of water mentioned.

Did she desire the water Jesus offered?

Tell the outcome of the episode and how the woman responded.

10. List ways we can respond to Jesus' offer of living water.



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Our “sealing” occurred the moment God’s Spirit entered us; we can look with joy to Revelation 7 as a description of our own salvation!

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VISION OF SALVATION

REVELATION 7:1-17

After witnessing the unraveling of the six seals, and after viewing the calamities which follow, chapter seven is a refreshing interlude. In stark contrast to the panic of the heathen world at the time of judgment, chapter seven displays the secure salvation of the redeemed. John allows us a peaceful pause between his images of destruction to give a sense of relief from the surrounding horrors. Another reason for this interlude is to give persecuted Christians a reason for hope and joy. As the hymn, “*For All the Saints*” so aptly states it:

*And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong.*

THE SEALING OF THE 144,000

REVELATION 7:1-8

Revelation 7 introduces us to five more angels. Four of them are in control of earth’s winds, and one angel is in charge of sealing the 144,000. What does the Bible tell us about angels? The word “angel” simply means “messenger.” God’s angels are His messengers, His servants. One of their functions is to praise God (Isaiah 6:3; Luke 2:13). They are also to minister to the world and the Church (Psalm 103:20-21). Jesus says in Matthew 18:10, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father.” For that

reason, we know God sends His angels particularly to watch over children. Angels also watch over believers (Psalm 91:11–12) and even accompany them to their heavenly home. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, it is an angel who carries Lazarus from his miserable life on earth to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:19–31).

Because John 1:1–3 tells us that before the creation of the universe nothing existed, and that after creation God rested from all His work (Genesis 2:2–3), the angels must have been created sometime during the six days of creation. (Incidentally, we do not become angels when we are taken to heaven, nor do we earn our wings, a myth perpetuated by television and movies such as *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Angels are separate beings created by God.)

Originally, all the angels were good. Since the angels were created during the six days, and God calls His creation “very good,” the angels were also formed in perfection. Somewhere along the line, a group of angels rebelled against the Lord. Their fall from grace occurred before mankind’s fall because Adam and Eve were seduced by the chief fallen angel in the guise of a serpent (Genesis 3:1–14 and Revelation 20:2). The fallen angels are not saved by Jesus’ death and resurrection, but are doomed forever to the fiery Abyss (2 Peter 2:4).

The number of angels must be incredibly large because Hebrews 12:22 describes them as “thousands upon thousands.” There seem to be classes among the angels as well. Scripture labels some angels as cherubim, some as seraphim, and others as archangels. What a lot of questions we will have when we reach heaven!

In the context of apocalyptic literature, nature is often pictured as subservient to angels. Here we note that angels have control of natural forces.

John sees four angels holding back the winds of the world. The angels permit time for the redeemed to be “sealed” before allowing the wind’s destructive powers to sweep across the earth. In Daniel 7:2–3, the winds cause four horrible beasts to arise from the sea. The Lord uses His four winds in Jeremiah 49:36 to execute the wrath of God against Elam. In Revelation, the winds are bursting at the seams in anticipation of God’s judgment, but His angels temporarily restrain them.

It is an angel from the east who orders the four angels to restrict the wind until God’s servants are sealed. The seal, which the eastern angel carries, is probably a signet ring that kings used to protect official documents. The seal will mark the foreheads of believers and claim them as the property of God. Later on, the devil’s followers will be sealed as well, but this time with the number 666. It is a ridiculous abuse of the text to advocate a literal sealing. There will be no dictator at our doors tomorrow demanding that the number 666 be tattooed on our foreheads.

Remember, the image of sealing is used throughout the Bible as a symbol for ownership. For example, look at Ephesians 1:13: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” When Paul talks about the covenant with God that we enter at baptism he says, “He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor. 1:21–22). Our “sealing” occurred the moment God’s Spirit entered us; we can look with joy to Revelation 7 as a description of our own salvation!

John doesn’t describe the sealing process as such, but he does hear the number of those sealed: “144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.” The number

The elders, living creatures, and angels join the redeemed in praising God. As God promised, the spiritual heirs of Abraham are in number as the stars of heaven. The palms are indicative of a celebration, and the white robes are a sign of the faithfulness and righteousness of Christ given to believers.



is obviously symbolic. The number of tribes, twelve, is both squared and multiplied by a thousand indicating in a twofold manner the completeness of redemption. Those who are sealed comprise all believers who remain faithful until the coming of Christ.

The next time someone claims that only 144,000 will be given immortality, have him or her refer to Revelation 14 where the 144,000 are again mentioned. This time they are described as male virgins (vv. 3–4). If the number 144,000 is to be taken literally, then a literal interpretation will also require that women and married men be excluded from the chosen. As mentioned previously, Revelation cannot be used to create new doctrine. It can only affirm concepts already explicitly stated in other parts of Scripture. Jesus says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Those who believe in Jesus and are sealed stand in the symbolic ranks of the 144,000.

THE BLISS OF THE REDEEMED

REVELATION 7:9-17

As if to affirm the redemption of all believers, John sees a great multitude praising God. The people of this multitude come from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. They include many more than the twelve tribes of Israel. The multitude is so large that their number cannot be counted. All the faithful throughout history stand in white robes waving palm branches and praising God. John is allowed a glimpse beyond the world’s turmoil into the peace and glory of eternal life with God. This unique vision resembles the Transfiguration when Peter, James and John were allowed a glimpse of the glorified Christ. But remember that the glorified Christ revealed Himself just prior to His final stand in Jerusalem and His subsequent crucifixion. John is refreshed by the vision of the multitudes praising God, but he must return to the earth’s horror and tribulation before ultimate victory is realized.

The elders, living creatures, and angels join the redeemed in praising God. As God promised, the spiritual heirs of Abraham are in number as the stars of heaven. The palms are indicative of a celebration, and the white robes are a sign of the faithfulness and righteousness of Christ given to believers. We are told in verse 14 that the multitude of worshipers have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

As if to affirm the redemption of all believers, John sees a great multitude praising God. The people of this multitude come from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages.



The entire body of worshipers praises God and the Lamb for bringing salvation. They fall on their faces and offer a sevenfold doxology (7:11–12), ascribing praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power and strength to the Lord.

When the angel asks John whether he knows who all these people are, John returns the ball to the angel's court: "Sir, you know." The angel explains that they are all the redeemed, those who have put on Christ, who have endured the trials of a fallen world but now stand pure in God's eyes because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Because they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they are able to stand before the throne of God and serve Him constantly. God's promise to spread His tent over them shows that His presence will shelter them from all harm. The promise includes no more hunger or thirst and no more scorching heat. They are protected from all discomfort by God's presence.

The image of the Lamb of God acting as shepherd to His people recalls Jesus' description of the Good Shepherd (John 10). Furthermore, the image of the shepherd leading his people to springs of living waters echoes Psalm 23:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.*

Jesus promises, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). The heavenly shepherd leads his people to the waters of life and, as a result, the tears of one brought suddenly from a state of sorrow to delight are wiped clean.

I don't know about you, but if our only image of heaven were to be drawn from Revelation 7, I'm not sure heaven would appear very appealing. The picture we have here is one of a large crowd doing nothing but singing praises into eternity. Wouldn't that grow tiresome? Again, we must remember that the images of John's vision are symbolic, representing a state of bliss and inexpressible joy. The mystery of heaven's appearance is insolvable, but we live with the promise that we will be with the Lord and in that state we will know no sorrow or misery, only joy, joy, joy!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 8:1-13

Read prayerfully Revelation chapter 8 and ask the Lord to guide your study of His blessed Word.

Revelation 8:1-5

1. Read Joshua 5. Along with your answer, list the verses in which you found your answer.
When the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho, how many days did they march?

 - How many priests led the march?

 - How many trumpets did they carry?

 - On what day of marching did the walls of Jericho fall? (Joshua 6:15)

 - After how many times around the city, did the walls fall?

 - Do you remember from the first lesson what the number seven depicts in Revelation?

 - Why do you think the judgments are described in groups of seven?

2. The chapter before this included a mind-boggling description of the sealing of the saints. Chapter eight describes a long pause between the sealing of the saints and the beginning of the second cycle of judgments. Why do you think the pause is included?

3. Once again, in Revelation 8:3-4 we see the image of incense representing the prayers of the saints. Look up Luke 1:9-10. What was Zechariah doing in the temple?

 - What were the people doing while Zechariah burned incense?

 - Did the Lord hear Zechariah's prayer? (Luke 1:13)

 - What was the prayer about?

Revelation 8:6-12

4. Look up Ezekiel 38. This chapter describes in symbolic language the last great struggle between the forces of evil and God's people. Gog is the leader of these evil forces. How will God execute judgment on Gog? (Ezekiel 38:22)

How does this compare with the first angel's plague in Revelation 8:7?

5. Amos also sees a vision of God's judgments against fallen man in the last days. Describe one such judgment in Amos 7:4.
-

How does Amos' vision compare with the second angel's plague in Revelation 8:8?

6. What does the Lord threaten to do to His people in Jeremiah 9:15?
-

Why will He bring this plague? (Jeremiah 9:13-14)

Why do you think the Lord sends the plague of wormwood in Revelation 8:10-11?

In what way did God act to deliver His people in Exodus 15:22-25?

7. How is the "Day of the Lord" depicted in Isaiah 13:9-10?
-

Why is the Lord sending this plague? Isaiah 13:11

How does this plague compare with the consequences of the fourth angel's trumpet? Revelation 8:12

Revelation 8:13

8. What figure is used to announce the woes to come?
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(Check several other versions. Do they use the same word to describe the being that announced the woes of Revelation 8:13?)

9. The plagues help us understand that the world will continue to be governed by the consequences of mankind's sins. From the following references, show that God's ultimate victory is ours (1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 John 5:1-5).
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The vision of John is meant only to help us understand that the history of the world is and will continue to be governed by the consequences of mankind’s sin, but that by the power and mercy of God ultimate victory is ours.



THE SEVENTH SEAL & THE FOUR TRUMPETS

Two chapters ago, we witnessed the Lamb opening six of the seven seals securing the scroll of history. Remember, only six seals were loosed. In chapter eight, we return to the seventh seal, viewing the consequences of its removal from the scroll.

Do you remember how we described the structure of Revelation? The book rotates around the same event, viewing that event from several different angles. We viewed the history of fallen man from one perspective as the six seals were loosed. Now, as the seventh seal is removed, we will witness a series of judgments against fallen man from a different perspective using the sounding of seven trumpets as a catalyst.

THE SEVENTH SEAL OPENED

REVELATION 8:1-5

When the seventh seal is opened, we hear a hush fall across the heavens. For a period of about half an hour, there is fearful silence as all await the judgment about to be unloosed against the fallen world. What a brilliant technique for creating tension. The dramatic pause highlights the judgments to come and acts as a contrast between the hymns of the last chapter and the thunderous catastrophes which will follow. We can imagine that during these thirty minutes, trumpets are being given to the seven angels and the angel over the altar is filling his golden censer with incense.

With the trumpets, we discover heaven's involvement in man's tribulation, directing plagues against this world for the purpose of working repentance.



In the Greek, the angels are described not simply as “seven angels,” but as “the seven angels,” indicating a specific group. It’s interesting to note that in the Jewish apocryphal book Enoch, the archangels are presented in a group of seven. The seven angels are even given names: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel and Remiel. Are these the same ones now blowing the seven trumpets? Are they the same who will later pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth? Perhaps, but no one knows for sure.

When the armies of Israel surrounded the city of Jericho (Joshua 6), seven priests blowing their trumpets led the hosts of Israel around the city for seven consecutive days. On the seventh day, the walls of Jericho crumbled. The same sort of judgment is indicated by the imminent blowing of the seven trumpets in Revelation.

We’re introduced to another angel who holds a golden censer at the altar of God. The angel mixes incense with the prayers of believers and offers them to the Lord. The angel offers the prayers in a similar way priests at the temple in Jerusalem would take hot coals from the altar of sacrifice and place them

at the golden altar of incense. Incense was poured on the hot coals resulting in clouds of fragrant smoke filling the room. Notice how this vision suggests something very special about prayer, how both the believer and his prayers enter God’s presence through the altar.

The prayers of the saints crying out for justice and an end to their suffering are answered, in part, as the angel takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar and hurls it over the earth. The prayers of the saints return to earth in wrath and act as a prelude to the seven trumpets, which will now sound.

FOUR TRUMPETS OF JUDGMENT

REVELATION 8:6-12

Upon the sounding of the first trumpet, the second cycle of judgments begins. Remember how we considered Revelation a “cyclical” book, the reader being treated to several different perspectives of the same event? The second series of judgments reflects that new perspective. As the Lamb unloosed the seals, we observed God’s judgments from one angle, viewing them as the consequences of man’s inhumanity to man. With the trumpets, we discover heaven’s involvement in man’s

tribulation, directing plagues against this world for the purpose of working repentance (see chapter 9:20–21).

The sounding of the trumpets is divided into three groups. The first four trumpets unleash judgments in the natural world. Following the first four trumpets, a pause in the action prepares the reader for the supernatural judgments in the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets. There follows the interlude of one and a half chapters before the last trumpet depicts the saints praising God in heaven (11:15–19).

Notice how closely the structure of the seven trumpets follows the structure of the seven seals. The first four seals were organized into one group under the symbols of the four horsemen. The four horsemen carried natural judgments (war, exploitation, famine, plague, etc.). The fifth and sixth seals dealt more with supernatural phenomena, that is, the saints praying for justice and the universe unravelling in destruction. Finally, we witness the heavenly hosts praising God for victory and salvation while the seventh seal ushers in a new cycle of judgments under the sounding of the seven trumpets.

Now we witness a similar cycle of judgments against the world, but we see this cycle from an altogether different perspective.

When the first trumpet is sounded, a mixture of hail, fire, and blood are hurled down to earth. The imagery resembles two plagues

produced by Moses against the Egyptians. Moses' first plague was to turn the Nile River into blood and his seventh plague brought devastating hail. In Revelation, the mixture of hail, fire, and blood brings great destruction. A third of the surface of the earth is destroyed by fire. The fact that only one-third of the world is destroyed indicates God's punishment on the earth is not final, but rather is designed to lead men to repentance. In addition, a third of the trees are burned up along with all the green grass. The plague is directed primarily at nature, but affects mankind as well.

The second trumpet brings destruction to the sea. Something "like a great mountain" is cast into the sea and a third of the sea becomes blood while a third of the sea life dies and a third of the shipping is destroyed. The description of the second plague resembles a volcano exploding its lava into the sea, and reminds us once more of Moses' first plague: changing the waters of the Nile into blood and the subsequent destruction of all marine life. Again, God's judgment is limited in order to lead sinners to repentance.

Upon the sounding of the third trumpet, a burning star falls from heaven into the fresh inland waters. The blazing star is named for its effect on the water, "Wormwood." Wormwood is a plant with a strong, bitter taste. In the Old Testament, wormwood was used as a symbol for sorrow and bitterness. This act of judgment is the exact reverse of the miracle at Marah when Moses placed

Following the four trumpets, John witnesses a pause in the action. The eagle acts as a transition between the four plagues against nature and the demonic plagues about to arise. The first four plagues are called forth by angels. The following plagues, however, are ominously announced by a bird of prey.



a tree into bitter waters and made them sweet (Exodus 15:25). As a result of the wormwood in Revelation, one-third of the waters are contaminated and its effect on mankind is serious. Many die from drinking the water.

As the fourth trumpet sounds, one-third of the sun, moon, and stars are struck so that one-third of the day is darkened and one-third of the night. (How can one-third of the stars be struck here when all the stars already fell from the sky in 6:13? Because Revelation is not sequential history but a series of cyclical visions!) Throughout Scripture, darkness is a symbol of judgment. Moses' ninth plague consisted of deep darkness. The "Day of the Lord" is described by Joel as a day of darkness and gloom (Joel 2:2). Jesus' parables describe unbelievers being cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Because only one-third of the skylight is diminished, judgment is limited. Once more, the plague is designed to lead mankind into repentance.

THE EAGLE'S WARNING

REVELATION 8:13

Following the four trumpets, John witnesses a pause in the action. The eagle acts as a transition between the four plagues against nature and the demonic plagues about to arise. The first four plagues are called forth by angels. The following plagues, however, are ominously announced by a bird of prey.

The eagle hovers in midair and cries out, "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" The next two plagues arise in chapter 9, but the last plague is not ushered in until chapter 12, when the devil is thrown onto the earth.

Perhaps, by this time, you will begin to realize that Revelation cannot be used to determine specific future historical events. The vision of John is meant only to help us understand that the history of the world is and will continue to be governed by the consequences of mankind's sin, but that by the power and mercy of God ultimate victory is ours. Begin to get a sense, a feel, of the vision. It is not a historical outline of the future, but rather an appeal to the senses about the repercussions of sin and the blessings of redemption.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 9:1-21

Read prayerfully Revelation chapter 9 and ask the Lord to guide your study of His blessed Word.

Revelation 9:1-12

1. Look up Luke 10:18. Whom did Jesus see fall from heaven?

What did his fall resemble?

How does Satan's fall from heaven indicate he is "bound" and no longer rules over believers? (Luke 10:17, 19-20)

How about in Revelation 20:1-2?

2. How does the description of the smoke spewing from the Abyss (Revelation 9:2) remind us of Joel's warning about the "Day of the Lord" in Joel 2:1-2?

3. How does the picture of the fifth plague compare with Joel's vision of the judgment in Joel 1:1-7 and 2:3-11?

Notice that in Joel, the leader of the destructive armies is God Himself. The Lord uses these evil forces for the purpose of bringing justice and judgment.

4. How does the torment of the fifth plague affect its victims in Revelation 9:6?

In what way does this fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy? (Jeremiah 8:3)

5. What descriptions does John use to emphasize the power and invincibility of these locusts? (Revelation 9:7-10)

6. In the sixth plague, millions of demonic horsemen are unleashed into the world. How is this plague implied again in Revelation 16:12, 16?

Look at Ezekiel 38:7–16 and read the Old Testament version of this plague.

7. Describe the demonic horsemen (Revelation 9:17).

8. John says the destructive power of the horses resides in their mouths and tails. How can these horses be a symbolic representation of the evil that arises from the words of the false prophets? (See Isaiah 9:14–16; Revelation 9:19)

9. What effect do these plagues have on unbelievers? (Revelation 9:20–21). State why. (1 Cor.1:18, 12:3)

What does this suggest about church growth principles based on business and advertising gimmicks rather than the true teaching of God's Word?

10. How does Isaiah describe the value of idols in Isaiah 44:9–18?

11. What kind of idols do we worship?

12. Why do you think mankind has always insisted on worshipping other gods rather than the true God?



THE SIXTH TRUMPET – REVELATION 9:13–21

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 10:1–11

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Once again, we must underscore the fact that John’s intent is not to give a literal description of these beasts, but rather, to indicate that the plagues against fallen man include not only natural disasters, but spiritual scourges as well.

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THE FIFTH TRUMPET

REVELATION 9:1-12

Our last chapter introduced four angels whose trumpets ushered in a new cycle of plagues. The first thirteen verses of chapter nine present the fifth angel blowing his trumpet and unleashing a unique plague. Unlike the first four plagues that focused on “disasters in the realm of nature,” the fifth plague unleashes supernatural, demonic forces onto the earth.

When the fifth angel blows his trumpet, a star falls from heaven to earth. This star, unlike the wormwood meteorite of the last chapter, refers to a person or figure. This figure is, after all, able to receive a key to the “Abyss,” that is, hell. In Luke 10:18, after the seventy have just returned from their outreach of preaching, healing, and exorcising, Jesus declares He has seen Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Jesus, then, gives us a clue concerning who this “star” is: the devil himself, thrown from heaven and unlocking the “door” to his infernal home. From the shaft of hell spits smoke and fire, so much smoke that the sky is blackened.

Out of the column of smoke swarm locusts. We are reminded of Moses’ plague of locusts inflicted on the Egyptians in Exodus 10:1–20. The locusts were part of Moses’ eighth plague and represented another sign of judgment against the Egyptians. Throughout the Old Testament, locusts are a symbol of destruction as they devour cultivated areas in search of food. As an example of their destruction, it has been recorded that after a locust

plague in Algiers during the year 1866, 200,000 people perished of starvation. Locusts have been seen traveling in a mass one hundred feet deep and four miles long!

The locusts of John's revelation are particularly harmful because they are given the power to sting like scorpions. A scorpion is a lobster-like insect, four to five inches long, whose tail secretes poison. The locusts are given the power to torment through their scorpion-like stingers, but they cannot ravage plants or trees, and their authority rests over unbelievers and not those possessing the "seal of God." As the children of Israel were protected from the plagues that beset Egypt, so believers are spared this demonic assault. It is in some respects reassuring to know that even though the locusts are released from the Abyss by the devil, God controls the extent of their devastation.

The locusts' torture is limited to a period of five months. Why only five months? For one reason, the life cycle of the locust is only five months long. More importantly, however, the five months represent a period of limited duration during which time the wicked are given a chance to repent. The sting of the locust is so severe, victims long for death. The apostle Paul, in Philippians 1:23-24, expresses his wish to die so that he can rest eternally with the Lord. Here, unbelievers long for death as an escape from the misery of the plague. What a difference in motivation!

John describes this special species of locust. Strange insects, indeed! They resemble horses girded for battle. They wear crowns of gold, suggesting victory in battle, and their faces appear human. Long hair, like a woman's, flow from their heads and they carry breastplates of iron, which indicate their invulnerability to attack. When they open their mouths, their teeth gleam like the fangs of a lion in anticipation of imminent feeding. Yet, it is their tails that inflict the worst misery. The army of locusts reflect a sort of unnatural and unyielding cruelty. Often in apocalyptic literature, grotesque creatures stand as symbols of demonic forces. There is no reason to consider these locusts as anything other than a picture of an evil army released from hell to torment man.

Who leads this army of demons? Their king is the "angel of the Abyss," whose Greek name is *Apollyon* and whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon. Both words mean "destroyer." The army of locusts obey their king's orders and do his work because he is the same angel who released them from the shaft of hell. Their leader is Satan.

But this is not yet the end! John reminds us that the demonic assault is only one of three "woes" still to occur. Notice as the end draws closer the severity of the plagues appears to increase. The Lord is "putting the screws" to fallen man in an attempt to encourage correction and repentance. And yet, His attempts prove fruitless.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET*REVELATION 9:13-21*

When the sixth angel blows his trumpet, a voice from the throne room (God Himself?) demands the presence of four angels who have been temporarily restrained at the river Euphrates. These four angels control the hordes of demonic horsemen that will sweep across the world. After God promised Abraham's descendants the land which stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18), the Euphrates came to be known by the children of Israel as the river which marked entrance into enemy territory. It is from this land of the enemy that two hundred million demonic horsemen are released by the four angels to sweep across the world. The two hundred million are released for the purpose of killing a third of mankind. This comprises the second woe.

(When the fourth seal was unloosed in the first cycle of plagues, one-fourth of mankind was extinguished. Under the sixth trumpet, one-third of mankind is destroyed. Notice how judgment grows more severe as men's hearts grow harder and more rebellious.)

Actually, in the Greek, the number of horsemen is not described as two hundred million. Rather, the Greek is literally translated as a "double myriad of myriads." That means twice 10,000 x 10,000. Knowing the numerical symbols of Revelation, we know John's intent is not an accurate headcount, but to indicate the innumerable mass of these horsemen. Hal Lindsey, in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, claims the 200,000,000 represent Red Chinese armies sweeping across the Middle East to invade Israel! Knowing John's frequent use of symbols, how unlikely that interpretation appears!

The demonic horsemen, like the locust before them, are presented as grotesque monsters. The horses and their riders wear fiery breastplates. The horses' heads appear as lion's heads, and the demonic steeds breathe fire, smoke, and sulfur. The riders do not destroy. It is, instead, the horses that devastate by consuming victims with fire, smoke, and sulfur, while their tails are like snakes, which bite and sting. The scene of destruction through fire, sulfur, and smoke is reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities consumed by the heat of God's wrath (Genesis 19).

Even though the sixth plague resembles a living nightmare, those not killed by the plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur refuse to repent. Once men's hearts are set against God, nothing moves them to repentance. Even though one-third of mankind is massacred, survivors continue to engage in idolatry, witchcraft, immorality and theft, worshipping the very evil which has resulted in judgment. But such is the foolishness of sin.

Once again, we must underscore the fact that John's intent is not to give a literal description of these beasts, but rather, to indicate that the plagues against fallen man include not only natural disasters, but spiritual scourges as well. The monsters which sweep across the face of the earth remind us that our true warfare is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 10:1-11

*Read prayerfully Revelation chapter 10 and ask the Lord
to guide your study of His blessed Word.*

Revelation 10:1-7

1. Describe the mighty angel who descends from heaven.

2. If you can imagine the angel placing one foot on the earth and one on the sea, what does that suggest about his size and power?

3. How is Jesus' face described at His transfiguration in Matthew 17:2?

How about Moses in Exodus 34:33-35?

Describe God's appearance in Ezekiel 1:27-28.

Describe Jesus' feet in Revelation 1:15.

4. Before you conclude that the angel in Revelation 10 is Jesus, look up Daniel 8:16 and 12:7. Who is the angel whose activity reminds us of the angel in Revelation 10?

Because of the angel's similarity to God's appearance, what might we say about the angel's importance?

5. When you think of thunder as associated with God, what mood do you think God is in when He thunders?

6. Will we ever know what message was emitted from the seven thunders? (Revelation 10:4)

7. What is the "mystery" Paul speaks of in Romans 11:25-27?

Who is the "mystery" of Colossians 2:2-3?

What is involved in the “mystery” of 1 Corinthians 15:51–55?

8. What does this suggest about the “mystery” which will be accomplished after blowing of the seventh trumpet (which has already been announced to God’s servants and the prophets)? (Revelation 10:7)

Revelation 10:8–11

9. What was John asked to do with the scroll in the angel’s hand?

10. Look up Ezekiel 2:8–3:3. What was Ezekiel asked to do?

How did it taste? (Ezekiel 3:3)

What was written on the scroll? (Ezekiel 2:10)

What was Ezekiel to do after the snack? (Ezekiel 3:1)

What was John to do after his snack? (Revelation 10:11)

11. Before we choke at the thought of eating the scroll of God’s Word, consider this:

What is Christ called in John 1:1?

Whose body and blood do we eat and drink in Holy Communion?

Therefore, are we not digesting God’s Word in Holy Communion?

And if we’re digesting God’s Word in Holy Communion, which part, Law or Gospel, would taste sweet?

Which part might turn our stomachs?

12. How does the psalmist describe God’s Word in Psalm 19:7–10 and Psalm 119:11–16, 89–90, 103–105?

What do the psalmist’s words mean to you?

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The image of digesting God's word comes from Ezekiel's call and John's revelation. It symbolizes taking God's Word into our inmost being, letting those words nourish us and strengthen us and prepare us for witness.



THE MIGHTY ANGEL & THE TASTY SCROLL

Revelation presents three different cycles of judgment. The first cycle begins in chapter 6 when the six seals are opened. The opening of the sixth seal is followed by an interlude in which the 144,000 are sealed and a great multitude gathers to praise the Lamb of God. Only then is the seventh seal unloosed. When the seventh seal is unloosed, the second cycle of plagues begins, but this time it is announced by seven angels with trumpets.

Like the interlude that followed the sixth seal, the sixth angel's trumpet is followed by an interlude that acts as instruction to the Church about its role in the last days. This is the interlude that confronts us in chapter 10. The seventh and final trumpet will not be sounded until the eleventh chapter, and the third cycle of plagues will be introduced in chapter 16. For now, we experience the interlude that separates the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets.

THE ANGEL FROM HEAVEN

REVELATION 10:1-7

What an awesome angel he is! He descends from heaven robed in the clouds and adorned with a rainbow over his head. His face shines like the sun and his feet are pillars of fire. He almost looks like the glorified Christ. But is he? We're told, after all, that Jesus will descend from heaven in the clouds of glory. God is surrounded by a colorful rainbow in Ezekiel



1:26–28. And the Gospel writers depict the Transfiguration as a time when Jesus' face shone like the sun.

But if this angel were Jesus, would John describe him simply as “another strong angel”? Furthermore, the angel's use of an oath in verse six appears unlike Jesus. The clincher stems from the description of the angel Gabriel in Daniel 12:7. Here the angel also lifts his right hand to heaven and swears by “him who lives forever.” We're also told that this angel is Gabriel in Daniel 8:16.

It is interesting to note that the angel's appearance seems to affirm God's covenants to His people in the Old Testament. The rainbow recalls God's promise to Noah. The angel's legs “like fiery pillars” bring to mind the fiery pillar that led God's people through the wilderness, and the scroll reminds us of the tablets of stone carried by Moses from Mt. Sinai.

The angel carries in his hand a little scroll, which is already open. As he lands on earth, he places his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. Certainly, his stance portrays the angel's colossal size, but it also recognizes the angel's authority over the earth. The angel's voice sounds like the roar of a lion. This great roar is described in the Greek as *mukatai*. It comes from the word *mukaomai* (pronounced moo-ka-oh-my) and is an onomatopoeic word for the mooing of a cow. We can hear in the Greek the long, resonant sound of this angel's roar!

The voice of the angel calls forth an answer from the “the seven thunders” and they respond by speaking some sort of message which we are not privileged to know. Instead, a voice from heaven tells John to seal up the words of the seven thunders. What are

the seven thunders? We can only suggest that because thunder is linked throughout Revelation with divine retribution, they indicate God's imminent judgment.

Like the angel in Daniel 12, the angel of Revelation 10 lifts his right hand to heaven. He swears that the delay in ushering in the end is over. God's intent in creation and redemption will be completed upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet. We now stand at the moment preceding the end of time as we witness the triumph of God over evil from several different viewpoints.

SWEET & SOUR SCROLL

REVELATION 10:8-11

The voice from heaven that ordered John to seal the sounds of the seven thunders now commands him to take the scroll that lies open in the angel's hand. John must have been hesitant to approach such a powerful creature. Notice, he doesn't just walk up and grab the scroll from the angel. He asks politely for it (wouldn't you?). The angel gives it to John and explains what use should be given it. He is to eat it. The promise is that it will taste sweet in the mouth, but turn sour in his stomach.

The experience John must endure resembles Ezekiel's commissioning (Ezekiel 2:8–3:3). When Ezekiel is called to prophesy he must open his mouth and eat what the Lord gives him. Ezekiel sees a hand stretched out to him holding an unrolled scroll. On both sides of Ezekiel's scroll are written words of lamentation and mourning and woe. When Ezekiel eats this scroll, it appears to infuse God's message into the prophet. In the Lutheran Service Book we pray that the Lord would help us hear Scriptures in order to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.”

How sweet will be our reign with God, but how many trials must be endured before the realization of glory!



The image of digesting God's word comes from Ezekiel's call and John's revelation. It symbolizes taking God's Word into our inmost being, letting those words nourish us and strengthen us and prepare us for witness. In Jeremiah 15:16 we read, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart." Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." John is to digest the contents of the scroll before presenting it to others.

What are the contents? We aren't told. We only read the effects of it on John's taste buds and stomach. It tastes sweet, but makes him sick. In the context of Revelation's theme, perhaps the scroll comprises the sweet taste of God's victory over evil while its nauseous quality reminds us the tribulation to be endured before God's people rise in victory.

Have you ever walked into a "fixer-upper" house? One can almost taste the sweetness of the house when imagining new carpets, a remodeled kitchen and bathroom. But the thought of what must happen first turns the stomach: repair bills, painting, caulking, unforeseen disasters, termites, and more. How sweet will be our reign with God, but how many trials must be endured before the realization of glory!

John is now reminded he must prophesy about what he sees and what must occur in the lives of many peoples, nations and languages. There are no distinctions between race, class, status, wealth. The only distinction between the peoples of the world is whether they possess God's seal or the devil's.

The interlude that begins in this chapter continues halfway through the next chapter. The upcoming lesson may be the most difficult in all of Revelation, but we shall endure. Hang in there! After tribulation comes victory.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 11:1-14

Prayerfully read chapter 11 and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you answer the questions.

Revelation 11:1-14

1. Look up Ezekiel 40:1-5. What happens to Ezekiel? (40:2)

Whom did he meet? (40:3)

What did the man do with his measuring rod? (40:5, 6, 8, 20, 28)

2. How long will the Gentiles trample over the outer court? (Rev. 11:2)

How long will the two witnesses prophesy? (11:3)

If a "time" stands for one year, "times" for two years, how long is the woman cared for in Revelation 12:14?

Can you see any relationship between 1,260 days, 42 months, and three and a half years? What is it?

3. What do the clothes adorning the two witnesses suggest about their message? (Revelation 11:3; Matthew 11:21)

4. What kind of powers do the two witnesses possess?

Of whom are we reminded by their powers? (See 2 Kings 1:10; 1 Kings 17:1; Exodus 7:19)

5. Who do you think is the beast from the Abyss? (Revelation 11:7)

What does the beast do to the two witnesses? (Revelation 11:7-8)

6. What city is John referring to in 11:8?

Why would he call it a figurative Sodom? (Isaiah 9:10)

Why might it figuratively be called Egypt?

7. Are the inhabitants of the world happy or sad that the two witnesses lie dead in the streets?
-

How do they show it? 11:10

What reaction to the Gospel does this verse suggest we might confront?

8. How did the Lord bring Adam to life in Genesis 2:7?
-

How does He resurrect the two witnesses in Revelation 11:11?

The words “breath” and “spirit” are translations of the same Hebrew word. If we can use God’s breath and spirit interchangeably, when does the Lord breathe new life into us? (John 3:5)

9. What would be your reaction if someone who had been murdered was again raised to life?
-

What was the people’s reaction to the resurrection of the two witnesses? (See 11:11)

10. What words in Revelation 11:12 do we look forward to hearing one day?
-

11. How many woes did the eagle predict in Revelation 8:13? _____

Which woe do we find in 11:1–14? _____

Which is the third woe? 12:12 _____

12. What special holy day is known for the exchanging of gifts?
-

Upon what occasion, however, does a perverted world exchange gifts in 11:10?

13. If the two witnesses represent you as a Christian, what does their story suggest about your mission on earth?
-



What does this unusual section have to say to the Church? It promises that the Lord is protecting His people for an established period during which time they are to witness and evangelize.



THE TWO WITNESSES

Chapter 11 is one of the most bizarre in Revelation. Please read the story of the two witnesses, verses 1–14, and then spend a few minutes contemplating the vision before continuing to read this lesson. Focus your attention on the broad activities of the two witnesses. What is it they do for 1,260 days and how are they protected in their activity? What happens to them after the 1,260 days? How are they finally vindicated? When we understand their untiring evangelism, their temporary defeat in death, and finally their victory in resurrection, can't we see a resemblance to the life of each and every Christian? Our lives are to be centered on proclaiming the Gospel.

Despite ridicule and hardship, we continue testifying of the faith until our dying day. Even though our words are silenced in death, victory is found in the resurrection. The two witnesses symbolize God's Church. They include you, me, and all who trust in the Lord as Savior.

THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE

REVELATION 11:1-14

After John dines on the sweet and sour scroll, he is commanded to take a measuring rod and measure the temple, the altar of God, and the number of worshippers.

Biblical prophets consistently use symbolic actions to emphasize their message. In the New Testament, the prophet Agabus tied up his hands and feet to show that the apostle Paul would be captured by the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10–11). Isaiah walked naked and barefoot as an object lesson to show how the Egyptians would be led into captivity by the Assyrians (Isaiah 20). Ezekiel 40–42 depicts the prophet measuring God’s temple as a prediction of God’s grand and glorious New Jerusalem, His heavenly kingdom.

Measuring the temple is a symbolic action indicating the permanence, the indestructibility of God’s Kingdom. It represents the Kingdom’s durability in the face of apparent destruction and defeat.

In Revelation, one part of the temple, the court of the Gentiles, is not measured. The Gentiles were not allowed beyond their own court in old Jerusalem’s temple. Inscriptions threatening death covered the barrier that separated the court of the Gentiles from the other courts. The reason John is not to measure the outside court is because this part of the temple will be given over to persecution. John considers the temple of God and the holy city as one and the same, both representing the Church. From one perspective, then, John warns that the Church will be trampled in the last days. But it will only appear so. The outside court will be trampled, but the inner courts will remain intact, protected, kept safe and secure despite outside intimidation.

The period of duration for this outward attack is 42-months. It is for a limited period of time. Now note this: the 42-months described here are equivalent to the time the two witnesses are allowed to prophesy! In verse 3, the two prophets are allowed to prophesy for 1,260 days. Each month in John’s calendar consisted of 30 days. Thirty days’ times 42-months is 1,260 days. We are to understand that the same period in which the Church is under assault is the same period during

which the two witnesses are allowed to speak God’s Word.

Of even greater interest is Revelation 12:14, where once more the 42-month period is mentioned in terms of God’s protection over the woman. The woman represents Christ’s Church. The period of her protection is stated as “a time (or one year), times (two years), and half a time (half a year).” The woman is protected for 3-1/2 years, which is equivalent to 42-months or 1,260 days!

Now turn to Daniel 7:15–28. Daniel’s apocalyptic dream is interpreted by one of the host of heaven. In the dream, he has seen a number of beasts representing kingdoms. The fourth beast, the last and most dangerous kingdom, assaults the Christian Church for a period of “a time, times and half a time”! And in Daniel 12:11, the same period is enumerated as 1,290 days, which is equivalent to 42-months according to the Babylonian calendar!

What does all of this say to the Christian Church? Revelation supports Daniel’s theme and Jesus’ warnings during His ministry on earth that God’s Church has been given a limited period of time during which it will be able to witness the Gospel. Throughout this same period, the Church will be under constant assault by the forces that hope to silence believers. It must be stressed again, however, that even though the Church is under attack, it will be protected. The outer court may be trampled, but the sanctuary is safe. We will suffer persecution, but the Church will march on to victory!

Who are the two witnesses in Revelation 11? Whom do they represent? These two witnesses are likely modeled after Moses and Elijah. By Elijah’s prayer, the king’s men were consumed with fire in 2 Kings 1:10. The two witnesses are also able to cause drought, a miracle by which Elijah gained considerable reputation in 1 Kings 17:1. Similarly, they have the power to turn water into blood as

Moses did before the Egyptians. Furthermore, like Moses, they are capable of striking the earth with a variety of plagues.

These two witnesses, modeled after Moses and Elijah, represent the witnessing Church in the last days. Even though the Church is assaulted, God's Word continues to be proclaimed. God gives His witnesses the power and protection to spread the Gospel no matter what powers may attack them. As an indication that their proclamation centers on repentance, the two witnesses wear sackcloth.

John also labels the witnesses as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord." John freely draws on metaphors used by Zechariah in his apocalyptic vision (Zechariah 4). In Zechariah, the two olive trees represent Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the Jewish governor, who were leaders of God's people at the return from Exile around 520 BC. The "two lampstands" metaphor underscore that the two witnesses are the bearers of the divine light.

Unfortunately, as soon as the period of their testimony ends, protection ends as well. The beast from the Abyss (Satan) ascends from hell, overpowers and kills them, and their bodies are allowed to lie in the street of the city. What is the great city? Its identification seems to lie in the explanation that in it the Lord was crucified. That would make it the city of Jerusalem. But what has happened to Jerusalem? John describes it as a new Sodom where moral degradation is rampant, and a new Egypt with all its overtones of oppression and slavery.

For a limited period (3-1/2 days), their bodies lie in the streets, viewed by every nationality on earth. Everyone is glad they don't have to listen to the prophets anymore. Who wants to hear a call for repentance, after all? So they gloat over the bodies, and send gifts to each other in celebration. It is a holiday!

The celebration is brief, however, because after three and a half days something wonderful occurs. God sends His breath of life into the witnesses and they are resurrected. It is a dreadful sight to those who celebrated the witnesses' death, and those who gloated over their bodies. Man's last resort against those he despises is murder. But, if the dead rise again, what else can be done?

The two witnesses are called to their heavenly home by a voice from heaven. In full view of their enemies, they ascend into God's arms. Once the witnesses have been taken to heaven, vengeance is wreaked across the earth. A severe earthquake kills 7,000 people in the city and forces many to acknowledge the power of God. There is no particular significance to the number 7,000. It reflects the number of deaths that might be expected if one-tenth of a good-sized city like Jerusalem were to be destroyed.

What does this unusual section have to say to the Church? It promises that the Lord is protecting His people for an established period during which time they are to witness and evangelize. But there will be an end to His period of grace, a time in which the Church will appear destroyed. And an evil world will rejoice at its destruction. Yet, ultimate victory lies with the Lord who will intervene to bring forth new life to His people and transform them from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant.

Throughout history, the Church's power and influence waxes and wanes. It was nearly extinguished by Islam in the Middle Ages. It is certainly threatened today by the philosophy of humanism and other forces. The promise of chapter 11 is that the Lord will give it final victory. The Church cannot be defeated. And that is why Jesus said to Peter, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [hell] will not overcome it!"

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 11:15-19

Read these few verses thoughtfully and prayerfully before answering the questions.

Revelation 11:15-19

1. The voices in heaven (Revelation 11:15) state that the Lord and His Christ will “reign forever and ever.” How long is eternity? Try to describe it in your own words.

2. Choose one of the following locations in Revelation, and tell whether the activity described there takes place in the earthly or in the heavenly regions:

Revelation 2 & 3 _____

Revelation 4 & 5 _____

Revelation 6 _____

Revelation 7:9-17 _____

Revelation 8:6-9:21 _____

Revelation 11 _____

3. Jesus, being God, was unable to sin even though He was tempted (Matthew 4:8-10). If you had been in Jesus’ position, but rather than resisting temptation, had succumbed to the devil, what do you think your eternal reward would be? (Romans 6:23).

Because Jesus resisted the devil, led a life of perfect obedience to the Father, then suffered and died to bring salvation to the world, what has He been given (11:15)?

4. How have you experienced this contradictory truth in your Christian life: “the more you take, the more you lose; the more you give, the more you get”?

What does this say about our stewardship?

5. Whom do the 24 elders represent? Remember our lesson on chapter 4.

6. The 24 elders praise Jesus for possessing total authority over the universe (11:17). At what great event did Jesus claim authority and what was His message to His disciples? (Luke 24:50-53 and Matthew 28:18-20)

7. Read Psalm 2. How does the Psalm’s message compare to Revelation 11:18, “The nations were angry and your wrath has come”?

8. What was the ark of the covenant used for in Joshua 3:1–6?

9. What does King Solomon do with the ark of the covenant in 1 Kings 6:1, 19?

10. What happened to the temple curtain at Jesus’ death (Matt. 27:51)?

What is the significance of what happened to the temple curtain? (See Hebrews 6:19, 20.)

What does that mean for us? (Hebrews 10:19–22)

Why is it exciting to see the temple of God opened in 11:19?

11. Using any translation other than the King James Version, what dimension of time is used to describe the Lord God Almighty? (11:17)

Which dimension of time is present in Revelation 1:8, but absent in 11:17?

What does that omission in 11:17 suggest about the coming of Christ?

12. Do you have a picture in your mind’s eye of the Second Coming of Christ? If you choose, share some of that visual with your group.



REVELATION

REVELATION 11:15-19

PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 12:1-17

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When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, the door to heaven is opened. We switch once again from earthly scenes of judgment to heavenly visions of victory. At first, we see nothing. We only hear “loud voices” praising the God of all creation and declaring a great transfer of dominion and authority to God and His Christ in their eternal Kingdom.



THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

REVELATION 11:15-19

Here we go again! Even as the opening of the seventh seal did not conclude the cycle of judgments against sinful man, so the blowing of the seventh trumpet will not usher in the “end,” but rather, will introduce another long series of visions. We might expect that as the fifth trumpet sounded the first woe (proclaimed by the eagle in Rev. 8:13), and the sixth trumpet the second woe, so the seventh trumpet would unveil the third woe. Indeed it does, but only after another glimpse at the victory celebration of God’s saints and angels in heaven. That celebration is what comprises this week’s lesson.

When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, the door to heaven is opened. We switch once again from earthly scenes of judgment to heavenly visions of victory. At first, we see nothing. We only hear “loud voices” praising the God of all creation and declaring a great transfer of dominion and authority to God and His Christ in their eternal Kingdom.

The understanding that the universal authority of God over all creation will be indisputably established echoes across the stage of biblical prophecy. When Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon during Israel’s period of exile from 604–562 BC), he relates that all the powers of the world will be crushed by God’s eternal Kingdom. “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that



shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44). Zechariah also prophesies, “The Lord will be king over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, speaks of the “end time” when Christ, having received all authority in heaven and earth, hands over the Kingdom to His Father.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, the devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would simply kneel and worship him. Jesus, of course, declined the offer (Matthew 4:8–10). Because of His successful mission and His innocent suffering and death on the cross, Jesus received all authority as His rightful possession anyway. That is why He could confidently and reassuringly declare to His disciples just before the Ascension, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). The heavenly host declare in Revelation 11:15 that Jesus’ final reign is already an accomplished fact.

The 24 elders reappear. We last saw them in chapter 7 where they were worshipping God on their knees. Once more we see them face down, singing a hymn of victory. Even though the world is still in the throes of sin and its consequences, the elders praise God in words which suggest that victory has already been won. The power which God has allowed Satan to carry over the world He has now taken to Himself. Notice especially in verse 17 how the elders acclaim the Lord as the One “who is and who was.” The additional phrase used in Revelation 1:8 — the One “who is to come” — is omitted. The Lord’s eternal reign has begun because there is absolute certainty about His final victory. To the 24 elders, it’s all over but the shouting. The shouting continues in the hymns and praises of the heavenly host.

God’s reign is established by His wrath against rebellious nations (Rev. 11:18). There is a hint here of the last crisis, a last struggle of defiant unbelievers against God’s power and authority. The words of verse 18 come from Psalm 2 where the nations of the earth rise to conspire against the Lord and His anointed, or Christ. The immediate context of David’s Psalm is his confidence that the enemies of Israel will be defeated because the Lord has appointed David to fulfill the destiny of God’s people. The Psalm foreshadows those enemies of Christ who will conspire to kill Him. They will ultimately fail because of the Father’s miraculous intervention in accomplishing His Son’s resurrection. Finally, Psalm 2 points to the end times, when once more God’s enemies will attempt a desperate struggle against the forces of righteousness. “The nations were angry,” sing the elders, “and your wrath has come!” The triumph of God’s anger and judgment against His enemies is revealed again in Revelation 20:11–15, which some have called “the great white throne scene.”

God’s wrath is made manifest in the judging of the wicked, but His mercy and reward toward believers finds its perfection in the new Jerusalem (which will be described in Revelation 21:9ff). The 24 elders categorize believers into two groups: a) the prophets who are God’s servants, and b) the saints who revere God’s name. No distinction between Jew or Gentile is listed, no difference between male or female, rich or poor, young or old. All those distinctions are irrelevant.

But even as believers are rewarded, the faithless will face retribution. Those who destroy the earth will be destroyed. In 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7, Paul makes that clear

when he writes, “For after all it is [only] just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and [to give] relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.”

The elders’ outburst of praise is followed by two signs of the Lord’s victory, 1) judgment against unbelievers, and 2) redemption for believers. Judgment is manifested in flashes of lightning, rumblings, thunder, a hailstorm and an earthquake (11:19). Repeatedly, in Revelation these are the consequences of God’s wrath. On the other hand, the opening of the temple and the vision of the ark of the covenant reveal God’s covenant love and mercy. The temple, which opens up, is not some earthly structure. It is God’s sanctuary in heaven. God’s Holy place is made accessible to the faithful. His presence is with mankind.

Inside the temple stands the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was made by Moses according to the Lord’s command. It was designed primarily to hold the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Nothing else was in it, although Moses placed the scroll of the Law beside it. The ark was five feet long, three feet wide, and three feet high. It was made of acacia wood, but gold-plated both inside and outside. A gold ring was placed on each of its four feet to hold the legs on which the ark was carried. Its cover bore the image of two cherubim with outspread wings, all made of gold.

The people of Israel often carried the ark of the covenant into battle. The ark symbolized God’s presence and frequently led them

to victory over their enemies. When King Solomon finished his temple, he solemnly placed the ark in the innermost room of the sanctuary. But from then on, it disappears! No mention is made of its existence.

According to the late tradition, Jeremiah hid the ark of the covenant in a cave on Mt. Nebo when the Babylonians destroyed the temple. Tradition claimed that the ark would reappear when the Lord God “finally gathers His people together and shows mercy to them” (2 Maccabees 2:7).

Consider the significance of the ark’s appearance for John’s readers. This is the fulfillment of the time-honored tradition! The ark is revealed again in God’s temple and the age of the Messiah’s reign has begun.

In Israel’s earthly temple, no one dared enter the Most Holy Place. The high priest entered the “inner sanctum,” but only on the Day of Atonement. In the heavenly temple, however, no priest needs to enter the inner sanctuary because the curtain is drawn aside. All the people can see for themselves God’s presence among them. There is no separation between God and man. Our sins are forgiven. God is with us.

Jesus Himself brought this gift to man. When He died on the cross, the curtain to the Most Holy Place in the temple was torn in two (Matt. 27:5). That joining of God and man is once again envisioned in the revelation to John when the heavenly temple stands open to all.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 12:1-17

Read through the entire chapter and pray for understanding.

Revelation 12:1-17

1. Describe the radiant woman of Revelation 12:1-2.

Whom might she represent? (Rev. 21:2; Galatians 4:26)

If the 24 elders represented the Church of God through both the Old Testament (the twelve tribes of Israel) and the New Testament (the twelve Apostles), what might be the significance of the woman carrying only twelve stars?

Which portion of the Church does she represent, Old or New Testament? (Isaiah 26:17)

Was it the Old Testament Church or the New Testament Church which looked forward to “giving birth to the Messiah through David’s lineage?”

Who is her child, described in Revelation as a “son, a male child, who will rule all the nations, with an iron scepter”? (Luke 1:31, 2:6-7; Psalm 2:7-9)

2. Describe the dragon of Revelation 12:3-4.

If the number seven symbolizes completeness, the number ten represents fullness, and a horn is the symbol of power, what does it suggest about the claims of the dragon that he carries the following:

Seven crowns?

Ten horns?

Seven heads?

Who is the dragon? (Revelation 12:9)

What has the devil been since the beginning? (John 8:44)

What are the dragon’s intentions concerning the male child? (Rev. 12:4)

3. What events do we celebrate in Luke 2:6-7 and Acts 1:9-11?

How are those moments summarized in Revelation 12:5?

4. How long is the woman protected by God in Revelation 12:6? _____

In Revelation 12:14? _____

5. Compare the battle between Michael and the devil (Rev. 12:7-9) with Jesus' declaration in Luke 10:18.

What else does the archangel Michael do in Scripture? (Jude 1:9)

6. What does it mean for us that the devil has been thrown down from heaven? (1 Peter 5:8; Rev.12:12)

7. How does the Lord protect the woman in Revelation 12:14?

8. Do you think the Lord has ever protected you from danger in a "miraculous" manner?

9. Look at Revelation 12:14. If a "time" stands for one year, "times" for two years, and "half a time" for half a year, how many months does this period involve? _____

10. If you calculate 30 days for each month, how many days are involved in this period? _____

11. For how many days is the woman protected in Revelation 12:6? _____

12. How does the earth protect the woman? (Rev.12:16)

How does the dragon react to this help?

13. Who do you suppose are the rest of the woman's offspring in Revelation 12:17?

What does this say about the importance of the Christian's life of prayer, worship, and Bible study?



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The hosts of heaven praise God because the devil is no longer among them. Unfortunately, Satan has been cast to earth where he will cause tribulation for the world and its inhabitants. Yet, the devil has been defeated.

• • •

THE CHURCH VERSUS THE DRAGON

REVELATION 12:1-17

Chapter 12 marks a significant division in Revelation. We have experienced two cycles of plagues already, one involving the seven seals, the other involving seven angels with trumpets. The third and last cycle will not be revealed until chapter 16.

In the meantime, John pauses to explain the root cause of the Church's persecution by the world and to illustrate how Christians are once more engaged in a struggle against evil. The Church must endure hostility and oppression because it is a soldier in the age-old warfare between God and the devil. Of course, the deciding battle has already been won. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Nevertheless, as the devil is cast down in defeat to the earth, the Church can expect trouble and turmoil from his death throes. The outcome is certain. God will protect His elect and come in judgment to defeat His enemies.

The vision begins with the appearance in the heavens of a radiant woman. She is clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, and crowned with twelve stars. And she is pregnant!

Who is this glorious woman? Not Mary, the mother of Jesus, although she is the one who bears the Christ child. Rather, this woman represents God's Church. The Church of God is often depicted as a "mother" in Scripture.

Consider the promise of growth for God's followers in Isaiah 54:1–3. Or reflect on Paul's description of new Jerusalem as "our mother" in Galatians 4:26. The woman in Revelation 12 is "clothed with the sun," indicating that even though the world might scorn God's Church, she is as glorious as the sun in God's eyes. The moon under her feet reflects her dominion, and the twelve stars crowning her head may represent the twelve tribes of Israel, the "Church" of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Church is ready to give birth. She cries out in pain to be delivered. The image of God's Old Testament Church, Israel, in the throes of labor arises from Isaiah 26:17: "Like a pregnant woman who writhe and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord." The Old Testament Church, pictured here as a radiant woman, groans with the pains of expecting its Messiah, the Savior.

At the same time, a second sign appears in heaven. This time there arises a great red dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns. No question about who this dragon is! Verse 9 describes him as "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." The red color of the dragon underscores its murderous, heated, bloodthirsty character. John, in his fondness for numbers, depicts the dragon with seven heads. The number seven is often used as a symbol for completeness. Thus, the seven heads on the dragon reveal his universal power. The devil also carries seven crowns as a symbol of his kingly rank.

Interestingly, when we see the 24 elders in Revelation 4:4 and the victorious 144,000 in 14:14, they are also wearing crowns. The Greek word for crown in these passages is *stephanos*. The devil's "crowns," on the other hand, translate the Greek word *diademata*. The former crown is associated with victory, the kind of crown given an athlete after the race is won. The latter Greek word is a mark of kingly rank.

The ten horns carried by the dragon duplicate the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Daniel had a vision of four different beasts. The last and most awful beast had ten horns, a symbol for the fullness of its power and authority on earth.

We witness the dragon gather a third of the stars with his great tail and hurl them to earth. Often in apocalyptic literature, stars represent angelic beings (look up Job 38:7, for example, where the morning stars are equated with angels). If this is the case, then the tail of the dragon sweeping the stars from the sky can be an excellent image of Satan pulling other angels down with him in his rebellion. Jude 6 speaks of that rebellion: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day."

This red dragon, after sweeping one third of the stars from heaven, stands before the woman about to give birth in order to devour her child. The woman gives birth to a son, a male child, and this child is destined to rule the nations with an iron scepter. In Psalm 2,

Even though the dragon has set himself in a position to devour the child, the child is swept unharmed into heaven. How is that for summarizing the life of Christ? In one short sentence, John covers Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus is born and swept into heaven and that's that!



the promised Messiah is seen as ruling the nations with an iron scepter (rod) (Psalm 2:9). Who else can this child be but Jesus Himself, born from the Old Testament Church and destined to establish an eternal kingdom?

Even though the dragon has set himself in a position to devour the child, the child is swept unharmed into heaven. How is that for summarizing the life of Christ? In one short sentence, John covers Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus is born and swept into heaven and that's that! Notice that John's Revelation is not so much concerned by the historical accounts of Jesus' life but rather, the significance of that successful mission for the Church. The focus of attention sweeps back to the Church, the woman, who flees into the desert, and is cared for by God for 1,260 days.

God's people are often in flight. The nation of Israel fled Egypt in the Exodus, Elijah fled into hiding and was fed by ravens, and Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt to escape Herod's madness. In each case, God has helped and sustained His children in exile. Be aware that the length of the woman's protection in the wilderness is the same amount of time given the two witnesses of chapter 11 to prophesy.

The vision now shifts to a war in heaven in which the archangel Michael and his angels struggle against the devil and his angels. Here we witness the same story abbreviated in 12:1-6, but with additional details. It is an all-out attempt by the devil to capture God's throne. But, the devil and his evil forces are defeated and cast from heaven. We find an allusion to this event in Isaiah 14:12: "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!" Jesus, in Luke 10:18 declares, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The archangel Michael

wars against the devil in this struggle and the devil's defeat means the beginning of the end for the armies of God's foe. (* Please see note at the end of Lesson 15.)

As is true after the resurrection of Jesus, all power and authority has been given to Christ. No longer can the devil accuse and condemn us because we are forgiven through the blood and merit of our Lord. As far as his authority in heaven is concerned, the devil is ruined. After the devil and his angels have been cast from heaven, a voice from above praises God for victory and salvation. Not only is the devil defeated by the Lamb, sings the voice, but also by the saints who have defeated him through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of the Gospel. The martyrs stood fast even unto death for their faith. Now victory is theirs.

The hosts of heaven praise God because the devil is no longer among them. Unfortunately, Satan has been cast to earth where he will cause tribulation for the world and its inhabitants. Yet, the devil has been defeated. His power is limited and he can only survive on the earth for a little more time. Because of his defeat, he is angry. His time is short and he wants to do as much damage as possible. This is the third woe mentioned by the eagle in 8:13, covering the period after Satan's defeat by Christ on the cross to the time of his ultimate banishment on Judgment Day. Now that the devil is hurled to the earth, his object is the Church, or, in the symbolic words of Revelation, the radiant woman in the wilderness. This is the only way he can try to "get even" with the Lord who banished him.

The images of Exodus are woven through the story of the dragon chasing the woman. The dragon's pursuit of the woman resembles Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel. The wings of a great eagle, given the woman as a means of escape, coincide with God's

description of Israel's deliverance from Egypt: "I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4). The serpent's attempt to drown the woman by spewing a flood of water from his mouth resembles Pharaoh's orders to drown the male children of the Hebrews (Ex. 1:22).

The purpose of these pictures is to show how powerfully the Lord acts to protect His own. Even when the serpent tries to drown the woman, God allows the earth itself to open up and swallow the torrent. How true is Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His Church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Now the dragon is even more furious! He is unable to drown the woman. What should he do to "get even"? He decides to go after the Church's offspring, believers in Christ, those who "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." It is you and me that he seeks, hoping to separate us from the "mother" Church so that he might pick us off one by one.

One of the central characters of chapter 12 is the dragon, also called the serpent. In the next chapter, the main characters will be the beast out of the sea and the beast from the earth. Don't let all these monsters confuse you! Remember, how the early chapters of Revelation are introduced by visions of God the Father, the Lamb, and the seven spirits (Holy Spirit). In the same way, Revelation portrays the devil as a sort of unholy trinity consisting of the dragon and the two beasts!

** Please don't puzzle over the period of time in which this battle occurred. Remember, heavenly time is different than earthly time. What we call "time" is also one of God's creations and does not hold our Lord under any restrictions.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 13:1-10

*Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read this section.
Contemplate its contents and supply your answers to the questions.*

Revelation 13:1-10

1. Look up Romans 13:1-6 and describe in your own words Paul's attitude toward government. Is it good or bad?

What is government's purpose?

Who has established government? (Romans 13:1)

What is Peter's view of the meaning and purpose of government in 1 Peter 2: 13-17?

2. If we consider the beast from the sea in Revelation 13:1-6 to symbolize government, what is John's description of the state?
3. When Paul and Peter wrote their letters, the truce between church and state had not yet exploded into the sort of conflicts experienced by John in his later years. John witnessed the introduction of emperor worship and a severe persecution of Christians by the Romans. How would those things affect his outlook toward the state?
4. Despite John's experiences, does he advocate revolution or acceptance? (Rev. 13:9-10)
5. The Christian is often in conflict with his or her government concerning religious issues. Does Paul allow any instance when citizens should rebel against their ruling authorities? (Romans 13:2)
6. This raises a dilemma for the Christian conscience. When should a Christian follow the laws of government and when should he resist? (Acts 5:29)
7. How would this general rule apply to those who feel the need to bomb abortion clinics? Is that God-pleasing?

8. How does it apply to those who peaceably demonstrate against abortion clinics?
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9. Do you think the American Revolution was a God-pleasing response to English taxation? (Romans 13:6-7) Why?
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10. What power does Jesus say His Father gave Pontius Pilate? (John 19:11)
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11. How did Pilate exercise that power? (John 19:16-18)
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12. How did Pilate, the Sanhedrin, Herod, and others who carried out Christ's execution resemble the beast of the sea as described in Revelation 13:5-10?
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13. How does the people's praise of the beast in Revelation 13:4 parody the praise of God in Exodus 15:11?
-
14. What kind of beast does the woman clothed in purple ride in Revelation 17:3?
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- Does this sound familiar?
-
- What is the resemblance between the woman's scarlet beast and the beast from the sea in Revelation 17:8 and 13:3?
-
15. What do the beast's seven heads represent? (Revelation 17:9)
-
16. What do the ten horns represent? (Revelation 17:12)
-
17. Read again 13:10. How would you apply this verse to your life today?
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In bitter anger, the devil set about to destroy God's Church. Failing to destroy the Church, the devil prowled after individual believers in an attempt to devour them one-by-one.

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THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

REVELATION 13:1-10

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," says the proverb. How about the fury of the devil defeated? In the last chapter, the devil suffered defeat and overthrow from his position in the heavenly realms.

In bitter anger, the devil set about to destroy God's Church. Failing to destroy the Church, the devil prowled after individual believers in an attempt to devour them one-by-one. It is this intent that encourages the dragon to call forth two more of his agents, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. Together, the dragon and the two beasts form an unholy alliance, a "trinity of evil," if you will, which parodies the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The dragon moves to the shore of the sea, standing watch as he calls forth the first beast from the sea. We do not know by what means he conjures up his sea beast, but when it rises, it carries a ferocious appearance. It is significant that it emerges from the sea. For the people of John's day, the sea was a reservoir of evil. It was dark, mysterious, and deadly. Now, from its bowels emerges something with ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns. Notice how closely the beast resembles the dragon himself. The dragon has seven heads, seven crowns, and ten horns. The beast from the sea carries seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns. It is almost a mirror

image of the dragon. Unlike the dragon, however, the beast from the sea looks like a leopard, with feet like a bear, and a lion's mouth.

Look up Daniel 7:1–7. Daniel has a night vision in which he watches four beasts rise from the sea. The different beasts of Daniel 7 contain the same characteristics as Revelation's beast from the sea. One of Daniel's beasts looks like a lion with the wings of an eagle. The second beast resembles a bear. The third resembles a lion. The fourth beast carries ten horns.

Daniel's vision foretold the rise of several different empires, namely, Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece. It was this last empire that incorporated ten horns or ten powers, representing the ten Seleucid rulers who ruled the Grecian empire from Alexander the Great to Antiochus Epiphanes.

What is Revelation doing with the apocalyptic precedent of Daniel's night vision? The beast from the sea represents all those secular powers that claim to replace God. In John's day, that empire was Roman, ruled by emperors who increasingly claimed to be gods and who demanded worship from the people. One of the agents used by the devil to destroy God's children is a secular government, which claims deity. In John's day, the worship of the emperor was blatant.

In our day, the worship of government is more subtle. Consider, for example, Communist states that declare religion as the opiate of the people, and then demand their citizens to sacrifice all, and to worship the classless utopia toward which the communist state is allegedly evolving. Or how about Iran's leader, who demands total allegiance and obedience to his decrees? It is through such governments that the devil succeeds in persecuting and often murdering God's people.

The beast of the sea has further characteristics: it derives its authority from Satan (the dragon), it blasphemes the name of God, it successfully wars against God's people, and it enjoys the world's worship. It truly underscores the frequency with which governments can be used as an instrument of evil against believers.

Many are attracted by the beast's powers. One of the beast's heads was given a mortal wound, but the beast survived, and because of its miraculous survival, the beast is able to seduce the world into following it. The beast seems all-powerful, indestructible, and unbeatable. As the proverb says, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," so the world follows the beast because of its apparent omnipotence. "Who is like the beast?" cry the people. "Who can make war against him?"

There is a sort of Christ-like parody in the beast from the sea. The beast suffers a mortal blow and so resembles an earlier picture of the Lamb of God carrying marks of slaughter. Like Jesus, the beast apparently returns from death to life. If the dragon is the opposite of God the Father, perhaps this beast from the sea most distinctly opposes Jesus Christ.

Many scholars believe John had a specific emperor in mind when he spoke of the beast from the sea. The emperor Nero, for example, seized the throne through the treachery of his mother. Nero instituted a savage persecution of Christians in AD 64. Finally, and fortunately, Nero committed suicide, but he was so evil that many could not believe his death was genuine. For years, the rumor persisted that Nero was actually hiding out in Parthia waiting to return to power. By the end of the century, no one believed Nero was still alive, yet the belief remained that he would rise from the dead and regain his throne.

It is endless speculation to consider which emperor, if any, John had in mind when he saw the beast from the sea. More important is the realization that the beast from the sea resembles all secular authority, which tries to unseat God. Each generation deals with such perverse governments, from the Roman Empire to Islamic Republics to Fascism to Communism. Whenever one government falls, another equally evil takes its place. Such governments seem indestructible and invincible for a time, causing many to follow in fear and awe. Yet they all fall. The Church continues while kings and empires fade away. Each empire crumbles, but, like the beast whose head is mortally wounded yet lives, each fallen empire is replaced by one equally evil. The head may die, the beast, but the spirit of antichrist continues. And it will continue until the Lord's return.

The beast from the sea is given the same amount of time to do its dirty work as the woman (the Church) is given to hide in the wilderness — (42 months). During the time of the Church's protection, these anti-Christian secular authorities blaspheme God's name, boast of their own power, slander the saints of God, and war against believers.

Through it all, we read that the beast's power is given to him. The dragon gives the beast its power, throne, and great authority. The beast is given a mouth to utter proud words, and he is given power to make war against the saints. Certainly, it is the devil who directly gives power to evil empires, but who is ultimately in control? Who determines the limitations of this oppression and persecution? God Himself. Finally, the reign of the beast is only by divine permission.

Only those whose names are written in the book of life refrain from these secular governments. The Greek emphasizes that each one (singular) follows the beasts, showing the individual responsibility of all of the beast's followers for his or her own damnation. We are reminded of Daniel who was commanded to worship Darius, King of Babylon, rather than the Lord, but Daniel refused and, consequently, was thrown into the lion's den. The Lord sent his angel to shut the lion's mouth and Daniel was delivered unscratched. It is no wonder that Revelation calls for "patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."

The couplet is a call for patience and long-suffering.

"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go.

"If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed" (13:9-10).

The first sentence teaches believers to accept what God has ordained. The second warns the Church against using force to defend itself. Peter, in the Garden of Gethsemane, attempted to thwart Jesus' arrest by pulling out his sword and cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus told Peter, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." The exhortation arises again in Revelation: let God do His work. It is futile to resist, but by patient endurance, victory will be given believers.

PERSONAL APPLICATION*REVELATION 13:11-18*

Read these few verses thoughtfully and prayerfully before answering the questions.

1. Describe the beast from the earth. (Revelation 13:11)

2. What is significant about the fact that it looks like a lamb but speaks the words of the dragon?

3. What does the dragon give the first beast? (Revelation 13:2)

What does God the Father give His Son? (Philippians 2:9-11)

4. For what purpose does the second beast exist? (Revelation 13:15)

What is one purpose of the Holy Spirit's work? (1 John 5:6; John 15:26)

5. How does the beast from the earth deceive mankind? (Revelation 13:13)

What does God warn about such signs and wonders? (Deut. 13:1-3)

How does Jesus support that warning in Matthew 24:24?

Who, above all else, will perform such false signs and wonders? And for what purpose? (2 Thessalonians 2:9)

6. In chapter 13 of Revelation, we have pictured an "unholy trinity" consisting of a dragon, a beast from the sea, and a beast from the earth. By what other name is the beast from the earth called in:

Revelation 16:13?

Revelation 19:20?

Revelation 20:10?

7. What determines whether a spirit is anti-Christian? (1 John 4:2-3, 2:22)

Was the spirit of the antichrist already loose in John's day? (1 John 4:3, 2:18)

8. What is the Antichrist's claim in 2 Thessalonians 2:4?

How does that compare with the role of the beast from the earth? (Revelation 13:12)

9. When will the Antichrist be overthrown? (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

10. By what number is the Antichrist known in Revelation 13:18?

If the Triune God were represented in numbers, an appropriate number would be 777, wouldn't it? The number seven is a sacred number representing completion. Accordingly, if each person of the Godhead were given the number seven, a numerical diagram of the Trinity might appear as 777. Assuming this diagram is accurate, can you think of any implication about an "unholy trinity" numbered 666?

10. Read Daniel 11:36–39. How does the "king who exalts himself" compare to the beast from the earth?

11. After looking at scriptural passages concerning the antichrist, false prophets and deceivers (1 John 2:18–23; 1 John 4:1–32; John 7: 2; Thessalonians 2:1–12), list facts you have learned.

12. Continue reading 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17 and write the meaning these words of comfort have for you.

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It must be repeated that no one can claim a definite answer to the puzzle of the Antichrist. Certainly, there are now many “antichrists” in the world ready to deceive believers. The point of Revelation is to give us courage to endure the devil’s strategies and hold on to the true faith.

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THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

REVELATION 13:11-18

Another beast! This week’s lesson introduces the last member of the unholy trinity invoked by the devil to divide, destroy, and confuse believers. Not only is the red dragon after us, not only the beast from the sea, but now the beast from the earth! What hope do we have when such powers rise against us? The next chapters of Revelation reveal that even though the strength of the devil cannot be lightly dismissed, the promise of God to deliver us is stronger than Satan.

Isn’t it interesting that even as Christ receives His authority from the Father, so the beast from the sea derives its authority from the dragon? And even as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, so the beast from the earth glorifies the beast from the sea. The evil triumvirate is now complete!

The beast from the earth carries two horns like a lamb, yet he speaks like a dragon. Outwardly, he resembles the Lamb of God, but his words are those of the devil. He reminds us of Jesus’ words: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Later on, the beast from the earth is labeled more distinctly “the false prophet.” Look up Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. Notice how in each verse the third being of the unholy trinity is simply referred to as “the false prophet.” His title gives us an indication of his role. He is to bring men to worship the first beast, the governmental spirit



of Antichrist. He is, in a sense, the first beast's prophet, a spiritual Antichrist, making the way straight for the coming of the beast from the sea.

Deuteronomy 13:1–3 warns God's people to avoid false prophets who claim the ability to perform miraculous signs and wonders. If through their miracles, they advocate worshiping other gods, they must be rejected. Jim Jones, the cult leader who led his followers to Guyana, occasionally claimed to raise chickens and livestock from the dead. His "resurrections" were pure trickery, but they convinced his followers he had the power to raise them from the dead. Jim Jones was a false prophet, incorporating the spirit of antichrist, using "signs and wonders" to lead people away from the Lord.

One particular sign performed by the second beast in Revelation is the ability to call down fire from heaven even as did the prophet Elijah. The Lord promised to send the prophet Elijah as a forerunner of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5–6). That forerunner, Jesus tells us, was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10). Even as Jesus had his "Elijah" forerunner, so the beast from the sea has his "Elijah" forerunner in the form of the beast from the earth.

Let's talk Antichrist here. What does the Bible say about him? Who is he? The Bible speaks about "antichrist" in both a general and specific sense. John writes in 1 John 2:18 that "the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come." The spirit of antichrist was around even during John's day. John describes the spirit of antichrist as "every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). But if there were already many antichrists in John's world, who was the Antichrist that believers were expecting?

Traditionally, the Antichrist described by 1 John has been linked to "the man of lawlessness"

described by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–10. What are the marks of this "man of lawlessness"?

1. Second Thessalonians 2:3 says there will be "a falling away" from the truth of the Gospel by the false doctrine of the "man of lawlessness" or Antichrist. Every antichrist teaches false doctrine, but the Antichrist will be most successful in leading people away from the Lord.
2. The Antichrist will arise from within the Church itself. Second Thessalonians 2:4 says he "sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." This suggests that the more blatant enemies of Christ and His Church are not the Antichrist. Their opposition to God is open and apparent. So, cross off the list such groups as Islam, communism, etc. Although they have within them the spirit of antichrist, they are not the Antichrist.
3. The Antichrist will claim authority and lordship over everything that is called God or is worshipped (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He will usurp the authority of God, claiming to be the sole authority in matters of faith and morals. He will demand to be obeyed by all Christendom as if he were God himself.
4. The Antichrist will use all sorts of signs and wonders to deceive the world (2 Thessalonians 2:9–11). We can imagine his exhibiting all kinds of pomp, pretense and alleged miracles. He will have apparent success in spreading his authority. But his power comes from the devil and is designed to lead people away from the Lord.
5. The Antichrist will continue to attack the visible Church until the return of the Lord. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:8: "Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

Who is the Antichrist? The Bible refuses to tell us, but it does seem to describe him under the name "man of lawlessness."



Who is the Antichrist? The Bible refuses to tell us, but it does seem to describe him under the name "man of lawlessness." The Lutheran Reformers thought the "man of lawlessness" or Antichrist most nearly defined the Roman Catholic papacy. They emphasized that it was the institution of the papacy, not one particular pope. What other force, they asked, arose from within the Christian Church and appeared likely to exist until the coming of Christ? What other leadership appeared to dispense so much false and heretical doctrine, claiming that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith should be condemned? What other institution claimed the authority to speak infallibly for God Himself? What other religious influence paid such great attention to "signs and wonders," like the miraculous appearances of Mary and other saints, mystical signs in heaven, indulgences, tokens of Christ's cross, etc.?

And when they considered that the seven heads of the beast from the sea are defined as "seven hills" in Revelation 17:9 (Rome was traditionally believed built on seven hills), their conclusion was that the Antichrist described the Roman Catholic papacy. It must be repeated that no one can claim a definite answer to the puzzle of the Antichrist. Certainly, there are now

many "antichrists" in the world ready to deceive believers. The point of Revelation is to give us courage to endure the devil's strategies and hold on to the true faith.

Enough of that! On to the second beast of Revelation. We left him deceiving the nations of the world by his signs and wonders. The second beast is also given the power to bring the image of the first beast to life. It gives divine authority to the anti-Christian state. The second beast is the voice of the first beast, bringing life to the spirit of antichrist and using that spiritual evil to put to death all those who refuse to worship him. And the second beast requires all people to be marked on the right hand and on the forehead so that each individual will be under economic slavery to the beast.

The marking of mankind is a real parody of the "sealing" of believers in chapter 7, isn't it? As the elect are sealed by God in order to avoid the calamities sweeping the earth, so the devil's followers are to escape the persecution of believers by wearing his mark. Which mark would you rather have? The mark placed on people is the number 666. We are told this 666 is "the number of the beast" or the number of his name. In John's day, the letters of the alphabet could also stand as numbers.

If the Triune God could be represented by three sevens, 777, then how appropriate to represent the unholy trinity as always one number short, 666! The devil tries to be God, but always comes up lacking.



The first nine letters stood for numbers one through nine, the next nine for the numbers ten through ninety, the next nine letters for numbers one hundred through nine hundred.

No doubt, this number had historical significance to John's readers, but the solution to the puzzle was already lost by the second century. Nevertheless, some interesting suggestions have been made:

1. The initials of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian add up to 666.
2. Nero Caesar's name in Hebrew adds up to 666, and even more interesting, some variant readings in early Greek manuscripts of Revelation read "616," which is the numerical equivalent of Nero's Latinized spelling.
3. The most compelling suggestion is based on understanding that the number seven is a sacred number for completion. If the Triune God could be represented by three sevens, 777, then how appropriate to represent the unholy trinity as always one number short, 666! The devil tries to be God, but always comes up lacking.

As you can see, no one knows exactly what the meaning of the 666 might be. I've heard people claim it means everything from a political leader to the computer. There is no justification for making any absolute claims. Anyone who does is misrepresenting Scripture. The meaning of the number 666 remains and will remain a mystery.

Over the last three lessons, we have witnessed the development of the "Antichrist." What Revelation encourages is an understanding that the Antichrist is not some individual person, but rather a force or spirit used by the devil to corrupt both church and state. Remember, the dragon conjures the two beasts. Both derive their authority from the dragon, but one beast corrupts the state while the other emerges as a false prophet of the Church.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 14:1-20

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your study as you read chapter 14 and answer the questions.

Revelation 14:1-5

1. What is placed on the foreheads of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:2-3?

What does Revelation 14:1 say about the names with which the 144,000 were sealed?

2. What city is synonymous with the term "Zion"? (2 Samuel 5:6-7)

Describe the difference between an earthly Zion and a spiritual Zion. (1 Chronicles 11:4-5; Revelation 21:1-2)

On which, do you think, stand the 144,000? _____

3. What is the "new song" of Psalm 98 about?

Could this be the same theme used by the 144,000 in Revelation 14:3?

4. In what sexual state is Zion in Lamentations 2:13 and Jeremiah 18:13?

Can we assume New Jerusalem is in the same state? (Revelation 21:1-2)

How about the 144,000 in Revelation 14:4? _____

What does that suggest about the symbolism of their virgin status?

5. How are we made blameless before God even as are the 144,000 of Revelation 14:5? (Revelation 7:14)

Revelation 14:6-13

6. Do you see a progression of thought in the messages of the three angels?

What is that progression?

7. How many people are included in the first angel's proclamation? _____

Through whom is the Gospel proclaimed in Acts 1:8 and 8:4?

8. Dare we join the modern tendency to discount hell as imaginary? Why not? _____

9. What comfort does the voice from heaven and the Spirit give believers? _____

10. What does the man in the chariot announce in Isaiah 21:9? _____

How is his report echoed by the second angel in Revelation 14:8?

11. Why do people have no excuse about doubting whether or not there is a God (Rom.1:20)? _____

Share a Scripture verse or verses which is a personal assurance for you of the existence of God.

What should the presence of creation cause us to do? (Revelation 14:7)

Revelation 14:14-20

12. How does the image of the harvest in Revelation 14:17-20 resemble Joel's prophecy of judgment in Joel 3:13?

How does Isaiah 63:3 concur?

Do you see both judgment and salvation in the prophecy in Isaiah 63:4? _____

Explain your answer.

If judgment is a time of both justice and mercy, which verses of Revelation 14:14-20 show mercy?

Which verses show justice? _____

13. How do the images of this chapter encourage us to witness to the Gospel more faithfully? _____

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Revelation is further support for the understanding that God must judge unbelievers, but mercy and grace are shown those faithful to His Word and faithful to His Son.



MORE VISIONS OF THE END

If you haven't noticed by now, John has a refreshing habit of interspersing his visions of tribulation with glimpses of heavenly victory. In the immediate future, Christians are confronted with the treachery of the devil and the beasts he conjures from the earth and sea. But believers need not despair. A word of encouragement is needed, and that encouragement arises in the vision of the 144,000 on Mt. Zion.

THE LAMB AND THE 144,000

REVELATION 14:1-5

How quickly the scene has shifted from the beast whose number was 666 to the Lamb, standing on Mt. Zion with the redeemed! It is appropriate that the Lamb and the 144,000 should be standing on Mt. Zion, a location traditionally connected with divine deliverance. The prophet Joel, for instance, claimed that only those on Mt. Zion would avoid the terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:32). According to the apocryphal book 2 Esdras, the Jews expected the Messiah to appear on Mt. Zion with a multitude of followers. In Revelation 7, the multitude of the 144,000 were sealed against the tribulation to follow. In chapter 14, those seals are depicted as bearing the names of the Father and the Lamb and are given to believers in Christ who have overcome temptation and now are committed to their Savior.



The 144,000 are singing a song of praise. Their song sounds like a mixture of a mighty river, loud rolling thunder, and harpists playing their harps. What an unusual sound! When Ezekiel heard the sound of the cherubim using their wings, he described their noise as the roar of a mighty river (Ezekiel 1:22–24). The 144,000 sing a “new song,” a phrase typically used to describe a hymn of deliverance. Psalms 96, 98, and 144 consist of such “new songs” designed to praise God for His redemption. Only those who know God’s salvation through the Lamb are capable of learning this heavenly song, and that restricts the chorus of the 144,000.

The 144,000 are described in three ways. First, they are virgins who have not defiled themselves with women. If Revelation were the only book in the Bible, the implication would be that heaven contains a separate elite group of saints who have achieved status by avoiding sexual relationships. That suggests sexual relationships within marriage are somehow sinful. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that, from the beginning, God made male and female for each other and that the union of marriage is blessed by God.

Several times in Scripture, the nation of Israel is depicted as a virgin bride (if you want, look up such passages as 2 Kings 19:21, Lamentations 2:13, Jeremiah 18:13, and Amos 5:2). Paul uses the same image in 2 Corinthians 11:2 when he presents the church at Corinth as Christ’s virgin bride. Only when Israel strays from the true God and worships idols is she described as a prostitute (Jeremiah 3:6 and Hosea 2:5). So the image of the 144,000 virgins, representing believers in Christ, is an extension of biblical imagery depicting the redeemed as those who do not stray from the faith, but remain true to their Lord and Savior.

The 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever He goes. That does not mean they follow Him every geographical step, but rather that they abide in His

commands and instructions. The 144,000 are true disciples of the Lamb.

They have also sacrificed themselves to God’s service. Purchased by Jesus’ blood on the cross, they are offered to God as “firstfruits,” as gifts for His kingdom. In contrast to evil men of every kind who are excluded from the Kingdom of God (Revelation 22:15), the 144,000 are blameless and true. Of course, they have been made blameless not by their own will and effort, but by the merit of Jesus Christ who also forgives our sins and makes us pure in the eyes of God.

THREE MORE ANGELS

REVELATION 14:6–13

There is a progression in the messages of the three angels who appear in midair. The first angel brings an appeal to the peoples of the earth. His message is one last attempt to lead every nation, tribe, language and people to the Gospel. All men must recognize the one true God and worship Him alone. The hour of judgment is at hand; the need for repentance is urgent.

A second angel appears in the air to announce the fall of Babylon the Great. John assumes his reader will know what Babylon stands for. In the Old Testament, Babylon was the capitol of a world empire known for its corruption. Even more important, Babylon was remembered as the conqueror of God’s people, the ultimate national enemy of Israel. It was associated with oppression and captivity.

What association would John’s readers have made with Babylon? Consider that 2 Baruch 11:1 and 67:7 associate Rome with Babylon. Consider also that Peter wrote his first letter from Rome, and in 1 Peter 5:13, he calls his congregation, “She who is in Babylon.”

For the early Christian Church, Rome and Babylon had a lot in common. Both were conquerors of

most of the known world. Both encouraged the worship of a host of pagan gods by which they “made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries” (Revelation 14:8).

The third angel offers a counter-proclamation to those who feared not to worship the beast of chapter 13 because they could not buy or sell. The third angel states that an even worse fate awaits those who do worship the beast and carry his mark. Those persons will drink the cup of God’s wrath. Notice the phrasing: “the wine of God’s fury” will be poured unmixed into the cup of God’s wrath. There is no question here about the Lord’s mood!

If there is any doubt about it, the next verse affirms the fate of those who worship the beast. Fire and brimstone await them, and there is no end to the torment of those who deny faith in Christ. The punishment is eternal.

How important for believers to show patience and endurance! Such qualities have eternal implications. Allegiance to Christ involves persecution, ridicule, and sometimes martyrdom. But the price of faithlessness is much greater, involving eternal punishment. This truth is supported by a voice from heaven that commands John to write that those who die in the Lord are blessed. The Spirit promises the faithful eternal rest.

THE HARVEST

REVELATION 14:14-20

Chapter 14 comes to a bloody close with two visions of judgment. John sees the son of man, seated on a white cloud with

a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. It is the end. The harvest of souls must now take place. The concept of a harvest of souls is familiar in Scripture. Consider Jeremiah 51:33 or Hosea 6:11 where the harvest is a symbol for judgment. Jesus used the same concept in His parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13). In that parable, the wicked weeds are gathered together and burned while the good wheat is brought “home” to the barn. The “one like a son of man” (we have previously discussed how that phrase comes from Daniel 7:13 and is used to depict the Messiah) swings His sickle across the earth and the earth is harvested.

An angel comes from the temple in heaven with another sharp sickle. Another angel, one who is in charge of fire, commands the angel to harvest the grapes from the vines. Perhaps this “angel of fire” is the same angel who fills his censer with fire and hurls it to earth in Revelation 8:3-5. In any case, the second harvest is bloody and violent. Grapes are thrown into a huge censer, which represents God’s wrath. There, amid His wrath, the grapes are trampled. The juice that flows out is a tide of blood flowing as deep as a horse’s bridle and 184 miles long.

Modern Christians may wish to gloss over the reality and implications of God’s judgment. It is not a popular subject in our non-judgmental age. How can we deny its existence when so much of Scripture emphasizes its reality? Revelation is further support for the understanding that God must judge unbelievers, but mercy and grace are shown those faithful to His Word and faithful to His Son.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 15:1-8

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read chapter 15 and answer the questions.

1. How many plagues did the Lord send against Egypt through Moses and Aaron? (Ex. 7-11)

How many plagues do the angels bring in Revelation 15:1?

2. How did Moses and the children of Israel escape the Egyptian army? (Ex. 14:21-25)

3. What happened to the Egyptian army? (Ex. 14:26-31)

4. Where do the faithful stand in Revelation 15:2?

5. Read the song of Moses that followed the Exodus (Ex. 15), and compare it to the “song of Moses and the Lamb” in Revelation 15:3-4.

6. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the ark of the covenant carried God’s Law, and the Ten Commandments. Where was the ark placed? (Ex. 26)

What is the tabernacle called in Numbers 17:7?

7. If the tent of the testimony housed God’s Law, what is the significance of the seven angels emerging from the tabernacle of testimony (NASB) in Revelation 15:5?

8. How does the Lord come to Israel on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:9?

9. What fills the temple of Revelation 15:8?

10. In many ways, Revelation 15 reminds us of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. How has the Lord provided you with an “exodus” from captivity to sin, death, and the devil?

11. When does the Lord provide a “parting of the sea” experience in our lives? (1 Cor. 10:1–2)

12. What does Philippians 2:9–11 say about the exaltation of Christ?

How is that supported in Revelation 15:4?

13. What is commonly considered the name of the sea that the children of Israel crossed after their escape from Egypt? (Ex. 13:18)

What color do you suppose the sea of Revelation 15 is if it looks like “glass mixed with fire”?

14. How do the Jews celebrate their escape from Egypt? (Ex. 12:43–51)

How do we celebrate our “exodus” from the devil’s captivity? (Matt. 26:17–30)

15. List ways you are witnessing to Jesus in your daily life.

16. Write one additional action you will attempt this week to show your gratitude to God.



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The faithful are given harps and begin singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Their song is one of praise for God’s redemption, for His incredible deeds of salvation. The lyrics are almost entirely copied from the Old Testament.



Welcome to the shortest chapter in Revelation! Revelation 15 opens with an introduction to seven angels who will unleash seven plagues upon the earth. This is the third cycle of plagues reported in Revelation, and it will be the last. Chapter 14 concluded with a graphic description of Judgment Day, yet here we are facing plagues that inflict mankind before Judgment Day. Once again, Revelation cannot be taken chronologically. Its arrangement of time is ever-changing, always in flux.

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

REVELATION 15:1

The seven plagues lead us to the last portion of the book where the old universe passes away and is replaced by a new and perfect world. With chapter 15, we enter the final stretch of John’s vision. Consistent with the rest of Revelation, the last chapters show us a mixture of God’s wrath on unbelievers and His infinite mercy toward those who trust and love Him. The seven bowls complete God’s warnings to an impenitent world. The seven angels will pour them onto the earth in one final attempt to melt the hearts of sinful men and turn their eyes toward the Savior. However, those hearts have hardened. Like the Pharaoh of the Exodus, there can be no repentance because sin has completely suffocated the work and strength of the Holy Spirit.

THE SONG OF THE FAITHFUL

REVELATION 15:2-4

Before the last plagues inflict an unbelieving world, John witnesses another interlude of victory. In these verses, we find much typology from Exodus. Consider the seven angels with seven plagues, the safety of believers standing by the sea, the imminent destruction of God's enemies, the song of victory (like the song of Moses), the presence of the Law or "tabernacle of testimony" amid the smoky habitation of God (how similar to the giving of the tablets on Mt. Sinai). There can be no mistaking the comparison between Revelation 15 and the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Revelation 15 reveals a new Exodus granted to Christians as an escape from the demonic forces that plague this sinful world.

John observes those who have faithfully endured the beast's persecutions standing victoriously by the sea. The sea looks like glass mixed with fire, resembling a heavenly Red Sea, if you will. Those who stand beside the sea have not abandoned their faith, but have overcome the devil's intent to tear them from their Savior. These are the believers who have received the promises of the seven letters mentioned at the beginning of the book.

They eat of the tree of life (2:7). They are protected from the second death (2:11), given the hidden manna (2:17), given authority over the nations (2:26), dressed in white robes (3:5), placed as pillars in God's temple (3:12), and placed beside Christ on His throne (3:21).

The faithful are given harps and begin singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Their song is one of praise for God's redemption, for His incredible deeds of salvation. The lyrics are almost entirely copied from the Old Testament. Contemplate these verses and compare them to the song in Revelation:

1. Deuteronomy 32:4 - "A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."

2. Psalm 86:9 - "All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord."
3. Malachi 1:11 - "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name."
4. Psalm 98:2 - "The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations."
5. Exodus 15:11 - "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

The song of Moses, the one sung by Moses after the Exodus (Ex. 15:1ff), was sung on Sabbath evenings in the service at the synagogue. Every pious Jew knew it by heart. Moses triumphed over Pharaoh, and now Christ has triumphed over evil! It's no wonder the saints should sing their song with joy. And those Jews who read Revelation were immediately made aware of the similarity between the old Exodus from Egypt and a new Exodus from sin, death, and the devil.

THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE OPENED

REVELATION 15:5-8

After the song has been completed, John sees the heavenly temple open. From its gates, march the seven angels carrying the seven last plagues. The heavenly temple is called the "tabernacle of testimony" (NASB), a biblical term for the ancient tabernacle in which were placed the two tablets of God's commandments which had been brought down from Mt. Sinai (Numbers 17:7, 18:2). Because the seven angels emerge from the tent of testimony, their role in executing judgment is of divine origin. It is part of God's plan to promote seven last plagues. The angels are dressed in clean, white linen, indicating their purity and nobility, and the golden sashes symbolize a royal, priestly function. The angels' appearance emphasizes the

solemnity of the moment. The time for mercy is over. Now must rise up the consequences of sinning against the law.

The seven angels receive the golden bowls of divine wrath from one of the four living creatures. Each of the angels is given a bowl. Remember that in Revelation 5:8, the golden bowls were filled with the prayers of God's saints. Now these bowls, filled with God's wrath, will be poured onto the earth. Paul's message to the Thessalonians will be fulfilled: "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

The temple fills with smoke. When God descended on Mt. Sinai to give His people the Law, He was shrouded in smoke. When the glory of God was associated with the tabernacle in the wilderness, a great cloud covered it (Ex. 40:34). Even Isaiah witnessed the smoke of God's glory in the heavenly temple (Isaiah 6:4). Smoke is an Old Testament sign of God's presence. God's judgments are impenetrable until they are completed and the smoke will vanish only when the last plague has been executed.

The time for mercy and intercession is past. The end must now unveil itself in punishment towards the faithless. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock!" No longer will He stand patiently at the door. He enters to act in judgment.

CONCLUSION

Although Revelation 15 encourages the faithful to embrace the future with trust and confidence in the Lord, the imminent outpouring of the seven bowls of God's wrath must incite us to evangelistic action. Our primary purpose as believers is to spread the Gospel. Our church meetings are important tools for organizing outreach, but they must never replace evangelism. The worship service is the center of the church's focus, but only to support Christians in their daily witness.

Revelation stands as God's urgent word not only to remain steadfast, but also to work while there is still time, to harvest while there is still a crop, to spread God's Word while there are those able to receive it. Nowhere else in Scripture is the fate of unbelievers so graphically illustrated as in God's Revelation to John. Nowhere else do we perceive such a fervent need to make disciples. There are souls dying in our communities without any understanding of the salvation God offers through His Son.

Our prayer must always be that the Lord deepen our gratitude for the salvation He has given us, that He embolden us to witness His love everywhere, and that as we witness He would open the hearts of people everywhere so that they too may be incorporated into the ranks of the saints.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 16:1-21

Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit as you read chapter 16 and answer the questions.

Revelation 16:1-12

1. Describe God's sixth plague, which Moses executed against the Egyptians in Exodus 9:8-12.

What was the result of that plague? (Ex. 9:12)

How does this sixth plague resemble the consequences of the angel's first bowl in Revelation 16:2?

2. Describe God's plague against the Egyptians in Exodus 7:14-25.

What was the result of that plague? (Ex. 7:22)

How does this plague resemble the plagues poured out by the second and third bowls in Revelation 16:3-4?

3. Why is the changing of the world's water into blood an appropriate punishment? (Rev. 16:6)

4. Describe the ninth plague in Exodus 10:21-23.

What was the result of that plague? (Ex. 10:27)

How does this ninth plague differ from that of the fourth bowl in Revelation 16:18?

5. What affect did these plagues have on the hearts of man? (Rev. 16:9, 11, and 21)

6. The Holy Spirit is the only power capable of leading men's hearts from unbelief to faith. When man drives the Holy Spirit from his heart, he can no longer believe on the Lord Jesus and can therefore not be saved. What does Jesus call this "unforgivable" sin? (Mark 3:29)

Revelation 16:13-16

7. If the dragon in Revelation 16:13 is the same dragon as the one in Revelation 12, and the beast is the same beast of the sea in Revelation 13:1-10, then who is the “false prophet”? (Rev. 13:11-18)

8. For what purpose do the kings of the earth gather at Armageddon (Har-Magedon-NASB)? (Rev. 16:14)

9. How do you think Revelation 16:15 suggests that the battle of Armageddon is spiritual rather than military?

Revelation 16:17-21

10. Describe the events caused by the outpouring of the seventh bowl.

11. What are your thoughts/feelings about the activities of God in this and other chapters where we see the full revelation of His judgment?

12. If, after all God has done, the peoples of the earth continue to blaspheme Him, what does this suggest about the success of our personal evangelism?

13. Can anyone force a person to love and trust in the Lord? (Rev. 16:21) Explain.

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Throughout Revelation, God’s plagues against man become increasingly severe as He more fervently attempts to change His creatures’ rebellious ways. In this last cycle of plagues, we sense His patience running out. In His justice, God must deliver punishment against all wickedness.

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THE LAST CYCLE OF PLAGUES

The chapter before us depicts the final series of plagues sent against the hardened hearts of unbelievers. These last seven plagues erupt, not from the unloosening of seals or the blowing of trumpets, but from the pouring of “bowls of wrath” upon the earth.

There are some interesting similarities and differences between the seven bowls of wrath and previous cycles of plagues. In both the trumpet plagues and the bowl plagues, the first four disasters occur upon the earth, sea, inland rivers and lakes, and in the heavens. The fifth plague involves darkness and pain, and the sixth includes the amassing of enemy forces around the Euphrates River. Both series resemble Moses’ plagues against the Egyptians, particularly the turning of water into blood and the blackening of the sun.

Whereas the trumpet plagues destroyed the earth only partially, the bowls of wrath plagues are complete. For example, not just one-third of all sea life dies, but “every living thing” in the sea is destroyed (16:3). Throughout Revelation, God’s plagues against man become increasingly severe as He more fervently attempts to change His creatures’ rebellious ways. In this last cycle of plagues, we sense His patience running out. In His justice, God must deliver punishment against all wickedness.



SIX BOWLS OF WRATH*REVELATION 16:1-12*

The seven angels are sent forth by a voice from the temple. The last verse of chapter 15 tells us that no one is allowed into the heavenly temple until all seven angels are finished with their work. The voice from the temple, then, must be God's.

The first bowl of wrath is poured on the followers of the beast. As in the sixth plague Moses brought against the Egyptians, which caused sores and boils to erupt, the first bowl instigates "loathsome and malignant sores."

The second bowl resembles Moses' act of turning the Nile into blood. It also resembles the second trumpet plague in which the burning mountain fell into the sea, turning it to blood. The sea is turned into "blood like that of a dead man," that is, coagulated blood. Of course, all sea life dies in the polluted, poisonous waters.

Likewise, the third bowl of wrath causes the inland waters to turn to blood. It is an appropriate punishment against those who have martyred the saints. Even as God's enemies have shed the blood of believers, so they must now drink blood. The "angel of the waters" attests to this ironic twist. He says, "They deserve it!"

The Lord's action is therefore righteous and just. The punishment fits the crime. A second voice issuing from the altar confirms the conviction of justice. Perhaps the altar voice is a personification of the testimony of the martyrs and the prayers of the saints. From their wishes and pleas, comes the confirmation that they are vindicated for all their suffering on behalf of the faith.

The fourth angel pours his bowl on the sun, resulting in a blaze of fire, which scorches mankind. In Scripture, fire is often connected with

judgment. Once more, the Lord uses it to execute His punishment on non-believers. How different from the redeemed who live in a heavenly paradise where "The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat" (7:16). Sadly, the world does not respond to the punishment of fire. They continue to curse God and refuse to repent. They blaspheme His name.

The contents of the fifth angel's bowl is poured over the throne of the beast. His kingdom is darkened. The darkness causes such pain that men gnaw their tongues; nevertheless, they continue to blaspheme God. They are beyond saving! Nothing can melt their hearts, and they are confirmed in their unbelief and pride.

The sixth bowl is poured on the Euphrates River. As a result, the river water dries up, providing access to Palestine by the armies of the "kings from the east." Unlike those miraculous moments when God dried up the waters to save His people (the children of Israel escaping from the Egyptians through the Red Sea or Joshua crossing into Canaan), now the waters evaporate for the purpose of punishing the faithless. The Euphrates River marked the eastern boundary of the land promised to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 15:18). The Lord's action of allowing easy access across that border suggests the withdrawal of His divine protection. The enemy is allowed instant entry into the heart of the Promised Land.

ARMAGEDDON*REVELATION 16:13-16*

The next three verses describe preparations for a final battle between God's people and the forces of evil. Three unclean spirits resembling frogs spring forth from the mouths of the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth (or false prophet). The fact that these unclean spirits resemble frogs not only emphasizes their

uncleanness, but also suggests their constant croaking of lies and false doctrine. The evil spirits are diabolical. They gather the kings of the world together to make war on God. Prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah knew that the end times would see a final conflict between good and evil. Ezekiel 38–39 underscores this conflict as well as Zechariah 14. In both instances, the Lord intervenes to save His people and crush those who oppose Him.

The place in which the kings of the world gather is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon (NASB), Armageddon (ESV, NIV). Magedon is traditionally connected with the city of Megiddo that lies at a strategic pass between the coastal plains and the valley of Esdraelon. Because the city lies in a strategic pass, battle for control of the city was a common event. Any expansionary nation would need to conquer Megiddo in order to continue its conquest. The strange aspect of Har-Magedon is that the name translates into “Mountain of Megiddo,” and there is no known Mt. Megiddo! But that need not concern us. Har-Magedon or Armageddon is merely symbolic of the final defeat of all evil forces by the power of God.

The fact that John intersperses a warning in verse 15 is a further support for the spiritual nature of this last battle. We are not to protect ourselves by building bomb shelters or arming ourselves with nuclear weapons, but rather by staying alert, remaining spiritually prepared, “not naked,” but clothed in God’s righteousness. We view Armageddon as a spiritual battle rather than a synonym for World War III.

THE SEVENTH BOWL

REVELATION 16:17–21

Upon the pouring of the seventh and last bowl, convulsions shake heaven and earth. A voice from the throne of the temple says, “It is

done.” When Jesus died on the cross and said, “It is finished,” the earth endured darkness and a great earthquake. Notice what follows the seventh bowl. When the Lord states, “It is done,” lightning, thunder and earthquakes follow. Babylon, the great city, the symbol of evil, is split and destroyed. All the cities of the world lie in ruins.

When the sixth seal was opened, a great earthquake resulted and every mountain and island was moved from its place (16:12–14). In the same way, the seventh bowl causes the islands and mountains to flee. God’s storm of wrath reaches its climax as hundred-pound hailstones fall to the ground. Yet, the plague produces no change in mankind. Nothing has helped! They remain unrepentant and blaspheming God. Judgment has come and those confirmed in their hostility toward God cannot change their hearts. They have come to imitate the blasphemy of the beast himself.

We have now witnessed three cycles of plagues initially designed to turn men’s hearts away from evil and to enact judgment against unbelievers. Again, it must be said that these three cycles are not designed to give us a literal play-by-play account of the horrors awaiting mankind in the last days. Rather, they are to underscore how increasingly difficult life will become as the end draws near, how the Lord will use adversity in order to turn men’s hearts, but failing that, will come in judgment to destroy His enemies.

The next two chapters will deal with the fate of “Babylon,” the symbol of evil. Although Babylon’s fate is dreadful, thanks be to God that He has delivered us from its judgment through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 17:1-18

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read chapter 17 and answer the questions.

Revelation 17:1-6

1. With what important event does the Bible associate Babylon? (2 Kings 25)

2. Where does Babylon dwell according to Jeremiah 51:13?

On what does the prostitute sit in Revelation 17:1?

3. What does Jeremiah say about Babylon's activity in Jeremiah 51:7?

How does this resemble the activity of the prostitute in Revelation 17:2?

4. Which beast also had seven heads, ten horns, and was full of blasphemies even as the scarlet beast of Revelation 17:3? (Rev. 13:1)

5. Describe Babylon's moral traits according to Revelation 17:5-6.

Revelation 17:7-14.

6. In an earlier chapter, we raised the possibility that the beast from the sea resembled anti-Christian government. If that's the case, what, in your opinion, would be the significance of its ability to be that which "was, and is not, and yet is?"

7. What two things, according to the angel, do the seven heads of the beast represent? (Rev. 17:9-10)

What do the ten horns represent? (Revelation 17:12, 16:14, 16)

8. What do the ten kings do with their power? (Rev. 17:13, 14a)

9. In the struggle of the kings and beasts against the Lamb of God, who will win and why? (Rev. 17:14)

10. Describe some ways in which Satan, the church, and state were allied for a time to conquer God's Son at Jesus' trial and crucifixion.
-

Revelation 17:15-18

11. What will the ten kings do to the prostitute? (Rev. 17:16)
-

12. Can you describe any instances when evil, at the very moment it seems invincible, destroys itself?
-

13. Whose plan is it that evil should appear so powerful, only to destroy itself at the height of its glory? (Rev. 17:17)
-

14. Knowing what Revelation says about the fate of evil nations and kingdoms, should we fear that Islam, Communism, Fascism, etc., will ultimately be victorious over the Church? Why?
-

15. Why is it important to pray for our state and church leaders?
-

16. In light of the description of the end times found in Revelation, what is your greatest personal comfort?
-



THE LAMB IS VICTORIOUS – REVELATION 17:14-18	111
PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 18:1-24	112



Time after time, evil governments arise to persecute the Church. When one government falls, another rises. Governments hostile to the Church never disappear entirely. They only die to be reborn somewhere else.



Chapter 16:19 briefly tells us that, “God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.” The doom of Babylon is portrayed in much greater detail through chapters 17 and 18. Chapter 17 focuses on the vision of the prostitute, Babylon, sitting on the scarlet beast. Chapter 18 is an extended lament over the destruction of the city.

One of the angels who carried a bowl of plagues invites John to view the destruction of the great prostitute. She is described as one “who is seated on many waters.” The waters, John tells us, represent peoples, nations, multitudes, and languages (v. 15). Her position over the waters represents her power and authority over the earth.

THE END OF BABYLON

REVELATION 17:1-13

As mentioned earlier, Old Testament prophecy used the harlot (prostitute) as a symbol for unbelieving peoples and nations. Isaiah 1:21 decries Jerusalem for becoming a harlot and chasing after false gods. Nahum 3:4 depicts the city of Nineveh as a harlot. The image of a prostitute is an appropriate description of people in rebellion against God. Those worshipping false gods have committed adultery against the only true God. They have been unfaithful, and their faithlessness has arisen as a result of “whoring” after other gods.

The prostitute is guilty of illicit relationships with many different kings and peoples of the world. The world is intoxicated by the prostitute's many immoral activities. When John is carried into the wilderness, he is afforded a different view of the prostitute. She sits on a scarlet beast that is full of blasphemous names and weighted down with seven heads and ten horns. The fact that moments ago she sat on many waters but now sits on the beast should present no problem to us as we remember the ever-shifting nature of apocalyptic literature. The beast of chapter 16, like the beast from the sea of chapter 13, carries seven heads and ten horns. Because of their similar appearance, the scarlet beast and the beast from the sea might be considered one and the same.

The prostitute is dressed in purple and scarlet, and she is covered with gold and jewels. In John's day, purple and scarlet were evidence of great wealth and luxury because the dyes necessary for coloring were so expensive. She holds a golden cup that contains all kinds of immoral and unclean things. Such sinful acts are what she offers those who would drink from her cup. Upon her head is written a "mystery." That word "mystery" might be better translated as "secret meaning." Only those who know the secret meaning will be able to fully understand the significance of her title.

She is described as "Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." She is supported by the beast from the sea, and with his power, she grows intoxicated with the blood of the saints and martyrs. When John sees her luxury, her wantonness, and her unremorseful reveling, he "wonders." He is in awe. She appears indestructible and there is even a certain fascinated attraction to her.

The angel of the Lord responds to John's wonder by explaining the mystery of the woman and the

beast she rides. The remainder of chapter 17 deals with an explanation of these symbols. The angel first describes the beast as the one who "was and is not, and about to rise from the bottomless pit [Abyss] and go to destruction." The angel's words are an obvious parody on the description of God the Father as the One "who is, who was, and who is to come," but notice the twist of words given the beast in verse 8, he "was, and is not, and about to rise." Time after time, this beast is destroyed, but returns to life again and again. The beast's amazing power of resuscitation invites the world's awe and wonder. Can nothing defeat it?

Time after time, evil governments arise to persecute the Church. When one government falls, another rises. Governments hostile to the Church never disappear entirely. They only die to be reborn somewhere else. The angel undoubtedly wants to link the scarlet woman with the Roman government because he interprets the beast's seven heads on which the woman is supported as the "seven mountains." According to tradition, Rome was built on seven hills. Any first century reader would have made the association.

The seven heads also represent seven kings, five of whom have disappeared, one who now reigns, and one who is yet to come. Scholars have attempted to link many different kings and nations to these seven heads. Perhaps it would be sufficient to suggest the seven, the number for completeness, is being employed to underscore the nearness of this world's end. Five kings have passed, one exists, and there is only one more to come. Be prepared! The end is not far!

Strangely, the beast himself is considered part of this evil realm — the eighth king, to be exact. The Greek literally translates verse 11 as "And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven and he goes to

With the kings of the world rallied against the Lord, we witness the victory of the Lamb over the forces of evil.



destruction.” Some Bibles translate this verse as the beast being “one of the seven,” but that is not entirely accurate. He plays the part of the seven other kings, but is from an entirely different realm.

Accompanying this beastly reign will be ten kings represented by ten horns. When the ten kings receive their authority, they will turn it over to the beast and join him in war with the Lord. The number ten is, of course, symbolic and represents the completeness of the world’s leaders joining in forces against the Church. It does not point to ten specific kings, but is meant to underscore the pressure and persecution placed on the Church during the end times.

THE LAMB IS VICTORIOUS

REVELATION 17:14-18

With the kings of the world rallied against the Lord, we witness the victory of the Lamb over the forces of evil. Armageddon is once more before us, but seen from a different perspective. The Lord’s victory, however, remains predetermined.

The fate of the prostitute is an insightful statement on the nature of evil, that it bears the seed of its own destruction. Because evil is jealous and hateful, it ultimately self-destructs into poisonous factions. The ten horns and the beast, upon which the prostitute rests, turn on

her, strip her, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. What an inglorious end to a woman once adorned in purple robes and fine jewels! In this sense, evil itself fulfills the Lord’s will, destroying itself without any outside interference or influence.

The angel tells John that the prostitute represented the great city that reigns over the kings of the earth. To John, of course, this would have pointed to Rome. Rome was the decadent seducer who had conquered or enticed the nations of the known world into her sphere of influence. Of course, the prostitute represents much more than Rome. She is every institution that prostitutes itself for money, wealth, luxury, fame at the expense of God’s people and the Church.

Will the time come when no kingdom of the world will allow Christians the opportunity to worship the Lord? Quite possibly. We, as believers, must remember there is no biblical guarantee that Christians are safe from persecution, even martyrdom. We do have the guarantee, however, that ultimately God will be victorious over those who wish to strangle His Church. The outcome of the final battle between good and evil has been determined by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Battles will come and go, but the war has been won.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 18:1-24

Pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you as you read Revelation 18 and answer the questions.

1. Why was the angel of Revelation 18:1 so radiant? (Compare Ex. 34:29-32)

2. What event does Isaiah foresee in Isaiah 13:19-20?

3. For what was “old” Babylon famous and what finally happened to it? (Jer. 25: 8-14)

What does this suggest will happen to the prostitute of Revelation?

4. The voice from heaven calls God’s people out of Babylon to escape her sin and arrogance (Revelation 18:4-8). What did the Lord direct His prophet Jeremiah to say about the same issues in Jeremiah 51:6-8?

5. Is the Lord showing justice or mercy against Babylon in Revelation 18:6-8? In what ways?

6. What did Alexander the metalworker do to Paul? (2 Tim. 4:14-15)

Who would punish him?

7. Whose job is it to repay evil with evil? (Deut. 32:43)

8. Compare old Babylon’s arrogant claim in Isaiah 47:7-11 with Babylon’s smug assurances of Revelation 18:7-8.

9. Are the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the seamen wailing over Babylon because they cared for her or are they more worried about themselves? Explain. (Rev. 18:10-19)

What does it mean to you that the merchants were trading “souls of men”? (Rev. 18:10-19).

What does this say about the morality of the merchants' business practices?

-
10. What should Babylon and its people have learned from Proverbs 29:23?
-
11. What does Jeremiah do with the scroll of disasters for Old Babylon in Jeremiah 51:60–64? How does the angel of Revelation 18:21 follow suit?
-
12. Do you think we should be bothered by the joy of revenge being displayed in this chapter? Why or why not?
-
13. Could the description of Babylon's wealth and trade be associated with our large cities today? What do you think about that?
-
14. List three reasons why the angel says Babylon was destroyed in Revelation 18:23–24.
-
15. How do you apply 2 Timothy 2:11–14 to your life and to the message of this chapter?
-

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When Babylon falls, she really falls! Babylon, a symbol for all God's enemies, is overthrown and plundered. It is inevitable that this source of evil should be destroyed because God is ultimately victorious over those who war against Him.

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THE FALL OF BABYLON

When Babylon falls, she really falls! Babylon, a symbol for all God's enemies, is overthrown and plundered. It is inevitable that this source of evil should be destroyed because God is ultimately victorious over those who war against Him. Two points about Babylon's destruction should be emphasized.

First, the lament for Babylon outlined in chapter 18 resembles many other laments found in the Old Testament. As such, Revelation 18 follows a typical literary genre.

Secondly, we should not be disturbed by what might appear to be an "unchristian glee" over the city's fall. It is not personal vindictiveness, but a joy in the redemptive purposes of God, which leads the angels to exult over the city's ruin.

THE BRIGHT ANGEL

REVELATION 18:1-3

We've certainly met a lot of angels in our study! In chapter 18, an angel descends from heaven, possessing great authority and reflecting the glory and radiance of God. This angel, whose glowing reflection of God illuminates the earth, has been authorized to announce Babylon's destruction.

Babylon has always been a symbol of opposition to God and His Kingdom. Revelation 18 makes clear that evil itself will ultimately lie in ruins. Although opposition to God often appears invincible, the Lord will remain victorious into eternity. The once proud city of Babylon becomes a ghost town. Only demons, evil spirits, and unclean birds inhabit her buildings. She enticed the kingdoms and nations of the world to faithlessness. She turned away from God and followed the luxury and wantonness of the world. As a result, her destruction was predetermined. There is a moral order to the universe!

ANOTHER VOICE HEARD FROM *REVELATION 18:4-20*

The second voice John hears may be the voice of God Himself. He calls believers “my people,” which suggests His role as Creator and Redeemer. The voice exhorts believers to separate themselves from the doomed city. Believers have always been tempted to compromise their beliefs with worldliness, but the call of God is to put distance between the cares of the world and the conviction of faith.

The voice encourages separation, not only so that believers will not share in the city’s sins, but also to spare believers the imminent punishment of plagues. Babylon’s sins are so numerous that they are piled all the way up to heaven (that’s a lot of sinning!). And God remembers them all. God is just, and when our sins are not forgiven through Jesus Christ, they must be judged and punished. In the case of Babylon, she is to receive double the punishment for all the sins she has committed. She made the nations drink from her cup of immorality, and now she must drink a double portion from the cup of God’s wrath. For all the luxury and glory she gained for herself, she will receive torture and grief. Justice is served!

Babylon had sat in arrogant pride believing she was invincible, above any personal loss or suffering. She considered herself a queen — not a vulnerable widow, but an invincible matriarch. As a result of her arrogance, plagues of death, mourning, famine, and fire will sweep upon her suddenly, decisively, completely. There is no escape for Babylon. She has been judged, and her sentence will be executed as surely as God reigns over the earth.

The kings of the earth join in weeping over the fallen city. After all, they are stunned. They believed she was unconquerable! She was the one who had made possible their great wealth and luxury. In seeing the fate of Babylon, they fear their own end. The kings, of course, do not rush to the city’s rescue. Instead, they stand from a distance and gape in horror at the events before them. How could judgment come so quickly to one so mighty? How could its glory crumble in heaps of ashes?

The merchants of the earth join the kings in mourning. They mourn not in sympathy for the city, but in sadness over their loss of market potential. No one will buy their merchandise anymore! Interestingly, John lists the cargo that the merchants had once traded. Twenty-nine articles comprise the list, falling into six groups:

1. Metals and gems
2. Expensive fabrics
3. Ornamental material
4. Aromatic substances
5. Food
6. Animals and slaves.

The list is given to emphasize the tremendous amount of trade which entered Babylon, and the tremendous wealth enjoyed by the merchants. The

merchants, like the kings, stand at a distance in horror at what has happened to Babylon. She was so luxurious, so wealthy, so glitzy and so glamorous! How could she lie so quickly in ruins?

The lament over Babylon is carried on by those involved in shipping. They, too, watch the city burn, and in an act of sorrow, they place dust on their heads, weeping and mourning over the destruction of their wealth. There was never a city as great as Babylon, yet its destruction was sudden and sure. If the city could be ruined, how vulnerable were those who made their profit from her!

Yet, the heavens, saints, apostles, and prophets are called to rejoice about Babylon's fate. This isn't a call to express vindictiveness, but is meant to celebrate the justice of a holy God who now repays Babylon for her persecution of the saints.

THE ANGEL WITH A BOULDER

REVELATION 18:21-24

When Jeremiah wrote his prophecies against Babylon (Jer. 51:60-63), he was told to take the scroll of writings and throw them into the Euphrates in order to illustrate how Babylon would sink and never rise again. In Luke 17:2, Jesus tells His disciples that it would be better for a man to have a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea rather than cause one of Jesus' "little ones to stumble." So, when the mighty angel of Revelation picks up a millstone, throws it into the sea, and compares it to the fall of Babylon, we can begin to understand the finality of the angel's action. Babylon has been judged.

Silence is the order of the day. No more can music be heard within the city. The sound of workmen has ceased. No more grain is ground at the millstone. Darkness blankets the city.

Weddings are history, and the joy of the marriage ceremony will no longer be experienced. The angel, after throwing his millstone into the sea, describes the utter desolation of a city decimated by the wrath of God.

The angel lists three reasons for the city's destruction. First, because of the luxury and wantonness of the city, its merchants were considered "the world's great men." Their trade had puffed them into great arrogance and they trusted in their own treasures rather than in God. Secondly, the city had hypnotized the nations of the world into its worship of luxury and wealth. Finally, Babylon had persecuted and killed God's saints. The blood of believers was crying out for justice even as Abel's blood cried out for justice against Cain.

One cannot read this chapter without feeling uncomfortable about the great wealth, greed, and arrogance of our own nation. Could these verses not apply to New York City, or Los Angeles, or the nation as a whole? Are we placing our luxury and greed ahead of trust in the Lord? And will we, too, be punished as swiftly and decisively as Babylon?

In John's day, Babylon was a sure symbol for Rome. All the greed and excesses portrayed in this chapter were present in Rome's wealthy, decadent empire. But the symbol of Babylon cannot be limited to one government, city or nation. It can apply to any people who place self-interest, greed, power, and idolatry before faith in the Lord Jesus. Babylon exists among us now even as it did in John's day. And the Lord continues to exhort us to separate ourselves from the seductive worldliness around us. Will we hear His call?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 19:1-21

Open my heart and mind, dear Lord, and grant me that degree of wisdom and knowledge which is Your will for me.

Revelation 19:1-9

1. What does the angel exhort the universe to do in Revelation 18:20?

How do the heavens comply in 19:1-2?

2. Who else is involved in the worship and what do they say? (Rev. 19:4)

3. Look up the word "Hallelujah" in the dictionary. What does it mean and from what language does it originate?

4. How does the heavenly host's praise in Revelation 19:1-2 compare to the theme of Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32:43?

5. John anticipates the destruction of Babylon by saying, "her smoke rose up forever and ever" (Revelation 19:3). How does that compare with Isaiah's description of God's wrath against the nations in Isaiah 34:10?

6. What celebration is announced in Revelation 19:7?

7. Describe in your own words the events of the marriage feast found in the parable of Matthew 22:1-14.

8. In the parable of the marriage feast, whom do you think is represented by

The king?

The son?

The rude guests?

Why is the one man not allowed entrance to the marriage feast? (Matt. 22:11-14).

How does his dress compare with the bride's clothing in Revelation 19:7-8?

Revelation 19:10-21

9. Why was the angel upset at John falling to his feet and worshipping the angel?

How might the angel's warning relate to the practice of worshipping saints? (1 Tim. 2:5)

10. What four names are given the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19:11-16?

Who do you think this rider is? Why?

11. How does the author of Revelation (John) suggest he is the same writer of the Gospel of John? (Rev. 19:13; John 1:1, 1:14)

12. For what purpose are the armies of heaven and the rider on the white horse armed? (Rev. 19:19)

13. If the marriage of the Lamb is a blessed event for believers, what is it like for unbelievers? (Rev. 19:17-21)

How does that compare with the ones who are dressed appropriately at the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14, and those who are not?

Which two are thrown into the lake of burning sulfur? (Rev. 19:20)

14. What does this chapter suggest about the war between good and evil? Who will inevitably win?

To which side should we steadfastly cling and why?



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Even as the marriage feast of the Lamb is an extraordinary, wonderful experience for the Church, so it is an unimaginable nightmare to unbelievers.



PRAISE THE LORD!

REVELATION 19:1-21

In the previous chapter, a voice from heaven exhorted the universe to rejoice over the fall of Babylon. In chapter 19, the universe complies with the voice's request as the heavenly multitude, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures worship and praise the Lord. The heavenly praises are in stark contrast to the recent gloomy laments spoken by the kings, merchants, and seamen over Babylon. May we continually lift praises to the Lord for delivering us from the doom awaiting the fallen city!

SHOUTS OF HALLELUJAH

REVELATION 19:1-5

The sound of a multitude roaring its praises across the heavens greets John's ears. Think of the roar arising from a great stadium full of people upon the execution of an outstanding feat of sportsmanship. Then, consider how much greater would be the roar of the heavenly hosts praising God! They sing "Hallelujah," which translates from Hebrew into English as "Praise the Lord!" What is the reason for their universal praise? Salvation, power, and glory belong to the Lord because He is just. He has destroyed Babylon, the city whose corrupting influence spread throughout civilization, and He has avenged the blood of the martyrs. The praise of the heavenly host is repeated. "Hallelujah!" resounds the heavenly encore. The destruction of the city is final. It is the end of evil.

When the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of God (many chapters ago), the twenty-four elders and four living creatures fell down and worshipped the Lord. It is fitting that they should do so once more upon the final destruction of Babylon. Their words “Amen, Hallelujah” complete their participation in the book of Revelation. They will not be heard nor seen again.

A voice from God’s throne calls all the servants of God, “Praise our God!” Perhaps the voice is from another heavenly being standing near the throne of God.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE HEAVENLY MARRIAGE

REVELATION 19:6-10

With the sound of rushing waters and booming thunder, the multitude praises God for a second reason. They praise the Lord not only for His victory over evil, but also for His upcoming marriage to the Church. The wedding of the Lamb proves that God’s reign is complete. The Lamb, who stands as the bridegroom, will celebrate his union with the bride. Even as harlotry stands as a biblical symbol for unbelievers in rebellion against God, so the bride represents believers, or, more specifically, the Church of God. God promises Israel in Hosea 2:19, “I will betroth you to me forever.” In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who throws a wedding feast for his son. And consider how Paul relates the intimacy of marriage with the relationship between Christ and His Church in Ephesians 5:32.

The bride is given fine linen that is clean and bright. Parenthetically, John defines those linens as the righteous acts of the saints. Believers’ acts are made righteous only through the sacrifice of our Savior, and it is appropriate that John describes the bride as wearing pure linen, which has been given her. The righteousness of the Church is a free

gift from the groom. How different from the purple, jewel-bedecked harlot of Babylon appears the bride of Christ!

Interestingly, when a man and woman were married in John’s day, two major events were necessary: the betrothal and the wedding. Upon betrothal, the man and woman were considered married, although they were required to remain separate from each other until the wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony traditionally began by proceeding to the bride’s house. Afterwards, the wedding party would return to the groom’s house for the wedding feast. Consider how accurately that tradition resembles Christ’s relationship to the Church. The Church is betrothed to Christ through faith. When Christ comes again, He will make official His union with the bride, the Church, for the purpose of escorting her back to His house (heaven) for an eternal wedding feast!

John is told to underscore how blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding supper. Isaiah well understood the blessedness of the feast. He looked forward to the same event envisioned by John when he wrote, “The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain: a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, [and] refined, aged wine” (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus Himself reminds the people that at the end, “they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline [at the table] in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29).

John is overwhelmed. He falls at the feet of the angel who shows him these blessed events in order to worship him. But the angel commands John to restrain his adulation. The angel is, after all, a servant of the Lord like John. Only God is to be worshipped, no other being deserves that acclaim. God alone commands our tribute and praise, not emperors, kings, nations, angels, or saints.

THE RIDER CALLED “FAITHFUL AND TRUE”

REVELATION 19:11-16

Without warning the heavens open to reveal a rider called “Faithful and True,” who sits on a white horse. This rider has waged a holy war against the nations of the world in order to usher in the end of the age. He is accompanied by the armies of heaven who return to heaven from victorious battle against God’s enemies.

Remember, the white horse is a symbol of victorious conquest. The description of the rider leaves us no doubt that He is the Christ, exalted and all-powerful. First of all, He is called “Faithful and True.” Psalm 96:13 portrays the coming Messiah as one who would judge the world with righteousness and truth. His second name is written on the rider, but no one knows that name except He Himself. Perhaps the secret name alludes to the sacred Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name revealed by God to Moses at the burning bush. It was considered by Jewish rabbis as too holy to pronounce, so they substituted vowels from another name for God (Adonai) between the consonants. Consequently, when the name YHWH was uttered using the substituted vowels, it was pronounced “Jehovah.”

The tip-off to the rider’s identity comes from the name written on His robe and thigh: “King of kings and Lord of lords.” His name is also “the Word of God.” What an interesting link with John’s Gospel which connects the pre-incarnate Christ as the Word of God (John 1:1), who became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14)! This Word of God, the Christ, carries universal sovereignty and reigns with total authority and power into eternity.

The same rider is described as owning eyes like blazing fire. Nothing can be kept secret from the burning look of the conquering Messiah. He carries many crowns on His head as an indication of His kingship. His robe is dipped in the blood of the enemy and out of His mouth issues a sharp sword. In our first look at the ascended Lord, He carried a sharp two-edged sword (Revelation 1:16). That same concept is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 where the Lord slays the “lawless one” with the breath of His mouth.

The prophecy “He will rule them with an iron scepter” comes from Psalm 2 where the Lord tells His anointed that He will rule the world with a rod of iron.

Finally, the picture of the rider treading the winepress of God’s wrath indicates His bloody mission — to destroy those who would war against the Lord.

In the last few chapters, we have witnessed “Armageddon” from a variety of view-points.

- In chapter 16, the sixth angel poured out his bowl, dried up the Euphrates, and so provided for the kings to gather in Armageddon.
- In chapter 17, we read how the ten kings gave their authority to the beast in order to war against God.
- In chapter 9, the sixth angel blew his trumpet to allow an army of 200,000,000 to sweep across the face of the earth.
- Now, in chapter 19, we have witnessed the end of the battle. The King of kings returns to heaven with His warriors in victory.

The words and images of Revelation need not scare you, because our Savior Jesus has removed any threat of such punishment from our lives. Instead, let them motivate you to bring God's salvation to the world through His Word. Pray the Lord works through you to work His deliverance.



THE MARRIAGE FEAST: FLIP SIDE

REVELATION 19:17-21

Even as the marriage feast of the Lamb is an extraordinary, wonderful experience for the Church, so it is an unimaginable nightmare to unbelievers. An angel, standing in the sun, announces the “supper of God” to all the birds who circle in the air. The supper of God is the flip side of the marriage feast of the Lamb. The flesh upon which the birds of the air feast is that of the kings, generals, mighty men, horses and riders who warred against God and lost. The same “supper” was foreseen by Ezekiel centuries earlier when he wrote about the destruction of the mythical Gog: “Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: ‘Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth’” (Ezek. 39:17-18).

Upon the defeat of God’s enemies, the beast from the sea and the false prophet (or beast from the earth) are thrown alive into the lake of fire. The lake of fire burns with brimstone, a smelly, yellow substance that can be found to this day in the valley of the Dead Sea. The beast from the sea and the false prophet are the first inhabitants of this hell. Later on, the devil, death, Hades, and all evil people will be united in the fiery pit. The forces of evil are killed by the sword of the Lord’s mouth, and their remains provide the birds with a delightful meal!

Did you realize Revelation was going to be so gory when you started this series? It puts Steven Spielberg’s special effects to shame! Yet again, John places the joy of the saints in stark contrast to the misery of God’s enemies. Can we ignore the very strong images of Revelation and dismiss any concept of God’s justice and eternal punishment? I think not. And if that is the case, how strongly we are invited to proclaim the Gospel so that no one need suffer the punishment reserved for the devil and his legions. The words and images of Revelation need not scare you, because our Savior Jesus has removed any threat of such punishment from our lives. Instead, let them motivate you to bring God’s salvation to the world through His Word. Pray the Lord works through you to work His deliverance.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 20:1-6

As you read these few verses, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in your study.

1. What does the angel hold in his hand? (Revelation 20:1)

What does he do with it? (Revelation 20:2)

2. What four names does John give the Prince of Darkness? (Rev. 20:2)

3. How long will the saints and martyrs reign with Christ? (Rev. 20:4)

4. Consider all we have learned about the use of numbers in Revelation. Explain your view of “a thousand years.”

5. What date were you born? (Women are exempted from answering this question.) _____
6. What date were you “born again” according to Jesus’ definition in John 3:3, 5-6? (Think about the month and day of your baptism!)

7. Why might your baptism be aptly described as “the first resurrection”? (Eph. 2:1-7; Acts 2:38)

8. What honor and responsibility is given the saints and martyrs? (Rev. 20:6)

How do you, as a saint and believer in the Lord, feel about that honor?

9. Why do you think we are blessed and holy if we have taken part in the first resurrection?

10. What happens to believers when they die? What happens to unbelievers? (Mark 16:1; John 3:17-18; Philippians 3:20-21; Job 19:25-27)

If the “first death” is the death of our bodies, what do you think the second death is? (Matt. 10:28)

Why, then, is it appropriate for John to say that the second death has no power over believers? (Rev. 20:6; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:50–57)

Using John's theme of death and resurrection, match the following:
Match the letter (a,b,c,d) with the proper number.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| _____ 1. "First Resurrection" (John 3:5–6;
2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 20:4–6) | a. Eternal life (heaven) |
| _____ 2. "Second Resurrection" (John 5:29) | b. Eternal death (hell) |
| _____ 3. "First Death" (Gen. 3:19) | c. Baptism |
| _____ 4. "Second Death" (Is. 66:24; Rev. 20:6, 14) | d. Temporal death |

11. In these Scripture references how was Satan bound? (Luke 10:18; Matt. 12:29; John 12:30–32, 16:5–11)

_____ Was Satan "bound" in the Old Testament? (Job 1:6–7, 2:1–3; Zech. 3:1–2)

12. When does Scripture say Satan will be loosed for a little while? (Matt. 24:24)

13. How might we describe the devil as being bound in our lives?

14. Why will unbelievers also come to life at the end of the thousand years? (John 5:28–29)

15. How does Matthew 19:28 compare to Revelation 20:4?

16. Imagine yourself a fired-up interpreter of Revelation who used the book to decipher future world events leading to the second coming of Christ. What might your followers think of Scripture after your predictions of future historical events failed to materialize?

17. Why is it important to preach the Gospel rather than possible future events? (Acts 1:7–8)



... ..

Those who share in the first resurrection are all believers. It is no wonder John says those who share in the first resurrection are blessed and holy!

... ..

THE MILLENNIUM!

REVELATION 20:1-6

THE DEBATE

Perhaps the most theologically debated section of Revelation is found in the verses before us. From this section of John’s writing has arisen endless speculation about events occurring at the world’s end. The word “millennium” means a period of a thousand years. It applies to the prophecy in Revelation 20 that Satan will be bound for a thousand years. The word millennium comes from the Latin *mille* (which means a thousand) and *annus* (which means year). In the Greek, the word for a thousand is *chilias*. Those who believe in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth during which Satan is bound and unable to deceive the nations are called millennialists or chiliasts.

Actually, there are different branches of millennialist thought. Millennialism is broken down into premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism.

Premillennialists outline five major events that will occur in the last years of history. They believe:

1. *The millennium will be ushered in by Christ’s invisible return.* His return will be followed by the removal of believers from the earth during a period of “great tribulation.” Dead believers will be raised,

and living believers will be transfigured. Together they will be taken out of this world in order to escape the tribulation and to be married to the Lamb.

2. After the Church has been removed, a great tribulation lasting seven years will afflict the earth. After three and a half years, the Antichrist will appear and God's wrath will be poured on the nations. As a result of God's punishment, Israel will be converted.
3. *Christ will then reveal Himself and establish His perfect Kingdom.* The Antichrist will be bound.
4. Toward the end of the millennium, Satan will be loosed for a little while and make one final assault against Christ and His followers, but, in the end, the Antichrist will be utterly destroyed.
5. The end of the millennium will be followed by Judgment Day in which hell and death will be destroyed and God will make a new Kingdom.

Premillennialists develop their theology by piecing together passages from Daniel, Revelation, Zechariah, 1 Thessalonians, and Ezekiel. They resort to arbitrary interpretations of biblical passages, and disregard clear statements by Jesus and the apostles, which contradict their theology. For example, Peter and Paul speak of the Lord's return and the end of the world as a sudden event, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), after which He will immediately judge the living and the dead (Matt. 25:31-33). Lutherans believe the concept of a thousand-year reign before Judgment Day is in direct conflict with Jesus' own words. Remember, we cannot construct new doctrines from Revelation, only reinforce doctrines spelled out in Scripture.

Postmillennialists are similar to premillennialists except that they believe that by the preaching of the Gospel the world will gradually evolve into Christ's Kingdom. The whole world will be converted and believe the Gospel with *Christ's return after the millennium*.

What have Lutherans traditionally believed? Lutherans have been considered **amillennialists**. *They say the "millennium" refers to the time period between Jesus' death and His Second Coming.* Satan was bound upon Jesus' atonement for our sins and now the devil can no longer touch the souls of believers because believers live under the grace of God's forgiveness. *The millennium will end when Christ returns to usher in Judgment Day.*

THE TEXT

John sees an angel descend from heaven carrying a key to the Abyss and a great chain. Perhaps this angel is the same one who released the demonic locusts from the Abyss in chapter 9. In any case, the angel's purpose is to seize the dragon who is Satan, the devil, and bind him in chains for 1,000 years. The devil is then thrown into the Abyss, and the door to hell is locked and sealed. Satan can no longer deceive the peoples of the world.

John now sees the saints sitting on thrones, awaiting their role in judging the earth. The saints include martyrs for the faith, "those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God." These are the ones who remained steadfast in the faith and were not swayed by the devil or his lieutenants. The saints reign with Christ for a thousand years, but unbelievers remain dead until the thousand years are ended. John explains that the saints are enjoying the first resurrection, and to those who experience the first resurrection, the second death has no power. Believers will reign throughout the millennium.

THE INTERPRETATION

How might a Lutheran amillennialist view these verses in Revelation? How could they be interpreted in accordance with the Lutheran principle: “Scripture interprets Scripture”?

As suggested earlier, amillennialists believe the thousand-year reign of Christ began at Christ’s birth and continues until His return. We now live in the “millennium”! As support for that assumption, we remember Jesus’ words after His disciples returned from casting out demons: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Consider Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ accusation that He was performing miracles through the power of the devil. To explain His power to defeat the devil, Jesus says, “How can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?” (Matt. 12:29). Jude 6 describes this binding as well: “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” All of these passages point to the binding of Satan upon Christ’s arrival in the world.

But, you may ask, if this is the millennium and Satan is already bound, why does he continue to deceive so many people? Why does Peter warn: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The answer is that although Satan is restrained, bound, chained, he is like a dog on a leash. There is still room for mischief. He is a dangerous being within the scope of activity God gives him.

Toward the end of time, the Lord will give the devil greater opportunity to do damage. John understands that the devil must be set free for a short time at the end of history. The idea that the devil will again be unleashed is supported by Jesus’ warning that in the end times “false Christs and false prophets

will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible” (Matt. 24:24). Things will be so bad towards the end of time, Jesus says, that His return will be the only saving factor for those who still trust in Him.

Revelation speaks of believers and martyrs seated on heavenly thrones awaiting their task of judging the world. The picture of believers sharing with Christ in judgment and reigning with Him is nothing new. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:2, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” In 2 Timothy 2:12 he says, “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” The image of the saints reigning with Christ until the end of time is merely a confirmation of a doctrine found elsewhere in Scripture.

How do we view the “first resurrection” and “second death” in line with what Scripture tells us? First, consider Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:3: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Two verses later, Jesus again explains, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” The importance of baptism in bringing new life is suggested in Paul’s letter to Titus 3:5: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Conversion involves the rebirth of the soul, a new life lived in faith towards the Lord. When John speaks of those who enjoy the “first resurrection,” he refers to all those who have been “born again” by water and the Word. Those who share in the first resurrection are all believers. It is no wonder John says those who share in the first resurrection are blessed and holy!

The fact is that we are raised from spiritual death upon conversion. The Old Adam is drowned and we rise to new life in Christ. The beginning of eternal life is experienced the moment the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to receive Christ by faith. Those who partake in the first resurrection never have to fear the “second death.”

The fact is that we are raised from spiritual death upon conversion. The Old Adam is drowned and we rise to new life in Christ. The beginning of eternal life is experienced the moment the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to receive Christ by faith. Those who partake in the first resurrection never have to fear the "second death."



What, then, is the second death? If we consider the first death to be the death of our bodies, then the second death must refer to the eternal death of the soul suffered by those who reject the Savior. Naturally, those who have enjoyed the first resurrection will never have to suffer the second death. True, we must all endure the first death, the death of our bodies, but the second has been cancelled by Jesus on the cross.

By extension, what would be the second resurrection? The resurrection of our bodies when Christ comes again. "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable..." (1 Cor. 15:42).

The point of all of this is that if we understand Revelation 20 as an attempt to teach us new doctrine about the end times, then we begin to take a premillennialist view of Christ's return. But if we follow the confessional mandate for biblical interpretation, if we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, then Revelation 20:1-6 expresses a view of the last days that is consistent with Jesus and His disciples' words and writings.

In the past, premillennialists have centered much of their preaching and evangelism on the events that precede the coming of Christ. Unfortunately, that emphasis has focused attention away from the heart of the message of the Gospel to a preoccupation with times, dates, and seasons foreshadowing the Lord's return. Our Christian witness is to teach forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. It is not to make out a day-by-day account of upcoming military and political events.

May the Lord work in our hearts to use these verses as confirmation of His teachings rather than as a mandate to unravel the secrets of the future. As our Lord said, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 20:7-15

Prayerfully read this section of Revelation 20:7-15 and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you answer the questions.

1. What is the first thing the devil does when he is finally released from the Abyss? (Rev. 20:8)

 2. Have you ever experienced what seems like the devil's army besieging your spiritual life? In what way?

 3. What is the end result of the devil's attacks? (Rev. 20:10)

 4. How does the picture of the "great white throne scene" in Revelation 20:11-12 compare to Daniel's vision in Daniel 7:9-10?

 5. How many types of books are opened in Revelation 20:12? Describe them.

 6. How does the judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15 support Jesus' description of judgment in Matthew 25:31-46?

 7. Does Jesus indicate that before Judgment Day, there will be a thousand-year kingdom over which He rules, or does He suggest His arrival will lead to immediate judgment? (Matt. 24:42, 25:31-32)

- Is the thousand-year reign mentioned anywhere else in the Bible?

- Who is the only writer to mention these thousand years? (Rev. 20:2, 7)

- Considering what we know about apocalyptic writing, should we take Revelation's "1,000 years" literally, or should we trust in Jesus and his disciples' words and look for what the "1,000 years" might represent?

8. What is "the second death" according to Revelation 20:14?

 9. By what measure are the dead judged? (Rev. 20:12)

10. Are we then to assume we are judged by our works? (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:22-24, 5:15)

11. How are believers saved? (Rev. 20:15)

John 3:16

12. What is meant by the picture of Death and Hades being thrown into the lake of fire? (Rev. 20:14)

How do the following passages shed more light on this picture?

1 Corinthians 15:26

1 Corinthians 15:54

Isaiah 25:8

What does this mean to believers?

13. What is meant by the picture of earth and sky fleeing from the Lord's presence? (Rev. 20:11; 2 Pet. 3:10-12)

14. Express how the study of Revelation 20 has influenced your perception of the Christian's spiritual life.



THE GREAT WHITE THRONE SCENE

REVELATION 20:11-15

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – REVELATION 21:1-27

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Each of us will one day face the ultimate enemy, Death. When we do, may we remember the picture of Satan's doom. God exhorts, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15).



THE END

REVELATION 20:7-11

In the last lesson, we undertook an examination of the "millennium" and its effects on views of the end-time. When John described the angel sealing Satan into the pit, he stated that the devil would someday be released for a short time. One last time the devil will be allowed to roam freely across the earth, leading many astray, and warring against the Lord God.

Ezekiel 38-39 is a prophecy about a ruler called Gog in the land of Magog. It is Gog's unique ability to rally the nations of the world against Israel for a final battle. But, just in time, the Lord God intervenes to save His people from destruction. God's enemies are destroyed, and the nation of Israel is restored. Ezekiel envisions a new temple built in New Jerusalem, and takes great pains to describe the new temple (Ezekiel 40-48).

The expectation of final warfare arising at the end of history became a standard theme in Jewish thought as evidenced by Daniel 11, Zechariah 14, and Isaiah 66:15-23. When John envisions the battle of Revelation 20, the battle of Armageddon that we viewed from various angles in other chapters, he depicts the devil loose in the world.

Once released from the Abyss, the devil begins where he left off, deceiving the nations and creating as much chaos as possible. He reaches out to the four corners of the world, gathering Gog and Magog as allies.

In Ezekiel 38, Gog is the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. He leads a final invasion against Israel. Magog, on the other hand, is a territory only vaguely located in the “uttermost parts of the north.”

John uses Gog and Magog as symbolic figures representing all the nations of the world gathered to war against the Lord. Their number is “like the sand on the seashore.”

In this last spiritual battle between good and evil, the devil surrounds God’s city with his forces. All appears lost. But, in a miraculous act of intervention, the Lord rains down fire against the surrounding armies and utterly destroys them. The fire from heaven is reminiscent of the fire Elijah called down upon the soldiers of King Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1. It also reminds us of the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah.

John views the destruction of the devil’s forces by fire. A worse fate awaits the devil himself. In chapter 19, the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire, but now they are joined by the devil so that they can all be tormented day and night. The same fiery pit will soon engulf Death and Hades, and all whose names are not found in the book of life. This is the end of the unholy trinity. Since the Garden of Eden, they have brought wrack and ruin to the souls of humanity, but at last, once and for all, evil is destroyed.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE SCENE

REVELATION 20:11-15

The next few verses lead us to the scene of final judgment. John views a great white throne and One who sits upon it. Consider how closely the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 resembles this throne! The throne’s massive size underscores the power and authority of the Father. The throne is so awesome, in fact, that earth and sky flee from its presence. This visionary image expresses for readers the annihilation of the universe as a precursor to the creation of a new and perfect heaven and earth. Other Scripture points to a similar method of universal destruction. Isaiah 51:6, for example, foresees the sky vanishing like smoke and the earth wearing out like an old garment. Second Peter 3:10–12 prophesies Judgment Day as one in which the Lord will appear as a thief in the night, and subsequently the heavens and earth will dissolve in thunderous fire.

What happens to the living and the dead? Suddenly they stand before the throne and “the books are opened.” There appear to be two types of books. One records each individual’s deeds, the other lists those who have eternal life secured. This, then, is both the second resurrection and second death. For those whose names are written in the book of life, those who have trusted in the purity of Christ, His death and resurrection, eternal life awaits. For unbelievers, however, judgment is determined by their deeds.

As Romans says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). There is no question that every human being created by God has fallen into sin and deserves eternal death. As a result, those who are judged by their deeds are inevitably and resolutely given the penalty of the second death. By the same token, those whose sins have been forgiven stand forever in the book of life and are blessed to receive the “second” resurrection. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16).

We confess in the Nicene Creed, “He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.” This event is what we behold through John’s vision. All people rise for judgment, those still living on the earth as well as those who have been buried, lost at sea, or even lost in space!

Death and Hades give up their dead. In Revelation 6:8, Death and Hades appeared as the rider of the ashen horse and were given authority to kill a fourth of the earth. In chapter 1:18, Death and Hades represented the underworld to which Jesus has the key. Now, in chapter 20, Death and Hades represent all the evil that is left in the world. Together they are tossed into the lake of fire, along with all of those judged according to their own deeds rather than judged through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Paul occasionally discusses the death of Death. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, he says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Later on he confesses, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Cor. 15:54), echoing Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 25:8. The implications are all the same. Death is and will remain the final enemy to be faced by each individual. May we ever hold fast to our salvation through Jesus. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25:41, “He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire

which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’” But to those on His right, He makes the invitation, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Decades ago, it was fashionable to view society as one that would gradually progress in affluence, equality, and justice until it reached an almost utopian existence. Lyndon Johnson began a War on Poverty and social programs were constructed to lead people from poverty and racial injustice into the sweet freedoms of liberty and prosperity. Now, those years appear hopelessly idealistic.

When the Bible discusses the last days of history, there is no promise of ease and comfort. In fact, Jesus stresses how awful the end times will be. After all, they will involve the last battle of Armageddon. Evil will stick to the world like wallpaper to a wall.

We are not aware when those last, dark days will begin. Perhaps we have already entered them. There are certainly many signs that indicate that possibility: civil war and starvation in Africa, the rise of radical Islam and the proliferation of terror attacks, the gang warfare in our cities, and the erosion of long-held values by our culture.

There is no way to tell whether the final spiritual battle between good and evil is underway. If we could tell, then we could more closely determine the date of the Lord’s Second Coming, but that is a mystery to be kept secret by the Father until history’s end. As Christians, we are expected to be constantly prepared for Jesus’ return.

What Revelation suggests is the high cost of Christianity in this world. There are absolutely no guarantees of a peaceful, carefree existence

Revelation depicts a cosmic warfare between good and evil, but the fallout is felt by each of us as we struggle to follow the Lord's will.



in our time. Instead, the Bible acts to warn believers concerning the price to be paid for loving and trusting the Lord. There will be persecution and there will be martyrdom, as is happening to some Christians even now.

Worst of all, there will be personal spiritual warfare between God's influence and the devil's mischief. How difficult it is to go to church on Sunday when so many other activities claim our attention! How disciplined we must remain in order to steadfastly study our Bibles, and continually pray to the Lord! Revelation depicts a cosmic warfare between good and evil, but the fallout is felt by each of us as we struggle to follow the Lord's will.

We worship the Lord and trust in His ultimate victory. The devil and his legions vainly surround the city of God, believing they are besieging merely a city of peace, while in reality they stand before all the hosts of heaven. And in a burst of power, God destroys His enemies. He will often work in our lives similarly. When evil appears at every turn, we are to wait on the Lord, prepare for His deliverance, and trust His miraculous intervention to lead us safely home.

Each of us will one day face the ultimate enemy, Death. When we do, may we remember the picture of Satan's doom. God exhorts, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 21:1-27

Read prayerfully Revelation chapter 21 and ask the Lord to guide your study of His blessed Word.

1. What has happened to the sea in the new heaven and earth? (Rev. 21:1)

What, do you suppose, is the significance of its absence? (Rev. 13:1)

2. What has happened to the old earth and heaven? (2 Peter 3:10-13)

3. Is the New Jerusalem constructed by man? How does it come to us? (Rev. 21:2)

4. What is the relationship between God and man now that the New Jerusalem has arrived? (Rev. 21:3)

When was this relationship supposed to begin and under what conditions? (Lev. 26:3, 12)

5. What will be absent from New Jerusalem which plagues us constantly here on earth? (Rev. 21:4)

6. Why do you think it is important that the One who gives us the inheritance of New Jerusalem calls Himself the "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End"? (Rev. 21:6-7)

7. Who is excluded from the new creation? (Rev. 21:8, 27)

Aren't we all guilty of these crimes? Why should we retain our confidence of inclusion in the kingdom even though we sin? (Rom. 3:20-26)

8. Consider how many common images of heaven and hell arise from Revelation: saints robed in white playing harps, pearly gates, streets of gold, hell as burning sulfur, etc. How do you think this highly symbolic book has influenced the media's concept of Christianity?

9. Whose names were written on the twelve gates? (Rev. 21:12)

Whose names were written on the twelve foundations? (Rev. 21:14)

What do you think this suggests about what the New Jerusalem represents?

10. List the twelve different jewels found in the foundation of the city and look up in the dictionary what they are. (Rev. 21:19–20)

11. From 1 Peter 2:5 describe how we are to be “living stones.”

12. Why isn't there a temple in the Holy City? (Rev. 21:22)

13. Why do you think the gates are never shut? (Rev. 21:25)

14. How does Isaiah 60:1–3, 19–22 compare to Revelation 21:22–26?

15. Do you find this chapter more exciting or less exciting than the previous five chapters? Why?



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It is important to remember how the city of God comes. It descends from God's heaven. Man does not construct it, nor does he climb over its gates. God freely gives it to man as part of His new creation, opening our way to Paradise purely out of love for His creatures. No amount of human effort can bring this New Jerusalem into being. It is solely the gift of God. Praise God for the promises to be fulfilled!



NEW JERUSALEM

REVELATION 21:1-27

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight, and its people a joy."

Isaiah 65:17-18

With these words, the prophet Isaiah foretold the creation of a new city of God's people. What a relief! Over the last few chapters, we've heard of nothing but "gloom and doom." Like the sunrise on a clear spring morning, Revelation 21 provides us the joyful glimpse of God's new creation for which we have been waiting. Judgment Day has passed. The old heaven and earth have ended, and descending from above is God's new creation, New Jerusalem. It's about time!

THE DESCENT

REVELATION 21:1-8

Because heaven and earth have dissolved before the throne of God, John delights in seeing a new heaven and new earth. His description of God's new creation is not to provide a photographic image of what is to come. As mere mortals, we could never endure such grandeur. Instead,

John's vision stretches beyond the limits of human vocabulary to emphasize the incredible reality of God dwelling among men.

The first interesting part of God's new creation is that it has no sea. How symbolic! Remember how the sea was a source of fear to John's peers, representing everything chaotic, dark, and evil in the world. But now, in God's new heaven and earth, there is no more sea. Evil is banished and the dread it once evoked vanishes as well.

Down from the new heaven descends a new City of God, which John calls the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. The concept of a New Jerusalem emerging at the coming of the Messiah was quite common in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Even Paul, in Galatians 4:26, makes a reference to the Jerusalem from above. Hebrews 11:10 suggests Abraham looked forward to the New Jerusalem.

Because apocalyptic writing is highly symbolic and picturesque, there is no reason to demand a belief in an actual city descending from heaven. The city is described as a bride adorned for her husband. How do you put a wedding dress over a city? The city is a symbol for the Church, the community of God's people, redeemed and made perfect by the blood of our Savior.

It is ironic that a city is used to represent God's redeemed children. The city was a consistent reminder of mankind's evil. What, for example, was the first thing Cain did after he murdered Abel and was exiled? He built a city (Genesis 4:17)! What did the builders of Babel do before they got the bright idea of building a tower into heaven? They built a city (Gen.11:4)! What was wrong with the city of Sodom? There wasn't a righteous man in it (Gen.18:24)!

For the Old Testament people of God, the city was often considered seedy, shadowy, and criminal. It was the creation of fallen man. But, what does the Lord do with that fallen creation? He redeems it and turns it into the bride of Christ! Consider how the Bible begins with the city as the consequence of man's sin, and ends with the city representing God's perfect

redemption. From the beginning of Scripture to its end, stand Law and Gospel.

Upon the arrival of New Jerusalem, a voice from the heavenly throne announces that the period of separation between God and man is over. No longer can sin erect its insurmountable wall between the sinner and his Creator. Evil is destroyed because God dwells with man. If the people of Israel had been able to follow God's Law perfectly, that arrangement would have been common throughout their history.

Leviticus 26:12 promises that if Israel obeys God's Law, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." The Law of God could not be kept. Consequently, Christ's death on the cross was required as satisfaction for our sin. Now that the satisfaction has been accepted, God dwells among man. As a result, perfect joy and happiness await believers. No tears, cries, mourning, pain, or death can ever again afflict them. The old earth and heaven have dissolved, and new, perfect ones have replaced it.

The Lord God Himself announces that the new creation is finished. He is the Alpha and the Omega (first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), the Beginning and the End. Time cannot erode nor dissolve the Lord's redemption because God Himself is eternal. Believers will inherit the new heaven and new earth and drink of the water of life. Jesus Himself promised this life-giving water to the woman at the well (John 4:14). The faith and trust in Jesus that gives spiritual life to believers will bring both spiritual and physical life into eternity.

In contrast to believers, are those who are judged by their deeds. These include the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the immoral, the sorcerers, idolaters, and liars who are all given the second death by being thrown into the lake of fire in which the devil and his two beasts already roast. But, you might think, aren't we all a bit cowardly, unbelieving, vile, hateful, immoral and untruthful at times? Absolutely! By God's grace, believers in the Lord are not judged by their sinful deeds, but rather, by the deed of Jesus sacrificing His innocent life on the cross. That, and only that, delivers us from the second death.

THE DESCRIPTION*REVELATION 21:9-21*

It is one of the seven bowl-carrying angels, now finished with the task of judgment, that engages John in a perusal of New Jerusalem. The angel will show John the bride, and now the wife, of the Lamb. The engagement is over. God's redeemed Church is no longer living in expectation of the wedding. It now lives in the joy of marriage.

John is lifted onto a mountain from which vantage point he may watch the city of New Jerusalem descend. Mountain top experiences are common in the Bible: Moses received God's commandments on a mountain; Ezekiel absorbed his great vision on the peak, and Jesus' Transfiguration unfolded atop a similar geographical landmark.

As the city descends, it reflects the glory of God. It is a brilliant sparkling gem that fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of a glorified Zion or Jerusalem: "Arise, shine, for your light has come..." (Isaiah 60:1-3). The city is surrounded by a great wall with twelve gates secured by twelve angels. The gates have written on them the twelve tribes of Israel, while the twelve foundations carry the names of the twelve apostles. How much clearer can John be in connecting New Jerusalem with the Old and New Testament churches?

The angel goes about the task of measuring the city. Remember, in chapter 11 John was told to measure the temple as a sign of its preservation. In chapter 21, the angel

measures the city in order to reveal its perfect symmetry.

The angel's measurements reveal a city that is a perfect cube. Each dimension is 1400 miles long. Now that's a city! In geographic terms, each wall would be as long as the distance between Los Angeles and Manhattan, Kansas. How are we to understand the significance of this measurement? The length as described in the Greek is 12,000 "stadia" (a stade is one-eighth of a mile). Remember the symbolism of numbers. Twelve is the number of the Old or New Testament Church, 1,000 a number for immensity. Consider as well that 12,000 stadia measured along each edge of the cube would total 144,000 stadia (the same as the number of believers sealed in Revelation 7 – 144,000!). In simplest terms, the measurement of the city is an indication that it includes the complete host of God's redeemed children in the perfection of His holy creation.

The thickness of the wall surrounding the city is measured as well and found to be (surprise!) 144 cubits thick (12 times 12).

The city is described as consisting of pure gold, with walls of jasper, and the foundations of the city of precious jewels, which sparkle with every color of the rainbow. The twelve gates of the city are carved out of immense pearls (whence our traditional "pearly gates") and the streets of the city are pure gold. New York never looked so good!

In the New Jerusalem, however, there is no need for a temple to indicate the Lord's presence because the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. There is no need to represent God's presence because God Himself is present. The symbol has given way to reality.



THE DESIRABLENESS

REVELATION 21:22-27

When John views the heart of the city, he is surprised to find the absence of any temple. How could the city of God exist without a temple? From the formation of God's people, the tabernacle and then the temple were indications of the Lord's presence. The Most Holy Place inside the temple was considered extra special ground because it was there that the Lord promised to "reside." The Most Holy Place, interestingly enough, was built in the shape of a cube.

In the New Jerusalem, however, there is no need for a temple to indicate the Lord's presence because the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. There is no need to represent God's presence because God Himself is present. The symbol has given way to reality.

For the same reason, the city of God needs neither sun nor moon to illuminate its recesses because the glory of God enlightens it. The glory of God is so intense that the nations of the world are guided by its splendor. When Isaiah foresees the glory of Zion (Isaiah 60:1-5), he also understands how God's light will attract the nations of the earth: "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All

assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm." Salvation is not restricted to one particular racial group, but to all the peoples of the world who trust in Jesus as the Savior from sin.

But perhaps the most peaceful aspect of New Jerusalem is its safety. No longer must the gates of the city be closed because there is nothing evil to threaten it! Indeed, there is no night with its accompanying shadows and fears. The glory of the Lord shines undisturbed and into eternity. The wicked and rebellious have been condemned, and only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life have access to the city.

It is important to remember how the city of God comes. It descends from God's heaven. Man does not construct it, nor does he climb over its gates. God freely gives it to man as part of His new creation, opening our way to Paradise purely out of love for His creatures. No amount of human effort can bring this New Jerusalem into being. It is solely the gift of God. Praise God for the promises to be fulfilled!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

REVELATION 22:1-21

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your study of chapter 22 and help you answer the questions.

Revelation 22:1-5

1. What comes flowing out of the throne of God through the middle of the city? (Rev. 22:1)

How does another prophet foresee a new world in which the water of life will be abundantly available? (Zech. 14:7-9)

Who else speaks of this water of life and to whom? (John 4:1-26)

2. What kind of tree accompanies the river? (Rev. 22:2)

When was the first time we were introduced to the tree of life and in what circumstance? (Gen. 2:9)

From what tree did Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit? (Gen. 2:15-17, 3:1-6)

Why was Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden a good thing in one way? (Gen. 3:22)

Can anyone eat from the tree of life while living in this fallen world? (Gen. 3:24)

When will it be available once more? (Rev. 22:2)

Why do you think it is significant that we only hear of this tree of life twice in the Bible, once in Genesis and once in Revelation?

3. What is so important about being able to see the face of God? (Rev. 22:4; 1 Cor. 13:12; Ex. 33:18-20)

Revelation 22:6-21

4. What answer does the angel give to those who may wish to discard Revelation as some sort of hallucination? (Rev. 22:6)

5. Quote how the speaker indicates the imminence of the Lord's return in the following verses:

Revelation 22:6 _____

Revelation 22:7 _____

Revelation 22:10 _____

Revelation 22:12 _____

Revelation 22:20 _____

6. What do you suppose is the reason for John committing the same mistake in Revelation 22:8 as he had already committed in Revelation 19:10?

7. What does the angel Gabriel tell Daniel to do with his vision in Daniel 8:26? Why?

In contrast to Daniel, what is John supposed to do with his prophecy, (Rev. 22:10)? Why?

8. List those who will be excluded from God's Holy City. (Rev. 22:15)

9. What do the Spirit and the bride say in unison? (Rev. 22:17)

How would you relate that invitation to the way in which God's Spirit works through the community of believers to convert sinners?

10. What happens to those who hear the Spirit and the bride's invitation? (Rev. 22:17)

What does that suggest about evangelism?

11. Consider the sage advice of Proverbs 30:5-6. How is that advice reinforced in Revelation 22:18-19?

What do the warnings mean to you?

How can we be sure that we are not "adding" or "taking away" from the Words of the book of Revelation?

12. Do you feel truly ready to say, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"?



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God's Holy City is open to all those who have been made righteous in the blood of the Lamb, and it is their privilege to enjoy the fruit from the tree of life.

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THE EPILOGUE

REVELATION 22:1-21

It has been our distinct pleasure to observe, through the eyes of John, the descent of New Jerusalem from heaven to earth. We have been dazzled by its size and color, its precious jewels, and its honorable position of being God's dwelling place. In chapter 22, the last chapter of Revelation, we are shown the water of life coursing through New Jerusalem and are encouraged to remain faithful to the end so that the inheritance of God's kingdom may be ours. We take a final look into the most mysterious of the Bible's books to receive the promise of a bright and glorious future in the City of God.

THE RIVER OF LIFE

REVELATION 22:1-5

Who doesn't enjoy the picture of a mountain stream, clean and sparkling, as it tumbles down through its rocky terrain? John enjoys the sight of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and bubbling through the middle of New Jerusalem. The water of life reminds us of the substance Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus explains to the woman that He is the giver of this water; in Him is the gift of eternal life.

Zechariah's last chapter foreshadows John's vision of the water of life. Following a great battle between good and evil, he envisions a new day in which darkness will have vanished. On that day, living water will flow

from Jerusalem to the seas, and the Lord will rule as king over the earth (Zechariah 14:3–11). Ezekiel, too, witnesses the water of life springing from God's new temple (Ezekiel 47:1–12). In New Jerusalem, this water of life runs beside the tree of life, affording a new crop of fruit each month. The leaves of the tree of life are therapeutic, indicating the complete absence in God's holy city of disease or physical pain.

It is exciting to view the tree of life in the last chapter of the Bible, because the Bible began with a view of the tree of life! The Garden of Eden contained both the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as well as the tree of life. Adam and Eve fell into sin by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and they were expelled from Eden before they could bring eternal harm to themselves by eating from the tree of life!

The same tree of life found in Genesis appears once more at the end of Revelation. No longer is Eden forbidden to man. The tree of life, with all of its reminders of Eden, stands again in New Jerusalem. The scriptural plot is complete: man lived in perfection, he rebelled against God and created a world of sin, Jesus died and rose again for our redemption, and finally, as the tree of life indicates, redemption is complete. The story has reached its end, the conflict is resolved, and believers live eternally in Paradise.

When Moses, the lawgiver to the people of Israel, pleaded with the Lord to see Him face to face, the Lord promised to pass before Moses in all His goodness, but Moses was prohibited from seeing the face of God. In Exodus, He warned Moses, "No man can see my face and live!" Such was the power of pure holiness on sinful man. But, once the curse of sin is removed, man can look on

God's face with impunity. In New Jerusalem, the redeemed will see God's face, and His name will be written on their foreheads.

Paul reminds us, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). It is as if the faces of those who have beheld the vision of God's glory will reflect the likeness of God Himself. The followers of the beast had his number (666) stamped on their foreheads as a sign of ownership. In the same way, the redeemed have God's name stamped on them as a sign of their allegiance and faithfulness to God.

JESUS IS COMING

REVELATION 22:6-21

The last verses of Revelation compose a kaleidoscope of ideas and speakers, which may appear unconnected and give us little certainty about the identity of the speakers. Perhaps our inability to discern who is speaking should not be too upsetting because, after all, it is ultimately Christ Himself speaking to us. If we were John, gawking before the insurmountable beauty of New Jerusalem and knowing our life was nearing its end, we might also jot down our last thoughts in a rather haphazard fashion!

Apparently, the angel who speaks about the authenticity of the vision is the same one commissioned to present the Revelation to John (Rev. 1:1). He assures the writer that all he has seen is genuine and true, that he may trust the images he has observed. This is no hallucination, even though some modern interpreters would like to dismiss the book as such. The words are from the Lord God Himself. And what He has spoken will soon take place.

There is a certain urgency that saturates the last verses of the Bible. The risen Lord underlines

it when He exclaims, “I am coming soon!” Jesus urges it is important to trust the words of prophecy, to observe them as God’s Word. John, too, urges acceptance of Revelation’s authority. His vision has been no daydream, no flight of imagination, but an authentic picture of God’s Kingdom coming.

Strangely, considering John had attempted this once before and was rebuked, he falls to his knees and worships the angel again! Certainly, we can forgive John’s reversion; he has witnessed something we will not know until the Lord carries us to our heavenly home. Nevertheless, the angel must exhort John not to worship angels or prophets, but to worship God alone.

The angel asks John not to seal up the words of Revelation, but to proclaim them as the end draws near. How different from Daniel 12:4 where the prophet is told to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. There would be considerable time between Daniel’s vision and the coming of the Lord, but now the angel tells John that the end is near. As a matter of fact, the end is so very close that there is no longer time to change the habits of fallen man. “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong... let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Rev. 22:11).

The exalted Christ again warns He is coming soon to judge the earth, and He will reward us according to our deeds. An indication of works-righteousness? Of course not! It is simply another reminder that those who trust in themselves for salvation will be judged by their own (unrighteous) deeds; those who trust in the Lord for salvation will be judged according to the deeds of His righteousness.

God’s Holy City is open to all those who have been made righteous in the blood of the Lamb, and it is their privilege to enjoy the fruit from the tree of life. Those who have no right to the city or the tree of life are those who remain unrepentant and faithless. John describes them as “dogs, those who practice

magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” Of course, without the forgiveness of God, we would all fall under one of these classifications.

Jesus authenticates the authority of the angel who has brought John his incredible vision. Interestingly, Jesus says He has given the testimony for the churches “to you” (in the plural). In other words, it is meant for others besides John. The revelation is for all believers, not just the writer.

Jesus’ authority rests in the fact that He is the Root and Offspring of David. He is the Messiah who fulfills the words of the Old Testament prophets. In Balaam’s fourth oracle, the prophet declared “a star will come out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17). Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy because He is the bright Morning Star.

The next speakers to take their place on Revelation’s stage are the Spirit of God and the Church. The Church is represented as “the bride,” but the meaning is clear. God’s Spirit works through His Church to invite the lost into God’s Kingdom. The Spirit of God works through the means of grace (God’s Word and Sacrament which are administered in the Church) to convert the hearts of man. Those who hear and receive the invitation share the invitation naturally with others. The invitation comes to us now:

- Are you thirsty for the spiritual nutrition that will give meaning and purpose to life?
- Are you thirsty to know your sins are forgiven?
- Do you wish to satisfy your longing for peace with God and the assurance of eternal life?
- Then quench that thirst! Do it freely! Read the Word of God and drink deeply! Believe on the Lord and soak in the redemption given to us without cost.

There is a warning to those who might wish to add or take away from the prophetic message. What a

*It is on a note of great joy that the Book of Revelation ends.
The saints, those made righteous through Christ, are those
for whom the whole course of human history has unfolded.*



severe warning it is! Those who deliberately distort the message of Revelation will suffer the plagues described in the book, be prohibited from partaking of the tree of life, and endure exclusion from New Jerusalem!

The warning is addressed to those who hear the words of Revelation in the congregation; it is not a curse on the copyist. Those who hear the words of warning and ignore them will suffer the punishments already described. And that makes sense. Those who discard the Word of God also discard faith, and without faith, we are lost.

Once again, Christ warns He is coming soon. Make no mistake about it. This is the fifth time in chapter 22 that someone has mentioned Christ's imminent return. How much more could it be stressed? We join in looking forward to His return when at last the struggle will be over, the battle won. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

It is common for an epistle to end with a benediction. This letter, written to the seven churches, is no exception. John prays for the grace of the Lord on all those who have heard and heeded the words of Revelation. God's people are invited to enjoy the free gift of the Lord's forgiveness and salvation.

It is on a note of great joy that the Book of Revelation ends. The saints, those made righteous through Christ, are those for whom the whole course of human history has unfolded. Believers are destined to survive the wreckage of cities and empires, persecutions and tribulations, endless toil and constant temptation. The grace of God is their only strength during their earthly days, but thanks be to God, Revelation displays for us and all believers the guarantee of triumph and the evidence of success!

PERSONAL APPLICATION
REVELATION POSTSCRIPT

Open my heart, dear Lord, and grant me that measure of enlightenment and knowledge which is Your will for me.

The Book of Revelation

1. How has your perception of Jesus changed after seeing Him as not only a slain Lamb, but also an exalted warrior?

2. Would you use Revelation as a tool for outreach and evangelism? Why or why not?

3. How does Revelation portray the way in which evil operates?

 In what ways do you think its presentation of evil is realistic?

4. Write down the way in which you envision heaven. Does it resemble the way in which Revelation describes it?

5. After reading the book of Revelation, does its message scare you or comfort you? Explain your answer.

6. How does it affect you to know that the Christian Church will endure almost intolerable hardships? Does it make you reassess your position in the Church?

7. If real persecution oppressed the Christian churches of the United States, do you think the church would shrink or expand?

8. Have you rid yourself of the habit of calling the book Revelations?

9. How could the study of this book encourage us to remain steadfast in the faith?

10. Has the study of Revelation overwhelmed you? If so, why do you think that is both normal and appropriate?

11. What effect does the final verse of Revelation have on you?

The central focus of our faith is the cross of Christ. The heart of our faith is the belief that, at just the right time, God's Word became man in Jesus Christ. The Son of God lived in our fallen world yet remained perfect.



We have studied together the incomparable pictures of Revelation and begun to appreciate some of its overwhelming signs and symbols. It is my prayer that you have been blessed with more insight into the work and will of God. It will be obvious to you that Revelation is not a primer on Christian doctrine. John wrote as an artist, portraying his message in pictures rather than in historical data.

Revelation is a theological book, supporting doctrine that is more clearly defined in other books of the Bible. It is because John uses pictures rather than clearly defined statements of information that his vision can be applied beyond the limits of a particular time and place. The struggle of evil against good, especially evident in the Roman Empire of John's day, applies to every generation. And in every generation, there need be no doubt that ultimate victory belongs to the Lamb. Evil is a temporary affliction of this fallen world and will be eliminated in God's Holy City.

Perhaps the most exciting picture employed by John depicts the method by which evil is destroyed. We often ask ourselves, "Why does the Lord permit evil? Why doesn't He simply wipe it from the face of the earth?" Jesus Himself addresses the question in the Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24–30). He likens the kingdom of heaven to a farmer who sows good seed in his garden, but whose enemy comes along at night and secretly sows weeds among the good seeds. The farmer refuses to pull the weeds out because by doing so he may inadvertently harm the good plants, extricating them by mistake.



John depicts evil as self-destructive. The Lord allows it to run its course because in time it will destroy itself. For example, the cup that sends the prostitute to her doom is filled with the blood of the martyrs, which she herself shed (Revelation 17:6). The monster that arises from the Abyss is destined to descend right back into the fiery pit (Revelation 17:8). The prostitute is destroyed by the very beast that raised her and allowed her to sit enthroned on its back. God uses evil to bring retribution on itself.

The implications for the Christian are broad. Revelation shows that martyrdom and persecution are the cost of God's patience for allowing as many people as possible to turn to Him. God does not wish to pull out the good with the bad as long as there is a possibility of conversion and new life. Only when all believers have been accounted for will God intervene to annihilate evil. Second Peter 3:9–10 underlines the Lord's will: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." He will patiently allow evil to self-destruct in order to wait for His children to repent.

In the meantime, evil can be both seductive and uncontrollable. When it is loosed in the world, it has an effect that grows far beyond any individual's control. In Revelation, evil metastasized into tyrannical churches and states that used economic force to determine allegiance. Evil may appear attractive, at first. When John first sees the harlot, he marvels at its strength and horrible beauty (Revelation

17:6). Sadly, no one chooses evil because it looks evil. Always, for a time, evil appears good and attractive. That is the nature of the devil's influence. He is the Great Deceiver who misleads God's people by telling lies, promising goodness and delivering destruction.

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of Revelation is its consistent use of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. There is hardly a chapter in the book that does not echo the Old Testament prophets or the writings of the apocrypha. Considering that the same Lord who inspired the prophets also provided John's vision, that should not be surprising!

The question that must arise at the end of our study is this: "What is the value of apocalyptic writing as an expression of the Christian message?" The central focus of our faith is the cross of Christ. The heart of our faith is the belief that, at just the right time, God's Word became man in Jesus Christ. The Son of God lived in our fallen world yet remained perfect. Then, in His perfection, He took the sins of mankind, was crucified on the cross, and on the third day rose again from the dead. His ascension brought to an end His earthly ministry. Christians always look to this historical event for their strength and ministry.

In apocalyptic writings, on the other hand, the emphasis is on events surrounding Judgment Day. Revelation is most interested in showing that no matter how powerful evil may appear, good will win out. Revelation, with its longing for God's new kingdom, abandons this world. Revelation is not really proclaiming a gospel to the world's sinners. It is more interested

Although it isn't the purpose of Revelation to instruct us in Christian doctrine, it does inspire believers with personal hope. No other part of Scripture paints such a clear picture of the hope of heaven's eternal beauty, majesty, and perfection. Scripture gives the promise that believers will live eternally with the Lord.



in proclaiming how nonbelievers will be punished and how evil will be overthrown and destroyed. Apocalyptic literature is not a good method of expressing the central message of Christianity, the Gospel. Certainly, the expectation of Christ's return is an important part of the Christian hope, but it is not the Gospel.

On the other hand, Revelation can be important for inspiring the work of outreach and evangelism. The ghastly images placed before the reader may awaken him to the necessity of spreading the Word of God. There is an elemental motivation to our proclamation, and it is not to keep enough people in the church, nor to make sure the coffers are full each Sunday morning. The fact is that thousands are dying in unbelief every day and sentenced to face the destruction in store for the devil and his angels. If we fail to reach the lost, there only remains eternal condemnation for them. Revelation graphically underlines the mind-boggling fate of the fallen, and encourages us to reach out while there is still time.

Furthermore, although it isn't the purpose of Revelation to instruct us in Christian doctrine, it does inspire believers with personal hope. No other part of Scripture paints such a clear picture of the hope of heaven's eternal beauty, majesty, and perfection. Scripture gives the promise that believers will live eternally with the Lord. To have before us this vivid picture, however symbolic, of our eternal residence is a valuable and inspiring matter.

I pray this study has been enlightening, exciting and disturbing. Perhaps there were times when you were perplexed and even ready to give up. After all, the visions we receive through John's eyes are too great for our imagination, and God's promises are too immense for our finite minds. Revelation should overwhelm us — and I expect it has! However, the grace of the Lord Jesus will be with all the saints, and that is solid comfort!

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).