

53 Lessons on Revelation

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Lesson 1

Introduction

What is Revelation? This would seem to be an odd question to ask about a book of the Bible, but Revelation is like few other books of the Bible. Is it prophecy? Is it history? Is it literal? Is it figurative? Is it art? Just what is Revelation? Here are several modern answers to that question.

Philip Carrington wrote:

In the case of Revelation, we are dealing with an artist greater than Stevenson or Coleridge or Bach. John has a better sense of the right word than Stevenson. He has a greater command of unearthly supernatural loveliness than Coleridge. He has a richer sense of melody and rhythm in composition than Bach. It is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament. Its fullness and richness and harmonic variety place it far above Greek tragedy.

Novelist Will Self in an introduction to a pocket edition of Revelation wrote:

In its vile obscurantism is its baneful effect; the original language may have welded the metaphoric with the signified, the “logos” with the flesh, but in the King James version, the text is a [puppet show] of tedium, a portentous horror film.

Hal Lindsey wrote in 1973:

The information in the book you are about to read is more up to date than tomorrow’s newspaper. I can say this with confidence because the facts and predictions in the next few pages are all taken from the greatest sourcebook of current events in the world.

Williams Barclay, referring to Revelation as “the strange book,” wrote:

When a student of the New Testament embarks upon the study of Revelation, he finds himself projected into a different world. Here is something quite unlike the rest of the New Testament.

And not only is it different, but it is notoriously difficult for a modern mind to understand. As a result it has sometimes been abandoned and has instead become the playground a religious eccentrics. One despairing commentator said that there are as many riddles in the Revelation as there are words. And another that the study of Revelation either finds or leaves a man mad!

Another wrote:

There is a choral, symphonic nature about the book of Revelation that stirs up our feelings as much as it does our ideas. It is a dramatic, forceful, yet surprisingly tender and comforting book. The result is that this remarkable book is both hard to understand fully and impossible to forget.

And another wrote:

Beautiful beyond description is the last book of the Bible. Beautiful in form, in symbolism, in purpose, and in meaning. Where in Scripture do we find a more vivid and picturesque portrayal of the Christ, Faithful and True, going forth unto victory, seated upon a white horse, arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood, followed by the armies of heaven?

And yet another wrote:

The Greek title of this book is *Apokalypsis* (that which is being uncovered), but readers may feel that not much is revealed. The Book of Revelation appears not to accomplish what its title promises, confusing its readers by all the images, figures, and numbers they encounter.

What is Revelation? There are as many answers to that question as there are commentators. We will see how we answer that question at the end of our studies.

What is Revelation about? Either Revelation is almost totally neglected or it is elevated to a prominence shared by no other Biblical book. No other part of the Bible has proved so fascinating to commentators, and no other has suffered so much at their hands.

What is this book all about? If you asked the man on the street, you would most likely hear that Revelation is all about the end of the world. And perhaps that is what we will find as we unravel this book. But perhaps we should heed

the advice of Mark Twain when it comes to popular ideas about Revelation: “When you find yourself on the side of the majority, it’s probably time to change sides.”

Perhaps a good starting point to properly understanding the book of Revelation is to recognize that not every verse that sounds like the end of the world is actually describing the end of the world. Matthew 24 provides a good example.

***Matthew 24:29-30** — The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.*

That really sounds like the end of the world, doesn’t it? But if we keep reading, we find something interesting in verse 34: “Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place.” Verse 34 provides the time frame—the most important feature of any prophecy. Whatever the “coming” was in verses 29-30, it must have happened in the first century! And it did, in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Is Revelation describing that same event? No, but Revelation, like Matthew 24, also provides a time frame.

The point is this: The language in Matthew 24:29-30 is language of judgment, and there are many judgments in the Bible: Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Edom, Tyre, Sidon, Babylon, Assyria, Judah, Israel, Jerusalem, Rome, and the World. The same sort of language used in Matthew 24 to describe a judgment against Jerusalem in AD 70 is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe other judgments.

If anyone ever tells you that such and such language in Revelation can only be talking about the end of the world — you should grab your concordance. The chances are pretty good that you will find that same language used elsewhere in the Bible to describe something other than the end of the world.

So what can we conclude about Revelation from Matthew 24? Only that we should be careful not to automatically assume that language of judgment must apply to the final judgment of the world. It definitely does not in Matthew 24, and I think we will discover that it does not in Revelation.

But, back to our question — what is Revelation all about? One thing we can say for sure is that Revelation is a book about Jesus. Some of the most wonder-

ful titles and images of the Messiah in all of Scripture are found in Revelation, including:

- The faithful witness
- The first born of the dead
- The ruler of kings on earth
- The first and the last
- The living one
- The true one
- The one with the key of death
- The one with the key of David
- The lion of Judah
- The lamb that was slain
- The King of kings and Lord of lords
- The alpha and omega
- The bright morning star

Revelation is a book about Christ. But Revelation is also a book about the kingdom of Christ, the church of Christ. Some of the most beautiful descriptions of the Lord's church found anywhere in the Bible are found in this book.

***Revelation 21:2-3** — And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

Revelation is a book about Jesus, about the church, and about judgment. And how do those three topics come together in this book? In a word — victory! Because of Christ, the church is victorious over its enemies.

***1 Corinthians 15:57** — But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Why should we study Revelation? The easy answer is that we should study Revelation for the same reason we study any other book in the Bible. It is the

Word of God, and we should want to know everything about it. But there are other reasons that apply specifically to this book.

First, few evangelistic tools are more effective than a knowledge of Revelation. Just placing a commentary on your desk at work can create an open door for spreading the gospel. (But, of course, we can't stop there. We need to know how to respond when someone notices the commentary and asks us a question.)

Second, people out in the world are interested in Revelation. Historian Timothy P. Webber tells us that a resurgence of interest in prophetic themes is one of the most significant developments in American religion since World War II. This fact, he says, is evidenced generally in the rising flood of eschatological literature pouring forth from the so-called "Christian" publishers.

One of the most widely distributed religious books of the present era is Hal Lindsey's multi-million copy *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It has been translated into no fewer than thirty-one languages and circulated in more than fifty nations. It was Lindsey's book that caused *Newsweek* magazine to report that in America there is a "boom in doom"!

There is a widespread popular interest in Revelation today. Unfortunately, most of the interest in Revelation is based on a radical misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the book. If we can answer their questions about this difficult book, then they may trust us on other questions. People are interested in Revelation, and their interest provides us a great open door.

A third reason to study Revelation is that it is incredibly interesting. If you enjoy Bible studies that cause you to search for clues all throughout the Bible then you will love Revelation. If you enjoy the study of history, and particularly the history of Rome, then you will love Revelation.

A fourth reason to study Revelation is that the book is incredibly beautiful and dramatic. Some today think we need to add drama to the gospel by presenting dramatic plays in the worship service or by adding dramatic music to cassettes of the scriptures. The Bible is already dramatic enough! It does not need any help from us. How exactly does man increase the drama of a story that involves the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of deity? Simply reading the book of Revelation from the pulpit would provide more drama than any play or musical that man could ever write.

This book contains images that outdo much of what we find in the movies. Blood and horror? In Revelation 14:20 we read of a river of blood two hundred

miles long that comes up to a horse's bridle. Fierce creatures? How about seven headed beasts and dragons? Success of an underdog? How about the church versus the greatest political and military power the world had ever known? Happy ending? How about the victorious church triumphing over Rome?

Does it matter what we believe about Revelation? Can't we all just agree to disagree when it comes to Revelation? Yes, up to a point. We can agree to disagree about whether Rome is the villain or Jerusalem is the villain. We can agree to disagree about when the book was written. But, we can't agree to disagree when it comes to theories about this book that violate other Scriptures; theories that belittle the church; theories that denigrate the plan of God — and there are many such theories about this book.

Premillennialism, for example, involves much more than a thousand year reign of Christ. As we will see, the false premillennialist doctrine has consequences that run counter to the very heart of the gospel.

Many of the false theories about Revelation come more from Hollywood than from the word of God. Revelation has permeated the popular culture. There are many people who can't name the first four books of the New Testament yet who have heard about 666.

Revelation forms the basis for virtually all of the predictions by the end-is-near prophets. Many feel that the Middle East and especially Israel will play a special role in the end of the world.

Here is a list of book titles from the 1980's and 1990's when I first taught this book: *Armageddon*, *Oil and the Middle East*, *Iraq in Prophecy*, *Holy War for the Promised Land*, *Prophecy 2000: Rushing to Armageddon*, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*, *Global Peace and the Rise of the Antichrist*, *The Coming Russian Invasion of America*, *The New Millennium* by Pat Robertson, *Road to Armageddon* by Billy Graham, *88 Reasons why the Rapture is in 1988* and its much anticipated (and unexpected!) sequel, *The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989*, and *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey.

An Amazon search today turns up the following titles: *The Book of Revelation Decoded*, *Revelation Deciphered*, *The Book of Revelation for Dummies*, *The Book of Revelation for Blockheads*, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Book of Revelation*, *Unlocking the Last Days*, *Final Warning: The Trumpet Days of Revelation Are Here*, *Hold Your Horses: The Four Horsemen of Revelation Reexamined*, and *Hillary Rising: The Specter of Absolute Power in the Prophecies of Daniel & Revelation*.

One book that I purchased recently is entitled *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror*, by John Walvoord, someone we will have more to say about later. That book lists a series of twelve catastrophic events that will supposedly take place as the fulfillment of Revelation. Walvoord writes on pages 4-5:

The rapidly increasing tempo of change in modern life has given the entire world a sense of impending crisis. ... How long can world tensions be kept in check? ... As alarming as these events are, they really are not surprising in light of the Bible's end-time prophecies.

Let me read next from the introduction of another similar book:

It is impossible for the most thoughtless to overlook the impressive and almost unprecedented character of the age in which we live. Events, as rapid in their succession as they are startling in their magnitude, ... chase each other like waves on the sea....

And where did that second quote come from? From another modern end-is-near bestseller? No. It came from *The Great Tribulation, or Things Coming on the Earth* by John Cumming, which was published in 1863 in New York at the height of the U.S. Civil War!

The first time I taught this class in 1990, we were at war with Iraq—the site of ancient Babylon. Popular books at that time told us that the locusts were smart bombs, and Saddam Hussein was the Antichrist.

The second time I taught Revelation was in the aftermath of Janet Reno's war on Waco. David Koresh's crazy ideas about the seven seals in Revelation were broadcast by the national media, which seemed to particularly enjoy an opportunity to heap ridicule on the Bible.

The third time I taught the book, we were once again at war in Iraq. And once again, the books and the preachers were shouting that the signs were clear that the end was near.

Now, with my fourth time to teach the book, the famous Doomsday Clock is set at two and half minutes to midnight, and we are told that planetary destruction is nearer than it has ever been. And the false prophets are again telling us that the end is near.

Do we really believe that God's word changes with the headlines? Is that what we want the world to believe? These modern day false prophets of doom are

doing great damage to God's word. It matters what we believe about and what teach about this book.

Do misconceptions about Revelation make any difference? Yes. In fact, misconceptions about the Jews and the end of the world may have effected political decisions. President Ronald Reagan said, "I sometimes believe we're heading very fast for Armageddon." And, in 1983, he told *People* magazine:

Theologians have been studying the ancient prophecies — what would portend the coming of Armageddon — and have said that never, in the time between the prophecies up until now, has there ever been a time in which so many of the prophecies are coming together. There have been times in the past when people thought the end of the world was coming, but never anything like this.

Will a president one day mistakenly see himself as an instrument of God destined to make end time prophecies come true?

Who wrote Revelation? Revelation 1:1 tells us that the author was John, who bare record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things things that he saw. Although the text just says "John," in my opinion, that John could be no other than the Apostle John.

There is significant *external* evidence from early writings that John the Apostle wrote Revelation. Those writings say that, later in his life, John moved from Palestine to Ephesus, and that there he wrote the fourth Gospel and his three New Testament epistles. Those writing also says that during the persecution carried out by Domitian, John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote Revelation. Further, thy say that after Domitian's death, during the reign of Nerva, John returned to Ephesus, where he died during the reign of Trajan after living an unusually long life. (We'll talk more about these writings and the dating of these events later.)

That external evidence agrees with the internal evidence, which suggests that the author was a Palestinian Jew named John, exiled to Patmos, writing to Christians in Asia during a time of severe persecution. That John the Apostle wrote Revelation has been the traditional view of the church for centuries, and I see no reason to doubt it.

What is the time frame of Revelation? The time frame is vital to understanding any prophecy. Absent a time frame, we are left with what I call the *Nostradamus Effect*. That is, we have vague statements with no anchor in time that could

apply to any of dozens of events that have happened throughout history. If I told you a king would arise, and he would be followed by another king who would do this or that, and then by a third king who would be evil, would you be surprised if that happened at some point in the next 2000 years? But what if I told you exactly *when* it would happen? And what if I told you all of that 600 years before the fact? Prophecies without time frames are usually not that impressive. For one reason, how can they ever be proved wrong? They still might happen someday.

Fortunately, Revelation has a **very clear** time frame. John says that the events dealt with in the book would occur shortly after the book was written, and he tells us that at least four times!

Revelation 1:1 — *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass*

Revelation 1:3 — *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is **at hand**.*

Revelation 22:6 — *And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must **shortly** be done.*

Revelation 22:10 — *And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is **at hand**.*

Two different Greek words are used in those four verses — *tachos* (1:1 and 22:6) and *eggus* (1:3 and 22:10). *Tachos* means “a brief space of time” and is found five other times in the New Testament:

Luke 18:7-8 — *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them **speedily**. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

Acts 12:7 — *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying,*

Arise up **quickly**. And his chains fell off from his hands.

Acts 22:18 — And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee **quickly** out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

Acts 25:4 — But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart **shortly** thither.

Romans 16:20 — And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet **shortly**. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Eggus means “near (literally or figuratively, of place or time)” and is found thirty times in the New Testament. The word is translated: *nigh* (thirteen times), *at hand* (six times), *nigh at hand* (four times), *near* (four times), *from* (once), *nigh unto* (once), and *ready* (once). Here are some verses that use *eggus*:

Matthew 26:18 — And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is **at hand**; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

Mark 13:29 — So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is **nigh**, even at the doors.

John 2:13 — And the Jews’ passover was **at hand**, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Romans 10:8 — But what saith it? The word is **nigh** thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.

Ephesians 2:13 — But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made **nigh** by the blood of Christ.

Philippians 4:5 — Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is **at hand**.

The meaning of these Greek words would not be disputed in any other context. In Revelation, however, the passages conflict with men’s interpretation of the

book, and, instead of changing their interpretation, many change the clear meaning of these important time frame verses. Many commentators ignore or try to explain away those clearly stated time frames. We will not do that. If we begin our study of Revelation by ignoring the time frame given in the very first verse, what hope do we have of correctly understanding this book?

Walvoord recognizes the proper meaning but ignores it. Hinds inserts a word in order to have John say that his writings concern events that were to shortly *begin* to come to pass. Others say it means that the events in the book would happen quickly once they eventually started to happen. None of that, however, is what John wrote.

The time frame in Revelation 22:10 is particularly instructive. In that verse, John was told to “seal **not** the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” Daniel received a vision in 550 BC (described in Daniel 8) that was fulfilled 400 years later in 165 BC when the sanctuary was restored after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel was told to shut up the vision because its fulfillment was a long way off. In Revelation 22:10 John is told just the opposite — don’t seal up the vision because the time for its fulfillment is at hand. By what theory do we argue that the “long way off” in Daniel is 400 years, while the “time at hand” in Revelation is 2000 years and counting? Does that make any sense?

But what about 2 Peter 3:8 where we see that to God 1000 years appears as one day? That verse tells us that time does not mean the same thing to God as it means to man. God does not experience time as we do. But in Revelation 1:1-3 God is not talking to himself — God is talking to man. Which time frame do you think he would use? In Daniel 8, God said that 400 years were “many days.” Whose time frame was God using there? As one commentator correctly noted: “Whoever speaks to men, must speak according to the human mode of viewing things, or give notice if he does otherwise.”

Everything about this book, from the beginning to the end, shouts “Soon!” Let’s pay close attention to what this book is telling us over and over about its own time frame.

Why was Revelation written? In studying any book, one should always begin with same question: Why was the book written? What was its initial purpose?

A short answer to this question is that the book of Revelation was written to provide comfort and encouragement to the people of God who were suffering

persecution. The book was written to convince the church that God had not abandoned them. It was written to convince them that the victory was theirs!

Revelation 6:10 — *And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

Revelation 17:14 — *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*

We will have much more to say later about the theme of the book and its initial audience, but one thing we can say now is that we should be very wary of any view that makes our own generation the focus of this book! This book was written to first century Christians suffering persecution, and any interpretation that ignores their suffering is a fatally flawed interpretation.

God was not comforting persecuted first century Christians by telling them about some great battle that would happen 2000 or more years later! Their persecution was a first century problem, and this book gives them a first century answer. Revelation was written to provide hope, comfort, and encouragement to first century Christians who were suffering severe persecution.

What is the context of Revelation? Let me ask a related question — is the book of Revelation one book or two books? I think we would all agree that it is one book — and yet we often treat it as if it were two books. That is a mistake — Revelation is a single unified book, and we must treat it that way if we are to have any hope in understanding it.

In what way do people often treat Revelation as two books? They drive a wedge between the letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 and the vision that begins in Chapter 4.

But how is that issue related to our question — what is the context of Revelation? The answer is that Chapters 2 and 3 are the context of Revelation. Those letters provide detailed descriptions of what was happening in the cities to which the book of Revelation was first delivered. Those letters give us the all-important context of the book.

If our view of the vision in Chapters 4-22 doesn't make any sense when viewed next to the letters in Chapters 2-3, then our view of that vision is wrong.

Let me give you an example. Soon we will consider the identity of the villain in this book. In my view the villain is Rome. Many incorrect views of Revelation are based on the mistaken view that the focus of this book is Jerusalem rather than Rome. Let me ask a question: If the focus in this book is Jerusalem, then why does the book begin with seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor? What did those congregations have to do with Jerusalem? The answer is very little if anything, but they had everything to do with Rome.

Asia was the epicenter of the imperial Roman cult, and the cities in Asia competed for the privilege of erecting a temple. In 29 BC Pergamum was the first to erect a temple, and Smyrna the second in AD 21. Ephesus was the third, and it was especially linked with establishing the Flavian dynasty (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian) in Asia. A twenty foot statue of Titus (some think Domitian) was erected in the temple there. Worship of the emperor in Asia Minor was meant to bind the province of Asia together under the *pax Romana*.

If anyone ever tells you that Revelation is not focused on Rome or the Roman emperors, ask them why the book begins with the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Asia Minor was known for its pro-Roman zeal, especially in terms of the imperial cult.

When we get to Chapters 2 and 3, let's be sure to read those letters with an understanding that those seven letters set the stage for everything else that follows in this book. If that is not the case, then why are they there? Why did God include them? The answer is that those letters are included because they provide the context for what follows. Too many Christians had gotten "cozy with a pagan world," and so Revelation calls them to choose allegiance to Christ or to the emperor.

If there are any today who worry whether Revelation is relevant in our modern world, they need not worry about that — and the opening seven letters are a big reason why. Those seven letters peg Revelation firmly to our world. Their problems are also our problems. Their issues with the Roman state are largely our issues with the modern state. They needed hope and comfort, and so do we. They needed to know that they had the victory, and so do we. They needed to know that the glorified Christ loves and cares for his church — and so do we.

What is the context of Revelation? We find that in the seven letters.

Lesson 2

Last week we looked at the time frame of Revelation and the context of Revelation. In a word, the time frame of the book was “soon.” From the opening verse to the closing verses, the book tells us that it concerns things that were to shortly come to pass.

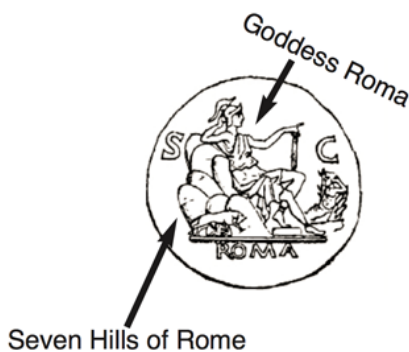
As for the context, we will find that when we get to Chapters 2 and 3 and read the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor. Those letters are our best source for the context of Revelation. We will also have some more to say about the context when we look at the history of Rome in our introduction.

Having looked at the time frame and the context, the next big question is *when* was the book written. But before we get to that question, let’s start with a related question.

Who is the villain in Revelation? Everyone agrees there is an evil earthly villain in this book, but not all agree on the identity of that villain. My view is that the earthly villain in Revelation is first century Rome, and more particularly, the first century emperors of Rome. They had put themselves in the place of God, and they had persecuted and sought to destroy the church in its infancy. Who would win? Revelation answers that question.

Why am I so sure this book is about Rome and not about something else, such as Jerusalem for example? The main reason is the text itself, as we will see as we study it. But that isn’t the only reason.

A coin minted during the reign of Vespasian (the time when, I believe, Revelation was written) depicts the goddess Roma sitting upon the seven hills that surrounded the city of Rome. Chapter 17 depicts the villain in Revelation as a bloodthirsty harlot sitting upon seven hills. If you lived in the first century, if you lived in one of the seven cities of Asia Minor, if you had that Roman coin in your pocket, if you were being persecuted by Rome, and if you read Revelation 17, who would you think John was writing about? How could there be any answer other than first century Rome? Here is how one commentary addresses this point:



Perhaps no point is more obvious in Revelation than this one: Rome is the one city in history that has been distinguished for and universally recognizable by its seven hills. ... Suetonius and Plutarch record for us that in the time of Domitian the festival of Septimontium (“the feast of the seven hilled city”) was held annually in December to celebrate the seven hills enclosing Rome. ... This point is well nigh indisputably certain. Indeed, “there is scarce a poet that speaks of Rome but observes it.”

If our view of this book would not make any sense to its initial recipients, then our view is wrong! This book was intended as a message of comfort to those who first read it. We need to see it through their eyes to properly understand it. There can be no doubt who they would have seen as the villain in this book — the mighty Roman empire, which was persecuting the first century Christians at the very time they received this book.

They were *not* being persecuted by Jerusalem; they were *not* being persecuted by modern day Rome; they were *not* being persecuted by Russia or China. They were being persecuted by first century Rome.

How did Rome begin? Rome’s early history is shrouded in legend. According to Roman tradition, the city was founded by the twins Romulus and Remus in 753 BC. Archaeological evidence supports the view that Rome grew from settlements on the Palatine Hill very possibly from the middle of the eighth century BC. The original settlement developed into the capital of the Roman Kingdom (ruled by a succession of seven kings, according to tradition), and then the Roman Republic (from 510 BC, governed by the Senate), and finally the Roman Empire (from 27 BC, ruled by Emperors).

The prophet Daniel lived around 600 BC, and in Daniel 2 we find the following:

Daniel 2:40,44 — And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. ... And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

That fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 is first century Rome! That was the kingdom, as strong as iron, that ruled the earth when God's eternal kingdom was established in Acts 2. No one looking at those Roman settlements in 600 BC would ever have predicted that they would someday subdue all other worldly kingdoms, and yet Daniel knew 600 years before it happened!

Rome was part of God's plan in ushering in his kingdom. We know that because Daniel tells us, but we also know that from the New Testament and from historical evidence. In Galatians 4, Paul wrote:

Galatians 4:4-5 — But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

It was not by accident or happenstance that Jesus came into this world when he did. God had been planning for his arrival since the foundation of the world, and those plans had become very specific by the time of Daniel in 600 BC.

When Daniel prophesied that a fourth kingdom as strong as iron would rule the world at the time of Christ, and that three kingdoms would precede it, the history of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome was predetermined for the next 600 years. Daniel and Revelation are bookends surrounding those four great earthly kingdoms.

Rome played an important part in God's plans. History shows us the hand of God in the great historical events that occurred between the days of Daniel and the time of Christ.

How else can we explain the rise of Greece under Alexander the Great? How else can we explain the ascendancy of Rome over such great powers as Carthage, and the Hellenistic kingdoms of Macedon, Syracuse, and the Seleucid empire?

Listen to a few sentences from the introduction to the recent book, *Rome and Her Enemies: An Empire Created and Destroyed by War*, by Jane Penrose:

Lying at its heart is a mystery as profound as any in the records of human civilization. How on earth did the Romans do it? How did a single city, one that began as a small community of castle-rustlers, camped out among marshes and hills, end up ruling an empire that stretched from the moors of Scotland to the deserts of Iraq?

The answer to that question is that it happened because God made it happen, just as God had already told Daniel that it would happen.

It is interesting to study the interplay of Greek and Roman culture at the time of Christ. As Horace famously stated, Rome may have conquered Greece, but Greek culture conquered Rome. The combination of Greek culture with Roman might created the perfect cradle for the coming of Christ and the beginning of his kingdom, and it was not by accident!

The Greeks brought reason, rationality, logic, and language. Rome brought peace, roads, trade, law, and communication. Although Roman religion later brought emperor worship and persecution, initially it was open and tolerant. This situation allowed Paul to do what he did and take Christianity beyond Jerusalem into the Greek world.

The Roman peace, the *pax Romana*, was vital in the spread of the gospel. The Greeks' hobby was war. The church would have had a much more difficult time reaching beyond Jerusalem had the Greeks still been in charge.

Another important factor was the Greek language, which had been around since 800 BC and had twice the vocabulary of Latin.

Those who believe that Christianity is anti-intellectual and irrational should note that Christianity began at a time of Greek intellectualism and rationality, and again that was no accident. Greek philosophical thought is admired to this very day. In fact, it has been said that the Greek contribution to western philosophy was western philosophy! It is no accident that the church was established, not in a time or place of superstition, but in a time of rational inquiry and clear thinking.

We are going to spend quite a bit of time discussing the early Roman emperors. Who were they and why should we care?

We should care about them because Daniel, Zechariah, and John wrote about them. In fact, Daniel sketched out the history of the first eleven Roman emperors 600 years before they came to power. John described them while some were already in power. We will need to understand that historical context if we are to understand this book.

As we discussed earlier, our focus will be on the first eleven emperors. Julius Caesar was killed by those who feared that he was leading Rome toward a monarchy. His death in 44 BC marked the end of the Roman republic. His adopted son Octavius became Augustus—the first Roman emperor.

Some argue that the list should begin with Julius Caesar. But history and historians tell us that Augustus was the first emperor. Also, Augustus was the emperor at the time of Christ, which is another reason to start with him. And, as we will see, the internal evidence supports using Augustus as our starting point.

The first five emperors make up the **Julio-Claudian Dynasty**:

- **Augustus** was the first emperor.
- Next came **Tiberius**, the stepson of Augustus.
- Next came **Caligula**, the adopted grandson of Tiberius.
- Next was **Claudius**, the uncle of Caligula.
- And then came **Nero**, the stepson of Claudius.

The next three emperors ruled during the civil wars of AD 68-69. They, along with Vespasian, make up the famous set of four emperors who all ruled in a single year, AD 69.

- **Galba** reigned seven months and then was hacked to pieces in front of the Forum on Otho's orders.
- **Otho** reigned 95 days and then killed himself after Vitellius defeated his army.
- **Vitellius** reigned eight months and then was killed after Vespasian's army entered Rome.

The next three emperors make up the **Flavian Dynasty**:

- **Vespasian** (along with his son Titus) put down the Jewish revolt of AD 67-70 and destroyed the Jewish temple.
- **Titus** was Vespasian's eldest son and reigned for only 26 months.
- **Domitian** was Titus's younger brother and died in AD 96.

These eleven emperors are described in Daniel 7 and in Revelation 17. My view is that the book of Revelation is largely focused on the conflict between the church and the two Roman dynasties of the first century — the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the Flavian dynasty — with the primary focus being the latter Flavian dynasty.

The persecution of the church by Rome was particularly intense during the reigns of Nero and Domitian. In AD 66 a fire destroyed much of Rome. A rumor spread that Nero had set the fire to further his plans to rebuild the city. To dis-

pel the rumors Nero blamed the Christians who, as everyone knew, predicted a fiery end of the world. Tacitus describes the situation as follows:

To scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his circus, mixing with the crowds in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.

This fierce persecution abated for awhile after the death of Nero but began again with renewed intensity when Domitian came to power. Tertullian called Domitian “a limb of the bloody Nero.”

Now we are ready to answer the question we started with today — *when* was the book of Revelation written? How you answer this question goes a long way in determining how you interpret this book. We are going to deal with this question at length when we get to Revelation 17, but since that will be months from now let's briefly look at that question now.

First, what evidence do we have, and how should we sort the evidence?

I am a patent attorney, and patent attorneys spend most of their time arguing about the meaning of the words in a patent. We look at two kinds of evidence: intrinsic evidence (mainly, the patent itself) and extrinsic evidence (such as a dictionary or a technical expert). The intrinsic evidence is by far the more

important of the two. If the patent defines a term, then a dictionary can't override that intrinsic definition — the dictionary might even contradict what the patent says, and it still doesn't matter. The patent's definition is the one that wins.

The same is true with Bible study. The most important evidence we have about the Bible is the Bible itself. If the Bible answers our question, then no amount of extrinsic evidence can override what the Bible itself says on the issue. So, what does the Bible say about the date when John received this vision?

The key verse in dating Revelation is found in Chapter 17.

***Revelation 17:10** — And there are seven kings: five are fallen, **and one is**, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.*

In that verse, John discusses seven kings, and he tells us that five are fallen, **one is (present tense)**, and one will come and continue only a short time. If we can determine the one king who “is,” then we will know when the book was written.

As we just saw, Augustus was the first emperor of Rome. Following Augustus were Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. After Nero, there was a period of civil war in which four emperors came to power in the span of about a year. The first three of those four (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) each reigned for only a short time before they died. The fourth of those four emperors was Vespasian.

So who are the five kings who have fallen? They must be the first five emperors — Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. According to 17:10, those five kings had all died by the time this book was written.

So who is the one king *who is*? We have two choices — either it is Galba, the emperor who followed Nero, or it is Vespasian, the emperor who ruled after the three civil war emperors reigned and died within a single year.

We saw those three kings when we studied Daniel 7, and there we saw them described as being plucked up or uprooted. I think Revelation 17:10 ignores those three uprooted kings, which means that Vespasian is the king who is in Revelation 17:10.

Why would Revelation ignore those three uprooted kings? Two reasons — one historic and one figurative. The historic reason is that they were hardly emperors; they came to power in a period of great turmoil, and they quickly ex-

ited the scene. For all practical purposes, Vespasian was the emperor who followed Nero. But there is also a figurative reason — if Vespasian is the sixth emperor, then Domitian is the eighth. And the number eight depicts a renewal — the eighth day starts a new week, for example. As we already saw, Domitian renewed the persecution that Nero has started.

If Vespasian is the king who is in 17:10, then who is the king who comes next and continues only a short while? That would be Titus, who followed Vespasian and reigned only a few years. When we get to Revelation 17, we will see that it has much to say about the next king — Domitian — and those descriptions will further confirm that we are on the right track in identifying the king “who is” with Vespasian. So, I think that Revelation was written during the reign of Vespasian.

But there is *external* evidence from shortly after the time that tells us John was banished by Domitian, and Domitian’s reign did not begin until AD 81. How can that fit in with our proposed date for the book during the reign of Vespasian?

First, external evidence, unlike internal evidence, can always be wrong. But we don’t have to assume it is wrong here to solve our problem.

In December of AD 69, Vespasian was acclaimed emperor, but for the first half of 70, he was occupied in Alexandria, while his elder son Titus was engaged upon the siege of Jerusalem. His younger son Domitian, the sole representative of the family in Rome, accepted the name of Caesar and imperial residence and was invested with full consular authority, his name being placed at the head of all dispatches and edicts. As Josephus tells us, Domitian was ruler for over six months with the backing of the army until his father showed up. According to one source, Domitian signed so many orders of appointment that Vespasian wrote him to thank him for letting Vespasian himself continue as emperor!

It was perhaps during this time that John was exiled to Patmos. That would have been in early AD 70, near the beginning of Vespasian’s reign.

Vespasian reigned from 69 to 79, which means (if my view of Revelation 17:10 is correct) that the book was written during that window of time. Can we narrow the time down any further? Yes, I think we can.

The condition of the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 suggests quite a bit of time had passed since the time when those congregations had been founded. The churches in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea were likely founded in the early

fifties, but had by the time of this book suffered a serious spiritual decline. Laodicea suffered a terrible earthquake in AD 60, but seems to have recovered to the point of being rich and self-sufficient by the time of this book. Polycarp says that the church in Smyrna was not founded until after Paul's death in the mid sixties. All of that would suggest we should push the writing of this book forward as far as we can, which in this case is to the *end* of Vespasian's reign in AD 79.

But some of the *external* evidence suggests a much later date for the book, some as late as the nineties. How can we explain that? One possible answer is to recognize that there is a difference between the date the book was *written* and the date the book was *circulated*. The book of Revelation could not have been read by others until either John or the book was able to leave Patmos. That could have occurred much later than when the book was written. So the book could have been written in the late seventies but not circulated until the late eighties or even the early nineties.

Some who argue for an earlier date claim that the book was written during the reign of Nero. As we just saw, I think the text of the book itself suggests otherwise. Whether or not we ignore the three uprooted civil war emperors, there is still no way for Nero to be the king "who is" in Revelation 17:10 — unless we start with Julius Caesar as the first emperor, something with which no historian would ever agree.

But there is another reason why Nero could not be the subject of this book — and again we can turn to the seven letters. Those letters point to persecution by Rome *in the provinces*. The persecution by Nero occurred *in Rome*, not in the provinces. And the persecution by Nero resulted less from the emperor's claims of deity and more because he needed some group on which to lay the blame for the great fire in Rome. It was not until later that a failure to honor the emperor as a god became a political offense punishable by death.

I think the best view is that the book of Revelation was written late in the reign of Vespasian, around AD 79, and was circulated among the churches later, perhaps as late as the early nineties. That view fits both the internal evidence and the external evidence.

Now let's continue our look at Rome. Why was Rome such a problem? In most of the other books of the New Testament, Rome is seen in largely neutral terms and sometimes even positive terms. We think, for example, of Paul's use of his own Roman citizenship in the book of Acts. But in Revelation there is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome. Rome is a Babylon, the mother of harlots, drunk

on the blood of the saints. The explanation for this change in attitude from what we see earlier in the book of Acts lies in the wide development of Caesar worship and its accompanying persecution, which together form the background for Revelation and help explain why Revelation was written.

By the time of Revelation, Caesar worship was the one religion that covered the whole Roman empire, and it was because of the Christians' refusal to conform to its demands that they were persecuted and sometimes killed.

By the late first century, emperor worship touched most aspects of Roman political, social, and economic life. Civic events and legal transactions included pledges of allegiance to Caesar as "Lord" and "God." As they entered the theater, sporting events, gladiatorial games, or public festivals, the people had to toss a pinch of incense on a small altar as a sacrifice to the "divine Caesar." Trade guilds held banquets honoring the emperor and his patron gods as silent guests. These practices were seen by the Romans as expressions of patriotism, national unity, and gratitude to the emperor.

And what about those who refused to do those things? The Romans did not view them as *blasphemers*, but rather as *ungrateful traitors*.

Our society usually thinks of religion and politics as separate concepts, or at least it likes to pretend that they are separate. But in the first-century Roman world, no one ever pretended religion and politics were separate. Rome claimed that its existence was ordained by the gods, and Rome thought they won battles only when their gods were happy with them. Those who refused to worship those gods must, logically, be opposed to the empire itself and want the empire to lose those battles, or so the Romans thought. That is what had happened earlier with the Jews in Jerusalem — when they ceased to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of Caesar, Rome saw that refusal as an open declaration of war!

The Christians had been commanded to honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:17), to pray for the emperor (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and to obey the emperor (Titus 3:1-2) — all, of course, up to the point given in Acts 5:29 ("we ought to obey God rather than men"). The Christians were having to walk a fine line — be good citizens of Rome without worshipping the false gods of Rome.

Much of Rome failed to appreciate that distinction, and so the name "Christian" increasingly became synonymous with subversion, and, in the eyes of the general public, Christians came to be classed with criminals. (We see that

beginning to happen in 1 Peter 4:14 — “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.”)

Every Roman household had a set of patron gods. Those in the household worshipped those gods to ensure protection of the household. Can you imagine the situation of a slave in that household who had been converted to Christ and who could no longer worship those false household gods? That Roman family would view that slave as a traitor to the household, as someone who wished harm to come to the family who lived there.

What was the reason behind this cult to Caesar? How did it develop? Rome had a vast heterogeneous empire stretching from one end of the known world to the other. It had in it many tongues, races, and traditions. The problem was how to weld this varied mass into a unity. Rome knew there is no unifying force like that of a common religion. But none of the national religions known to Rome could conceivably have become universal. Caesar worship could. (Constantine later discovered the universal aspect of Christianity as he used it to his own political ends!)

Caesar worship was the one common act and belief that turned the empire into a unity. To refuse to burn the pinch of incense and to say Caesar is Lord was not an act of irreligion, but was an act of political disloyalty. That is why the Romans responded with the utmost severity with the man who would not say Caesar is Lord, and no Christian could give that title to any other than Jesus Christ.

Not every emperor took their supposed divinity seriously, but Domitian did. He was the first emperor to demand directly that he be worshiped as deity. He wanted to be hailed as Jupiter’s son and heir, the earthly representative of the king of the universe.

We might be tempted to think that Rome *hated* the church, but that would likely be an overstatement. Rome was not focused on the church; many Romans likely knew nothing or very little about it. Much of the persecution against the church was an indirect result of the policies that Rome had set up to promote emperor worship and to unify the people. But whether direct or indirect, the persecution was real, and God was going to hold Rome accountable for it.

Caesar worship was not just a problem for Christians; it was also a problem for Jews. The Jews had worked out an agreement with Rome. They had agreed to pray *for* Caesar, but not *to* Caesar. They had agreed to offer sacrifices *for* Cae-

sar, but not to Caesar. Each Jew also paid a special tax to Roman for these exemptions.

Initially, the Christians were seen as a Jewish sect, and thus enjoyed the Jewish exemption. But that slowly changed over time. First, due largely to the efforts of Paul, Christianity became seen as increasingly less Jewish as more and more Gentiles were converted. Second, when the Jews rebelled in AD 66 (leading eventually to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70), Christians became much more reluctant to identify with the Jews for the sake of the exemption. Also, after that revolt, the surviving Jews in the Roman provinces closed ranks and expelled Jewish Christians from their communities and synagogues, often reporting them to the Roman authorities. The seven letters in Chapters 2-3 have much to say about these conflicts with the Jews.

We see an early example of this in Acts 17.

Acts 17:5-8 — But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

By the time of Revelation, that problem had become much worse. How far had the unbelieving Jews fallen by this time? Twice in this book the inspired text will refer to them as the synagogue of Satan!

Much of the persecution was physical, but much was also economic. If there were two silversmiths in the city, and one was a Christian, the other could turn him in and reduce the competition. Or he could be kicked out the silversmiths' guild for failure to offer the pinch of incense to Caesar. Or he could suffer by refusing to make silver images of false gods. (We are reminded of the bakers who have suffered in our own time for refusing to bake cakes for so-called gay weddings. They have lost their livelihood, and they have been fined

heavily by the state. Rome, it seems, hasn't gone anywhere!) It was to encourage Christians in such times that the book of Revelation was written.

Lesson 3

Last week we began looking at the evil earthly villain in the book of Revelation — the first century Roman empire and the first century Roman emperors. We also looked at what the book itself tells us about when it was written, and we saw how Revelation 17:10 places the date of the book during the reign of Vespasian, and likely near the end of his reign in AD 79 based on the condition of the seven churches in Chapters 2 and 3. We also looked at emperor worship and the persecution that the church endured because of its refusal to participate in emperor worship.

The book of Revelation was written to encourage Christians generally in such times of persecution, and, specifically, to encourage the first century Christians being persecuted by Rome. The book of Revelation comes from one of the most heroic ages in church history. It is a call for all Christians to be faithful unto death to win the crown of life.

We also talked last week about how the church's attitude toward Rome changed over time. Early, the Roman peace paved the way for the spread of the gospel, and Paul used his Roman citizenship to his own advantage in spreading the gospel. But that changed as Caesar worship began to take hold, and especially in the provinces where the seven churches of Asia Minor were located.

We see the approaching spread of this persecution in the books of First and Second Peter, likely written in the early sixties, about fifteen years before Revelation was written. First Peter 4:12-17 speaks of a "fiery trial" that was coming and of a "judgment" that was coming to the house of God in which the righteous would "scarcely be saved." Second Peter talks about some who failed in that test — some who were "denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2:1) and some who having "escaped the pollutions of the world" were becoming "again entangled therein" (2 Peter 2:20). By the time of Revelation, the persecution by Nero had come and gone, but a renewed persecution was about to come under Domitian.

We also see evidence of these daily struggles in the letters to the seven churches. Some were struggling with sexual immorality and food offered to idols — both of which were central features of the trade guilds that were a vital part of economic life. The seven churches had problems with false

teachers that were promoting compromise and assimilation with Rome. They were having troubles with the Jews who were reporting them to the Roman authorities. The spiritual commitment of some in those churches was wavering; some had forsaken their first love; some were spiritually dead despite having a great reputation; others were lukewarm and arrogant. The daily struggle with Rome was taking a toll on the church. The people needed a message from God — and that is what this book provided them.

An exchange of letters has survived from the early second century that gives us a glimpse into the lives of the early Christians living in the Roman empire. The letters were exchanged between Pliny Secundus, the Roman governor of Bithynia, and the Roman Emperor Trajan (who was the second emperor after Domitian). Bithynia was located just north of the cities addressed in Chapters 2 and 3, and the letters were written in AD 111 or 112, about thirty years after Revelation was written. These letters show us that if a Christian was brought before a Roman court on charges of disloyalty, the Romans gave that Christian three options to walk free. He could sacrifice wine and incense to images of Caesar and other Roman gods, he could declare that “Caesar is Lord,” or he could repent of his faith and curse Christ. Refusal meant death.

What could the Christians do when faced with this choice?

- They could surrender their faith in Christ to save their life and their job, but that would mean giving up the crown of life promised in Revelation 2:10 — “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
- They could lie about their loyalty to Christ, but Revelation 21:8 tells us that “all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.”
- They could try to change the Roman laws, but Rome was not a democracy and no Roman emperor would ever have accepted a rival “Lord,” and especially when that rival had been executed by Rome as a criminal.
- They could fight the Roman government, but God had commanded them to do the opposite — honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:17). And God had told them that their weapons of warfare were not carnal weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4).
- They could compromise by confessing Caesar as “god” without really meaning it, but that would have been the worst sort of compromise.

“Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33).

- Or they could die, as Jesus had died. That was the only path for the Christian, and it is a path that we all must take one way or another.

Mark 8:34-38 — *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die. History describes someone who made the right choice a few years later in AD 156. Polycarp was an elder in the church at Smyrna, and his execution by fire was described in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, written shortly after the event. Here is Polycarp's exchange with a Roman magistrate:

But when the magistrate pressed him hard and said, “Swear the oath, and I will release thee; revile the Christ,” Polycarp said, “86 years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

That is the only path for the disciple of Christ — we must take up our own cross and follow him daily. And if we are ever tempted to think that struggle is too much for us to handle, this book of Revelation can help us view our own struggles in perspective with the struggles of those who came before us — those who were told to curse Christ or die! Unlike Polycarp, I certainly have “not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:4), and I suspect that is also true of others here today.

Why were the Romans worried about the Christians? Why did Rome see the church as such a problem? The exchange of letters shown on the handout for Lesson 2 (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) gives us two clues.

A first clue is provided by Pliny's statement that the false Roman temples had been almost entirely deserted for a long time due to what he called the infection of this wretched cult (referring to Christianity). That statement by Pliny suggests that the church had been very evangelistic even in the midst of the Roman persecution. Pliny's letter also suggests, sadly, that Rome's persecution had been partially effective in getting some people back into the false Roman temples. But that part of the letter tells us that Rome did not like the competition! And that was one reason why Rome persecuted the church.

A second clue for why Rome targeted the church is provided by Pliny's statement that his edict against them was prompted by Trajan's command forbidding assemblies. The Roman Empire (as with all totalitarian states) was suspicious of unlicensed assemblies, and particularly in the provinces, where the empire contained many nationally minded groups that could easily stage a revolt (such as the Jews had done earlier in AD 66).

Pliny's letter also gives us some insights into the church of the early second century. The believers met regularly, early in the morning, to worship Christ "as a divinity." They insisted on a strict code of ethics: to abstain from fraud, theft, and adultery, never to lie, nor to default on an obligation. At the end of the assembly they ate a common meal, and then they adjourned. Pliny called their teaching "an absurd and extravagant superstition." Paul had earlier described this same attitude.

1 Corinthians 1:18 — For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.

Rome's attitude toward the cross remains a common attitude today among those who are perishing. They are like a drowning man who ridicules the life raft with his dying breath.

Caesar or Christ? The book of Revelation is about the Roman state and about the choice between Caesar and Christ. That question — Caesar or Christ — may be the **central theme** of this book. We will see it all throughout the text from beginning to end, and it is a choice that we are still being called upon daily to make in our own generation. It is a theme that is just as relevant for Christians today as it was in the first century!

Keeping this theme in mind will help us understand the symbols in this book. For example, later we will see two cities — the *great city* and the *holy city*.

*Revelation 14:8 — And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, **that great city**, be-*

cause she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Revelation 21:2 — *And I John saw **the holy city**, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

Which city was the eternal city — the great city of Caesar or the holy city of Christ? Daniel answered that question six hundred years before Revelation was written.

Daniel 2:44 — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

Much of Revelation is devoted to describing and contrasting those two cities, while all the time asking God's people to make a choice. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve!" That age-old question rings out loudly all throughout this book of Revelation.

Yes, the message of Revelation was directed originally to those seven churches, but few books of the Bible are more relevant to our own day and age than is the book of Revelation. We can learn valuable lessons for our own lives by studying this message to the suffering first century church. It was a message of comfort and victory for them, and it is a message of comfort and victory for us as well. There has never been and will never be a time on this earth when the church does not need to hear a message of comfort and victory!

And our victory comes through our faithfulness to God despite whatever persecution we may face. That is why we rejoice when we are tested, and that is how the church triumphs over its enemies — by faithfulness to Christ, the head of the church.

And 2 Timothy 3:12 promises us that persecution will always come to the faithful Christian. Why? Paul tells us in that verse: "Yea, and all that will **live godly** in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Notice that the persecution does not come because of what we believe — persecution comes because of how we live.

The Roman persecution is a good example of that. As one commentator noted, "the ordinary pagan did not care two straws whether his neighbour worshipped twenty gods or twenty-one." The ordinary Roman would have been

fine with Christians had they just fit smoothly into Roman society — had they just gone along to get along — but they did not. Instead, they lived godly lives, and they suffered for it. But that suffering in this life is what ensured their crown of life in the next. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4).

Is Revelation relevant today? This book deals with the persecution of God’s people by the government. Is that subject relevant today? Are Christians facing persecution today? They certainly are outside of the United States. There are still countries today where being a Christian will bring you a death sentence. But what about in this nation — a nation whose motto is “in God we trust”?

Could we face government sponsored persecution here? Not all government opposition to religion is as blatant as the former Soviet Union, which distributed booklets in the 1930’s entitled *Teach Yourself to be Godless*, but our society is becoming increasingly hostile to all things religious.

Those who don’t think that the tide has changed in this country just have not been watching the tides! Candidates for political office once *aligned* themselves with Christian principles to get elected. Now candidates **oppose** those same Christian principles to get elected.

We are in a race to the bottom, and it seems that there may not be a bottom! Who would have predicted even just a few years ago that so-called gay marriage would now be settled law in all fifty states? Remember that it was Bill Clinton himself who signed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, and remember that Obama was *against* gay marriage when he ran for president in 2008. By 2015, that same Obama was lighting the White House up in rainbow colors to *celebrate* that which he had *opposed* in 2008. That’s how quickly things can change.

In Europe, a preacher was recently jailed simply for reading out loud what the Bible has to say about homosexuality. Could that ever happen here?

Today, I am free to post audio and written copies of this lesson on the Internet for all to see. Do you think that will be possible forever? I don’t. I’m not even sure it will be possible ten years from now. How could that change? It could change due to government regulation, but more likely it could change due to *corporate* regulation.

I can guarantee you that Google disagrees with everything I am saying here today — what prevents Google from just deleting such content from their search engine so that no one can find it? They are already doing that with Nazi literature and other such content that we would all agree is evil and abhorrent — but Google thinks that our views on homosexuality are equally evil and abhorrent! Google is already censoring what people in China are able to see.

We tend to see the church and the government in the same way that many in the early church likely saw themselves and Rome. What can we do? The church is so small and the government is so powerful? What can we do?

If we leave this book with only one message, let it be this one: the church is infinitely more important and infinitely more powerful than any earthly government! We make a mistake when we look to the government for our salvation—it has no salvation to give. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Perhaps the primary goal of the book of Revelation is for the reader of the book to see the world and to see the church as God sees the world and as God sees the church. We often say that Revelation uses images and symbols to picture for us things that we cannot see — but I think that view of Revelation has it entirely backwards. I think we will see that Revelation uses images and symbols to picture for us things that we *can* see, but things that we are not seeing as we should. God wants us to see things as he sees them, and Revelation will help us do that.

If the book of Revelation and all of its talk about persecution and death sentences do not seem relevant to us, then we should be *thankful* for that. Perhaps our prayer should be that this book **not** become as relevant to us as it was to the Christians of the first century. But we should also recognize the turn of the tide, and we should be prepared for the coming day when that tide may very quickly and very sharply turn against us.

How should we approach Revelation? Many different approaches to this book have been proposed, and we won't have time to look at all of them, or even most of them, but let's look for a moment at the major approaches to the book.

The Dispensational Approach

The dispensational approach is by far the most common view of Revelation today in the denominational world. Where did it start? That's hard to say, but it was popularized by a man named John Nelson Darby, who died in 1882, and later by the Scofield Bible and its list of seven dispensations. Darby's view of

Revelation rested on two principles: First, he sharply separated Israel from the church, believing that God had a different plan for each. And second, he interpreted Revelation with a rigid literalism. From there, he developed the idea that Christians today are living in what he called the “Great Parenthesis,” the period between the crucifixion and the secret rapture to come.

At this secret rapture, millions of Christians will suddenly vanish. (“Warning: In case of Rapture, this car will be driverless!”) They will meet Jesus in the clouds so that they will not have to face the trials that will come upon the earth during a seven year tribulation. For the first three and a half years, political and military power will shift to a European confederacy led by the “Anti-christ,” who will have miraculously survived a serious head wound and then obtain unprecedented power. He will sign a seven year peace treaty in the Middle East, but half way through he will show his true colors and compel everyone to bear the mark 666 on their hands or forehead. He will also bear this mark on his own body.

At this point, the Antichrist will move from Rome to Jerusalem and will rebuild the temple. In that rebuilt temple, he will blaspheme God, break his own peace treaty, and persecute Israel. Chaos breaks out, and natural calamities follow.

As history draws to a close, a great battle takes place — the great battle of Armageddon, which lasts about a year and kills millions of people. Jesus finally appears, winning the battle and tossing the Antichrist into the lake of fire. Jesus then reigns on the earth for a thousand years, but that is not the end.

After the thousand year reign, Satan is released from the bottomless pit to challenge God one final time. He loses and is also cast into that lake of fire. The dead are then resurrected and judged, and God creates a new heaven and a new earth.

If you are thinking that all sounds less like the Bible and more like a Hollywood movie, you are right! It was called *End of Days*, and it starred Arnold Schwarzenegger!

There are many variations of that view, some of which are even more imaginative. Here was Hal Lindsey’s *original* scenario for the end of the world:

- For three and a half years Satan will rule the world through a Jewish Antichrist in Rome.
- The Jews will be allowed to rebuild the temple.

- Many Jews will be converted and a worldwide evangelism program will be undertaken by 144,000 Jewish preachers.
- After three and a half years the Antichrist will set up his own image in the newly rebuilt Jewish temple.
- World War III will break out.
- Egypt will invade Israel.
- Russia will invade the Middle East and trample both Egypt and Israel.
- The Roman dictator will invade Israel.
- Rome will launch a nuclear attack against Russian forces in Israel.
- Two hundred million Chinese troops will march on Palestine to battle the Roman army.
- The battle of Armageddon will begin and lead to worldwide destruction.
- Jesus will return to reign on earth for a thousand years.

If that all seems very dated, we are not the only ones to have noticed. Hal Lindsey recently had to release a new book with an updated schedule of events.

Who is the terrible Antichrist who will do all of this? If the end is as close as these people suggest, then the Antichrist (as they interpret Revelation, which, by the way, never uses the term “Antichrist”) should already be walking around among us somewhere. Who is he? Here are some of the suggestions that have been made by the dispensational crowd:

- Adolf Hitler
- Pope Pius XII
- John Kennedy
- Pope John XXIII
- Henry Kissinger
- Moshe Dayan
- Pope John Paul II
- Anwar Sadat
- Jimmy Carter
- Ronald Reagan

- Pat Robertson
- King Juan Carlos
- Sun Myung Moon
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- Saddam Hussein

And their reasons for these choices? It varies, but they are all very imaginative. Gorbachev, for example, had a clear mark of the beast on his forehead! Moshe Dayan suffered a head wound in the Six Day War. And President Reagan? His full name was Ronald Wilson Reagan — how many letters are in each of those names? Six, making his name 666!

Here is a Bible study tip — when you find yourself putting down your Bible so that you can count the letters in the middle name of a U.S. President, you have veered badly off course!

As we can see, there are many varieties of dispensationalism, but they all share three things in common: a separation between the church and Israel, premillennialism, and the secret rapture.

Time does not permit us to discuss everything that is wrong with the dispensational approach, but here a few major problems.

First, dispensationalism ignores the **time frame** of the book of Revelation. Twice in the first chapter and twice in the closing chapter the book tells us it describes things that were to happen soon. What happens to their “rigid literalism” when it comes to those verses?

Second, dispensationalism ignores the **context** of the book of Revelation. According to them, while Chapters 2-3 relate to the first century, Chapters 4-22 all relate to events that are still future in time. If so, why did the book include Chapters 2-3 — what purpose did they serve? And what about the persecution described in those chapters? How does that fit into the dispensational view? Dispensationalism causes the book to have little significance to its initial readers.

Third, dispensationalism causes great harm by suggesting that the word of God changes as quickly as the headlines. The political scene that caused Lindsey to reach his conclusions in 1974 is quite different in 2018. When asked about his changing views, one local dispensationalist preacher in Dallas said

he wasn't worried because everything he had said (and later retracted) was Biblical! The Bible gives a simple test for identifying a false prophet:

Deuteronomy 18:22 — *When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.*

Dispensational prophets fail that test every time it is applied!

A fourth reason we should reject dispensationalism is that it includes **premillennialism**, which is a false teaching that is directly counter to the gospel of Christ.

What is premillennialism? The word “millennium” refers to the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:4, which, by the way, uses that time period to describe not a reign **of** Christ but rather a reign **with** Christ.

“Premillennialism” views that thousand year period as a *literal* thousand years and teaches that the return of Christ will occur **prior** to that thousand year period, which explains the “pre” in its name.

“Postmillennialism” also takes the thousand year period literally but teaches (or, more accurately, *taught*) that the return of Christ will occur **after** the millennium (hence the “post” in its name). Under that view, the final coming of Christ would be preceded by a thousand year period of peace. Understandably, postmillennialism did not survive very far into the twentieth century, which by one count saw 123 million deaths in its various wars and genocides, but postmillennialism was popular in the 19th century, even in the church. Alexander Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger*, for example, was *post-millennial*. The years after 1914 gave premillennialism a tremendous boost, and postmillennialism quickly faded from the scene.

“Amillennialism” takes the thousand year period figuratively, which, as we will discuss when we get to Chapter 20, is (I believe) the correct way to view the thousand year reign with Christ.

What does premillennialism teach? There is a temptation to think that premillennialism is just about the end times, and so perhaps we can all just agree to disagree about it — but that is not the case. The false teaching of premillennialism is directly counter to the gospel of Christ.

For example, premillennialists teach that the Levitical priesthood is going to be restored during the millennium. We know that can't possibly happen. Why? Because Jesus' perfect sacrifice put those people out of business permanently (Hebrews 10:12, 18). The coming of reality in Jesus Christ meant that the shadow of the Levitical system was removed forever. (Premillennialists teach that all of the old shadows will return.)

Also, Jesus could not be a priest if the Levitical system were still functioning. Under the Law of Moses (Numbers 18), only Aaron's sons could be priests. The Law of Moses and the Levitical system cannot be separated—one cannot exist without the other (Hebrews 7:12). In addition, the old and new covenants cannot coexist (Romans 7:1-6). The first covenant was taken away so that the second could be established (Hebrews 10:9-10). Jesus cannot be priest on earth under the Levitical system (Hebrews 8:4).

Premillennialists also teach that bloody sacrifices for sin will be restored during the millennium. But what does the Bible say?

Animal sacrifices were never able to cleanse the soul. They simply shadowed the coming sacrifice that would provide true cleansing. Jesus' sacrifice was all sufficient. His perfect once-for-all sacrifice meant that future sacrifices were unnecessary (Hebrews 10:17-18). Those who have remission of sin have no further need of sacrifice. The premillennial view undermines the sufficiency of Christ's sacrificial atonement. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:21 that "if justification were through the Law, then Christ died to no purpose."

Premillennialists also teach that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 is not yet in force and that it will not come into force until the millennium. Walvoord says that the new covenant applies only to Israel and has no relation with this present age. But what does the Bible say?

In Luke 22:20 Jesus says "this cup is the new covenant in my blood." In Hebrews 9:15 we read that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Paul writes that "our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant."

Premillennialists teach that Jesus is not presently ruling over Israel. Walvoord and Lindsey both claim that although Jesus has the right to rule the earth, he is not exercising that authority at this time. For proof they point to the mess that the world is in. But what does the Bible say?

Psalm 29:10 reminds us that God reigned (and *rained!*) at the time of the flood even though the world was in a mess at the time. Paul told the Ephesians in

Ephesians 1:21 that Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” in this age. In Revelation 2:26–27, Jesus claims to have already been given the authority over nations that was prophesied in Psalm 2:8–9. In Revelation 1:5, we see that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Psalm 110 depicts Jesus as sitting at God’s right hand and ruling in the midst of his enemies. This passage is quoted many times in the New Testament as having been already fulfilled. What does Walvoord say? He claims that although Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 110:4 have been fulfilled, the remaining verses in Psalm 110 have not been fulfilled.

We could go on and on, but that should be enough to show two things — first, that premillennialism is false, and two, that premillennialism is dangerous. It belittles the plan of God and the work of Christ, and it creates a difference between Jew and Greek that leads people astray.

That approach, with all of its many variations, is called the dispensational approach, and it is *not* the right approach to the book of Revelation.

Earlier in our introduction we asked the question — does it matter what we believe about Revelation? We know that it does, but that is particularly true when it comes to this dispensational approach. Wild theories about Revelation have consequences, not just in the world to come, but also in this world.

For one recent false prophet, Revelation 9 was the key to everything. He saw in those verses four angels with the faces of men and hair like that of a woman with fire from their mouths and breastplates of fire. Those four angels, he decided, must be the Beatles — with their long hair, their fiery lyrics, and their electric guitars. He saw himself as the angel with the key to the bottomless pit who had been tasked to start the racial war he thought was prophesied in that chapter. Who was that false prophet? Charles Manson.

For another recent false prophet, Revelation 13 and 17 were the key to it all. The beast in those chapters, he said, was the United States, and he would lead his followers in war against that horrible beast. Who was that false prophet? David Koresh.

Peter talks about such people in 2 Peter 2:14 — “having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls.” It is not a coincidence that the book of Revelation is the first place a false teacher turns when he or she wants to beguile unstable souls. It does matter what we believe about this book, and we need to be able to explain it to those who have been deliberately confused about it.

So if dispensationalism is not the way to go, what other choices do we have?

The Historical Approach

The Historical Approach was once so popular that in the denominational world it is sometimes called the standard Protestant interpretation. It remains popular in the church, and is, for example, the approach taken in the *Gospel Advocate* commentary by Hinds.

The historical approach views the book as a forecast in symbols of the history of the church following its establishment in the first century. The Roman Catholic church almost always plays the role of the villain in the historical approach.

There is an immediate surface appeal to that view. Why? Because the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Empire have much in common. Listen as secular historian Will Durant describes the relation between the two, and especially as he describes the transformation of the Roman empire into the Roman Catholic church:

Christianity . . . became a triumphant Church by inheriting the organizing patterns and genius of Rome. . . . As Judea had given Christianity ethics, and Greece had given it theology, so now Rome gave it organization. . . . It was not merely that the Church took over some religious customs and forms common in pre-Christian Rome — the stole and other vestments of pagan priests, the use of incense and holy water in purifications, the burning of candles and an everlasting light before the altar, the worship of the saints, the architecture of the basilica, the law of Rome as a basis for canon law, the title of Pontifex Maximus for the Supreme Pontiff, and, in the fourth century, the Latin language as the noble and enduring vehicle of Catholic ritual. The Roman gift was above all a vast framework of government, which, as secular authority failed, became the structure of ecclesiastical rule. Soon the bishops, rather than the Roman prefects, would be the source of order and the seat of power in the cities; the metropolitans, or archbishops, would support, if not supplant, the provincial governors; and the synod of bishops would succeed the provincial assembly. The Roman Church followed in the footsteps of the Roman state; it conquered the provinces, beautified the capital, and established discipline and

unity from frontier to frontier. Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome.

Of course, when that historian uses the word “church,” he is not referring to the Lord’s church that we read about in the Bible. Instead, he is referring to the monstrosity that grew out of the ashes of Rome and remains with us to this very day.

It’s very interesting to think about the impact that the old Roman empire continues to have to this very day through the Catholic church. Rome was not able to conquer the church through persecution — that is a message of the book of Revelation. But Rome did great damage. How? Not by persecuting the church, but rather by *embracing* the church. It was at that point that the great heresies really took off.

But here is our question — is the historical approach the right approach to understanding the book of Revelation? In my view, no.

First, we should be very careful before we take a first century description that could apply to Rome and lift it out of that context to apply it instead to the Catholic church. Yes, there may be some striking similarities, but the best explanation for those similarities is the one that we just read — the Roman Catholic church modeled itself after the Roman empire, and so we would expect them to have some striking similarities.

Second, a major problem with the historical view is that it operates with the unstated assumption that we are presently living close to the end of the world. Why? Because the historical approach almost always ends its history with our own history. I have never anyone taking the historical view who was operating under the assumption that the history of the church would last 100,000 years — but that is a possibility, and if so, wouldn’t that suggest that our own history should appear around Chapter 5 rather than around Chapter 22?

Lesson 4

Last week we began looking at various approaches to the book of Revelation. We started by looking at the **dispensational** approach, and we discussed why that approach is not the right approach. We then began looking at the **historical** approach, which treats the book of Revelation as a timeline of the history of the church after its establishment in Acts 2. We had just started looking at some problems with that approach when class ended last week.

The first problem we identified with the historical approach is that it implicitly assumes that we are now living near the end of time — which is something the Bible tells us that we have no way of knowing.

If the historical view were true, then wouldn't that mean we could know about when Jesus was coming again? Couldn't we just track the history in Revelation, and see how close we were to the last chapter? But we know that can't be right. The end of the world will come like a thief in the night; there will be no signs! For all we know, there may be a million years of church history yet to come in which case the two thousand years we have seen so far will seem like just a drop in the bucket. Any theory that is based on an assumption that we can know, even implicitly, that we are living in the end times is deeply flawed! It is based on a faulty premise.

Martin Luther fell into this trap. Luther and almost all of the other leaders of the Reformation believed that the Antichrist was the Roman Catholic church. Luther favored the historical approach, but he taught that the book of Revelation was focused on only two time periods — the early church and the church in Luther's own day. For that reason, Luther thought the end of the world was imminent — that the world could not last much beyond the year 1600.

The historical view has a second major problem. It ignores John's clearly stated time frame for the book, that the things described therein were not to be sealed up but rather were to shortly come to pass.

Third, the historical approach makes the book of little significance to its initial readers — those persecuted first century Christians who needed a message of comfort.

And, finally, the historical approach quickly becomes absurd in its attempt to match historical details to the visions in the book. As with Nostradamus, something in Revelation can be found to fit almost any historical event if the context and time frame are ignored. Luther, for example, thought that the advancing Turks of his day were Gog and Magog.

For those reasons, I don't think that the historical view is the right approach to this book.

The Extreme Preterist Approach

The Extreme Preterist (preterist just means past) approach is also called Realized Eschatology, the 70 AD Theory, transmillennialism, or Max Kingism. I generally will not spend too much time on what could be called "crackpot" theories about Revelation, but since this particular crackpot theory was popularized by some in the Lord's church, I think we should spend some time discussing it.

This view seems to have originated with a man named James Stuart Russell, who was a Congregational clergyman in England before his death in 1895. He wrote a book entitled *The Parousia*, from the Greek word for "coming."

Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion of Max Kingism is to look at some things that Max King himself has said about it. A good place to start for that is the debate that occurred between Max King and Jim McGuigan. (Brother McGuigan is a superb scholar and teacher of God's word, and I recommend all of his books.) There were several propositions at issue in that debate. Here is one with which Max King *disagreed*:

Proposition Four: The New Testament teaches there is yet to be a day in which all the dead will be raised to life. And that they with the people yet alive on that day will be judged relative to where they shall spend eternity.

And, yes, Max King *disagreed* with that statement. That alone should be enough evidence for us to know that he had seriously gone off the rails!

Max King claims that although the kingdom came on the day of Pentecost following the ascension of Christ, it did not come with power and glory until AD 70. Max King claims that the event commonly referred to today as the "second coming of Christ" has already happened, and it occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Max King claims that both the Christian and Jewish faiths were in operation from the day of Pentecost until AD 70. When the temple was destroyed, the church (the body) was resurrected—it had been buried under Judaism for forty years.

Max King claims that there is no resurrection of the body and that Christ will **never** return to claim his people. According to Max, all prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70, and there is not a single prophecy that has not been fulfilled. He said: “The destruction of Jerusalem did not leave unfulfilled one single prophecy, promise, or blessing.”

One religious encyclopedia describes his views this way: “AD 30 to 70 represented the millennial reign of Christ, and this Last Days period transformed all things and ushered in the covenantal kingdom.”

It is tempting to disregard this view as just so much nonsense, but we should be careful. First, there are many sincere members of the church who have been led astray by this false doctrine, and I personally know of two congregations that have been divided because of it. Second, although presenting himself as still in the church, Max Kingism denies basic tenets of the Christian faith including the second appearance of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment.

Fortunately, their headway into the church seems to be on a drastic decline, most likely because congregations are now more aware of what they teach and are able to spot it early. Perhaps that is why the Max King movement is looking for new ground to conquer. In one of their recent publications, they say that they have now “opened their ministry to others with a view to trans-denominationalism” (whatever that means!).

So that we can confront Max Kingism when we see it, I want to quickly go over several key reasons why their *approach* to prophecy is wrong.

Max King’s view violates one of the interpretive rules we discussed earlier: Similarity of language does not prove identity of subject. There are many judgments in the Bible (Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Edom, Jerusalem, Rome, and the final judgment), and the same language is often used to describe each. King focuses on the Jerusalem judgment in the New Testament and assumes that all judgment language in the New Testament refers to it. That is a basic flaw with his approach.

We often confuse the judgments ourselves, and King exploits that confusion to get his foot in the door. I will be the first to agree that many passages that

some often take to refer to the end of the world actually refer to the end of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24:1-34, for example.) But that does not mean that *all* such verses refer to the end of Jerusalem.

A second flaw is that Max Kingism is based on the premise that the focus of Revelation is the fall of Jerusalem and that the book was thus written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. That idea is contrary to all of the evidence — both internal and external — and is one of Max Kingism's weakest links. If we can disprove that assertion by Max King (and we can), then Max Kingism collapses.

Those criticisms go to his *approach*. As for why the *consequences* of his approach are wrong, there are many verses that can be used to respond to his false view. For example:

- **Acts 1:11**, for example, tells us that Jesus will return in the same manner as he left — “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”
- **1 Corinthians 11:26** tells us that the communion proclaims the Lord's death until he comes — “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”
- **1 Corinthians 15:25-26** tells us that death will be destroyed when Christ returns — “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”
- **2 Timothy 2:17-18** reminds us that those who deny the resurrection can overthrow people's faith — “And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” Sadly that has happened with many of Max King's followers. If Max King is in any way different from Hymenaeus and Philetus, I don't see it.

God's word is not decided by majority vote, but we should be concerned when we come up with something that no one has ever thought of before. **Novel theories about the Bible are generally wrong theories about the Bible.** Max Kingism is just such a theory. Yes, we have to be careful anytime we are tempted to reject something solely because that is not the way we have always heard it, but when we hear something different from what we have always

heard, that should raise a red flag that causes us to open our Bible and study what it says on the subject.

If you want to know more on this subject, I recommend the written debate between Max King and Jim McGuiggan, which is available in used book stores on Amazon.com. I recommend any book on prophecy written by Jim McGuiggan. My own interest in the subject comes from a videotape course on Revelation by Brother McGuiggan that was shown to me in a Bible class in the late seventies.

So far we have looked at and rejected the dispensational approach, the historical approach, and the extreme preterist approach. What is left?

The Preterist or Contemporary Historical Approach

The Preterist (not extreme!) or Contemporary Historical Approach applies the book primarily (or completely) to the conflict between the church and first century Rome. I won't say too much about this approach now for the simple reason that we are about to spend about a year discussing it.

Some taking this approach apply the book to the conflict between the church and Jerusalem, but that theory is seriously flawed. As we have already discussed, and as we will see in great detail later, the villain in this book is Rome, not Jerusalem. That's not to say that Jerusalem is not discussed anywhere in the book — some see Jerusalem all throughout Chapter 11. We shall see when we get there.

The preterist approach does not violate John's claim that the prophecies in Revelation were to come to pass shortly. This approach makes the book meaningful to its initial readers in that it gives comfort and assurance of victory to those being persecuted. According to this approach the book is *not* primarily eschatological— that is, it is not primarily concerned with the end of the world, but is instead concerned with the end of Rome and the victory of the church over Rome.

I am *not* an extreme preterist, but I am a preterist. I believe this book is primarily about the first century conflict between Rome and the church, and the purpose of this book was to provide comfort and a promise of victory to the first century Christians being persecuted by Rome.

So does Revelation have anything to say about the end of the world? Not nearly as much as most people think, which is the answer we would expect in view of the very first verse: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto

him, to shew unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass.” As for what it does say about the end of the world, let’s answer that question as we make our way through the text.

Can we understand Revelation? Yes! (But it will be challenging!) One problem with studying Revelation is that it is difficult to say what anything means until one has decided in a sense what everything means.

But despite its many challenges, the book is meant to be understood. Chapter 1, verse 3, provides a blessing to those who read and understand the book. Also, the very name of the book indicates that the message is **revealed**.

Some might argue that Revelation falls into the category of items dealt with by Deuteronomy 29:29 (“The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”) But Revelation is not a secret thing! Revelation has been revealed! We were meant to understand it, and we can understand it.

Why is Revelation so difficult? Even with the confidence that we can understand Revelation, we must all agree that Revelation is difficult to understand because it is so very different from anything we find in the New Testament and in almost all of the Old Testament. What makes it so different? The main reason it is different is that it is written in what has become known as **apocalyptic language**.

What is apocalyptic language? Revelation is called *Apokalupsis* in Greek, and it is from that word that we get the word apocalyptic, which means unveiled, uncovered, or revealed. We have already seen such language in our studies of Daniel and Zechariah.

Apocalyptic language is composed of symbols that are often lurid in color, violent in tone, and easily remembered. They strike the imagination and grab hold of the mind. In addition to Revelation, such language can be found in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Isaiah, the minor prophets, and even in the gospels and epistles.

Apocalyptic language is almost always used to denote conflict and victory. It is used when God judges and smites an oppressor and vindicates his people. It is used to describe times of crisis and judgment.

All apocalyptic literature deals with these events: the sin of the present age, the terror of the time between, and the blessings of the time to come. It sees the present world as beyond mending. It looks forward to a new world after

this present one has been shattered by the avenging wrath of God. It is continually attempting to describe the indescribable, to say the unsayable, to paint the unpaintable.

Why does God use apocalyptic language? Some think it was used in Revelation to shield the church from Roman retaliation. But that explanation has never appealed much to me. If we can understand the book two thousand years after it was written, then surely Rome could understand the symbols at the time it was written.

I think the reason it was used is that God wanted to use it! This book is an oil painting from God. Numbers 12:8 reminds us that God does not always speak clearly, but sometimes uses dark language, and perhaps such language is reserved for times of conflict and judgment.

God speaks us to us in different ways in his word. We saw a good example of that in our study of Zechariah and Ezra. Ezra was a straightforward historical account of what happened, while Zechariah — looking at the same events — described them in very different language, while explaining their future significance. Haggai, another prophet also looking at the same events, described them in a very different way than did Zechariah.

Likewise, here. We see the persecution in Acts and the epistles, and we see the persecution in the opening chapters of Revelation. And we also see that persecution in the vision that begins in Chapter 4 of Revelation — and we see it described with very different language.

But shouldn't we always interpret the Bible literally? The usual approach to interpreting the Bible is that we understand a passage literally unless forced to do otherwise. (For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us that if our right hand offends us, we should cut it off. We understand that is not to be understood literally.)

This usual approach is reversed for apocalyptic language—we should understand apocalyptic language figuratively unless we are forced to do otherwise. Why? Because apocalyptic language by its very nature uses vivid and dramatic symbols to describe vivid and dramatic events. How do we know that? We know that because explanations of what the symbols mean are sometimes given in the text itself. We will see that in Revelation, and it occurs in Daniel, also. Also, we know that because in many and perhaps even most cases of apocalyptic language, it is not possible to understand what we read literally.

But shouldn't all prophecies be taken literally? No, and I don't know anyone who does.

- To literalize **Genesis 3:15** is to reduce it to just describing a conflict between snakes and humans.
- To literalize **Zechariah 14:12-13** requires those that just had their flesh, their eyes, and their tongue consumed away by a plague to then lay their hand upon their neighbor and create a great tumult.
- To literalize **Isaiah 11:6-10** is to deny that Paul applied it correctly to the first century in **Romans 15:10-12**.
- To literalize **Ezekiel 16:53-55** would require the resurrection of the inhabitants of Sodom to their former prosperity despite what we read in Jude 7.
- To literalize **Ezekiel 37:22-25** would require that David and not Jesus be Israel's eternal king.

Whatever approach we take, we should apply it consistently. Those who say that they take all of Revelation literally are never consistent in that regard. They **always** take some things figuratively. To Hal Lindsey, the 144,000 Jews in 7:4 are literal yet the locusts in 9:3 are Cobra helicopters and the demonic horsemen are tanks. To John Walvoord, the ten days in 2:10 are figurative yet the thousand years in Chapter 20 are literal. We can avoid many of their errors just by being consistent in our interpretation of the text — but, of course, we must be consistently right!

What about the Greek text? The language of Revelation is unique. The Greek usage and vocabulary in Revelation are so different from that of the other books of the New Testament that it has been necessary for textual scholars to develop a special grammar to deal with the text. The book is written in what some have called *Hebraic Greek*.

J. B. Phillips: Revelation piles word upon word remorselessly, mixes cases and tenses without apparent scruple, and shows at times a complete disregard for normal syntax and grammar. ... And generally speaking, the tumultuous assault of words is not without its effect upon the mind.

There are a number of passages in which the author seems to violate the simplest rules of Greek grammar. "The book seems openly and deliberately to defy the grammarian." Why?

Some suggest that perhaps John wrote down what he saw *during* the visions, and there is some support for that idea in the text itself — several times John is commanded to write what he is then seeing.

But perhaps the best explanation for the unusual grammar is that it was used *intentionally* to make a theological point. For example, in Revelation 1:4, in the KJV, we read: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come.”

Barclay tells us that John bursts the bonds of grammar here to show his reverence for God. Where we have “from *him* who is,” John retains the nominative case and in effect has “from *he* who is.” John’s reverence for God would not allow him to alter the form of his name even when the grammar demanded it!

But perhaps John just made an *unintentional* grammatical mistake there? The evidence suggests otherwise. That same preposition is found thirty-one times in the book of Revelation, and each time it is used correctly, with this one exception.

Further, where we have “from him who was,” John has “from the ‘he was.’” John uses a grammatically impossible construction to avoid using a form of “to become” that might imply that God could change. Those suffering persecution were particularly concerned with the *changelessness* of God, and the inspired text reinforces that theme even with its grammar!

Some have used the Greek usage in Revelation to argue that the same person could not have written this book and the gospel of John. But I would turn that argument around on them — that the same person wrote both books confirms that the unusual language and awkward grammar in Revelation were intentional.

But is there any evidence we can point to to confirm that the same person wrote both books? Yes, there are some remarkable links between the two books. A recent commentary by Warren Gage is entitled *John’s Gospel: A Neglected Key to Revelation*. While I don’t agree with all of the linkages he proposes, they are all interesting. Some that we can see immediately are the many links between the **opening** chapter of John and the **closing** chapters of Revelation.

John 1:1 — In the beginning was the word.

Revelation 22:13 — I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

John 1:3 — All things were **made by him**; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Revelation 21:5 — I **make all things new**.

John 1:14 — And the Word was made flesh, and **dwelt** [lit. tabernacled] among us.

Revelation 21:3 — Behold, the **tabernacle** of God is with men, and he will **dwell** with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

John 1:29 — Behold the **Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Revelation 22:3 — And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the **Lamb** shall be in it.

John 1:32 — I saw the Spirit **descending from heaven** like a dove, and it abode upon him.

Revelation 21:2 — And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down from God out of heaven**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Those are just a few examples, but the book I mentioned includes many others. I certainly don't agree with everything in that commentary, but his central thesis is very interesting — John's gospel account may be helpful in our study of Revelation. They were likely written close to the same time. Almost certainly, John's gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem — why? Because of the four gospel accounts, John's account is the only one that omits Jesus' warnings to flee the city of Jerusalem before it was destroyed. There would have been no need for John to repeat those warnings after the city had already been destroyed.

In short, I think the same inspired apostle John wrote both the gospel of John and the book of Revelation, as well as the epistles of John, and the odd grammar of Revelation certainly does not establish otherwise.

Lesson 5

How can we understand Revelation? We know from the opening verses of the book that we *can* understand Revelation.

Revelation 1:3 — *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

The next question is **how** can we understand Revelation.

We must study the Old Testament. Revelation is steeped in the Old Testament, and we must be also if we are to properly understand it.

Of the sixty-six books in the Bible, perhaps Revelation above all is dependent upon the rest of the Bible for its proper interpretation — and yet many commentators try to explain Revelation without reference to the other sixty-five books of the Bible. We will not make that mistake. The marginal references in your Bible are usually much more enlightening than any commentary.

Revelation has more Old Testament allusions than any other New Testament book, although it would be difficult to point to a single direct quotation. By one count, the 404 verses in Revelation contain some five hundred allusions to the Old Testament. Apart from Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and Haggai, John alludes to every book in the Old Testament. These allusions are essential to understanding the book. Nearly every point made in the book comes in some way through an Old Testament allusion.

One thing to look for in choosing a commentary on Revelation is to check how many times the commentator refers to the Old Testament. (It's not fool-proof, but it is a good indicator.)

We must pay close attention to numbers. We need to pay particular attention to numbers and periods of time. They have special meanings that we must carefully deduce from the evidence. Here is what another has said on this topic:

The study of the numbers used in Scripture is not as dry a field as most people imagine. ... God is indeed a wonderful Numberer. There is no such thing as chance in God's world — no such thing as confusion. Everything is numbered, everything is in its place,

everything comes up in its time and season. Upon nature and upon history there is the stamp of symmetry and proportion.... The Bible informs us that our steps are numbered; that our days are numbered; that the hairs of our head are all numbered; nay, that God numbereth the drops of rain; that the righteous are numbered to life; that the wicked are numbered to the sword; that earthly kingdoms are numbered; and, in short, that there is nothing without number, save only 'His understanding,' of which the Psalmist declares 'there is no number.'

We should always try to read this book through first century eyes, and that is particularly true when it comes to the numbers in this book. Modern man is much more *quantitative* than they were in the first century. It may be difficult for us to see numbers in figurative terms, but it would have been natural for a first century reader to have done so. Graffiti from Pompeii, for example, reads "I love her whose number is 545." We're not sure what that number depicted, but apparently some one did!

Most of the symbols behind the numbers make perfect sense immediately once you see them. For example, three is the number of God, twelve is the number of God's people, ten is the number of completion, seven is the number of perfection, six is the number of imperfection, eight is the number for renewal, four is the number of the earth, two is the number of confirmation or strength, and three and a half is a broken seven. Some require a little detective work, such as 1260, 144000, and 1000. (For example, 1260 days is three and a half years at 360 days per year.)

But why seven? Why twelve? We can't say for sure, but seven and twelve both relate to the numbers three and four (seven being their sum and twelve being their product). We know the significance of three as a figurative number for God, and we can see how four is a figurative number for God's creation (four directions, four seasons, four corners). So perhaps the combining of three with four shows God at work in his creation.

Perhaps the perfect number seven, being the sum of three (the number for God) and four (the number for God's creation, man) is symbolic of what we see in Hebrews 2 — that when Jesus came he was completely God and completely man.

Hebrews 2:9-10 — *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace*

of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

But how do we know all of this? Why shouldn't we just take all of the numbers in this book literally?

Let's think for a moment about Chapter 7, which is a beautiful chapter that describes the blessings of God's people. It was a message that God's people really needed to hear when this book was written and while the Roman persecution was raging. In that chapter, the number twelve occurs twelve times, and the sum of God's people is given as 144,000, which is twelve times twelve times a thousand.

What are we to think of this? Have we ever seen the number twelve used before anywhere in the Bible? Twelve tribes? Twelve apostles? Can we not see how twelve could be used to depict the people of God? Or can we really imagine God turning to the poor persecuted Christian wearing the number 144,001 on his chest and saying "Sorry, but you're a day late and a dollar short! Better luck next time ... if there was going to be a next time!" At some point, our common sense, if nothing else, should tell us that numbers are being used figuratively in this book. And if that is true of the 144,000 in Chapter 7, then wouldn't we also expect it to be true of the one thousand in Revelation 20?

Think about the beautiful description of the church we see in Revelation 21.

Revelation 21:12-17** — And had a wall great and high, and had **twelve** gates, and at the gates **twelve** angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the **twelve** tribes of the children of Israel: On the east **three** gates; on the north **three** gates; on the south **three** gates; and on the west **three** gates. And the wall of the city had **twelve** foundations, and in them the names of the **twelve** apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth **four** square, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, **twelve thousand** furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, **an hundred and forty and

four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

“Oh, but I take every number in the book of Revelation literally!” Really? Is the church literally a giant cube fifteen hundred miles in each direction? Is heaven? Do we really think that is what the book of Revelation was building towards in the previous twenty chapters? Is that the message of hope and comfort God’s people needed to hear? “Don’t worry about Rome! There’s a giant cube in your future!” And, more importantly — do we really think that is how they would have understood this book? Again, we must try to read this book through first century eyes.

There are, however, some dangers with viewing numbers figuratively — there is a temptation to read more into them than they were intended to convey. And there is the danger that some people start looking for secret codes in the Bible, while ignoring what the Bible plainly says. And there is also the danger that if we focus just on numbers and ignore everything else, we can almost literally prove anything!

Here are two quick examples. Did you know there is a numerical “proof” that Hitler was the Antichrist? Let A = 100, B = 101, C = 102, etc. and note that 107 (H) + 108 (I) + 119 (T) + 111 (L) + 104 (E) + 117 (R) = 666! Or did you know there is a numerical “proof” that Shakespeare translated the King James version of the Bible? How old was Shakespeare in 1611 when the King James version was published? 46. The 46th word in Psalm 46 is “shake.” The 46th word from the end of Psalm 46 is “spear.” Coincidence? Certainly. Silly? Yes. More silly than most of the crazy notions people have about 666? No. People need to quit looking for secret messages in the Bible and start obeying the messages that are clear for all to understand.

We must follow the rules. Although I am calling these “rules,” a more accurate term for some of them is likely “guideline.”

Rule 1: We must pay careful attention to context and the time frame.

The surest way to go wrong with Apocalyptic language is to atomize the text by looking at one verse at a time without any regard for the verses that preceded it, the verses that followed, the reason they were written, and the history in which they were written.

The context is vital. And we must do more than just say the context is important — we must actually pay close attention to it!

And that includes historical context. Apocalyptic language always has historical significance, so we must study history in order to properly understand the images.

The time frame is also vital in understanding Revelation. No prophecy in the Bible has a time frame more clear and more often repeated than the time frame in Revelation, and yet no time frame is more often ignored by commentators.

Rule 2: We should use easily understood verses to help us understand verses that are harder to understand.

This rule always applies in Bible study. If we find some doctrinal position (such as a thousand year of reign of Christ on earth) in apocalyptic language, and if that doctrinal position is found nowhere else in the Bible and in fact contradicts very easy to understand statements found elsewhere in the Bible, then we can be certain that that doctrinal position is wrong and we have misunderstood the apocalyptic symbols.

Let's consider an example. The Bible says in Romans 10:12 that "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek." And the Bible says in Acts 10:34 that "God is no respecter of persons." Those verses are not difficult at all to understand. In fact, it would be difficult to misunderstand them. So what then can be said for a view of Revelation that creates a difference between the Jew and the Greek? What can be said for a view of Revelation that causes God to be a respecter of persons? That view must be wrong. Any view of Revelation that suggests God has a different plan in mind for the Jews and that they will be saved or lost under a different gospel *must* be a wrong view! That is an example of Rule 1 in action!

As another example, 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that Satan walks about as a roaring lion "seeking whom he may devour." Ephesians 6:11 tells us that the reason we wear the whole armor of God is so that we can "stand against the wiles of the devil." Ephesians 2:2 describes Satan as "the prince of the power of the air" and "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Revelation will have much to say about Satan, who is the evil power working behinds the scenes in Rome's attack on the church — but, and here is the key point, Revelation does not contradict what we just read about Satan in the rest of the New Testament. We need to interpret what this book says about Satan in light of the many straightforward descriptions of Satan we see elsewhere in the Bible.

Rule 3: We should interpret apocalyptic language figuratively unless we have a compelling reason to do otherwise.

This is the opposite rule from how we understand most things in the Bible. Usually we take a verse literally unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. When might we be so compelled? How about Matthew 5:29? “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.”

Apocalyptic language is figurative language, and so the opposite rule applies — we understand it figuratively unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

As an example, Matthew 24:29, 34 tell us that the stars fell from the sky in the first century. That must be *figurative* for at least two reasons. First, the stars did not literally fall from the sky in the first century. And second, it would be impossible for the stars to ever *literally* fall from the sky.

For such language, our initial view should be that it is figurative unless something in the text compels us to view it otherwise. That exception does not apply very often, but we saw it in Daniel 8:22 where the best view of the number *four* was to have it *literally* apply to the four kingdoms that followed the death of Alexander the Great.

This rule will help us with some of the difficult verses in Revelation. Revelation 11:8, for example, will describe a “great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” What is that great city? I think we will see that it is Rome — but what about that last phrase (“where also our Lord was crucified”) — doesn’t that mean the great city is Jerusalem? No. Here is where we need to remember our interpretive rule. That same great city is also called Sodom and Egypt in the same verse. Is the great city Sodom? Is the great city Egypt? (Egypt is not even a city!) If Sodom is being used as a symbol in Revelation 11:8, and if Egypt is being used as a symbol in Revelation 11:8, then on what basis could we conclude that Jerusalem is not being used as a symbol in Revelation 11:8? Nothing is forcing us to take it literally, and so the best path is to be consistent and treat each of those location as figures for the great city, which I believe we will see is describing Rome.

Rule 4: Similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. (The same image can be used to depict different subjects.)

This is common pitfall. Often in the study of Revelation you hear someone say that such and such symbol in Revelation could only apply to the end of the

world. Really? What if that same symbol is used in the Old Testament to apply to something other than the end of the world (as is very often the case)?

An example of that? In Revelation 21:1, John writes, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” Is that describing the end of the world? I’ll save that question until we get to that verse, but here is a question we can answer now: *must* that language of a new heaven and a new earth be describing the end of the world? The answer to that question is no. Why? Because Isaiah used the same image to describe the establishment of the church.

Isaiah 65:17 — For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

Rule 5: Dissimilarity of speech does not imply distinctness of subjects. (Different images can be used to depict the same subject.)

As an example, many different symbols are used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe the church. We saw many examples of that in our study of Zechariah, and we will see many in this book as well.

Rule 6: We should always carefully study how the same symbols are used elsewhere in the Bible, while keeping Rule 3 and Rule 4 in mind.

If we find the same symbol in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, that symbol may or may not have the same subject. We need to examine it carefully.

If the subject in the Old Testament was something that has already occurred, then it would be very unlikely that the New Testament subject is the same — but the subjects are likely similar, such as Babylon in the Old and Rome in the New.

Rule 7: We should not add symbols to the text.

We saw this issue when we studied Daniel, where we saw a giant image of a man. Daniel described the man’s feet and toes in Daniel 2. Now, almost certainly, the giant image had two feet and ten toes — but the number two and the number ten are never mentioned in Daniel 2. Premillennialists split the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 into two parts — and they rely heavily on the two feet and the ten toes in making that argument. If two and ten were that important to the meaning of the vision, don’t we think they would have been mentioned?

We should not read symbols into the text. Let's stick with the symbols we already have!

Rule 8: We should pay careful attention to any explanations that are given in the text.

In this book we will sometimes see an angel explaining the meaning of certain of the symbols to John. Revelation 17, for example, begins with a vision of “the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.” What does it mean? An angel explains it to John (and to us) in the second half of Revelation 17. We should, of course, listen very carefully to that explanation! If we disagree with the the divinely inspired explanation, then we are wrong!

And what does that say about the view that everything in Revelation should be taken literally? In Revelation 17:9, the angel tell us that “the seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.” How can the seven heads be literal heads and also be literal mountains? Don't we know with certainty that symbols are being used when the angel tells us that the heads depict mountains?

Rule 9: Sometimes a *literal* person, place, or thing is later used as a *figure* for a similar person, place, or thing.

For example, literal Babylon is used in in this book as a figure for Rome. Why? Because both were great enemies of God's people. Egypt, Assyria, and Jerusalem are sometimes used in the same way. Revelation 11:8 uses three such symbols to depict evil bloodthirsty Rome: Egypt, Sodom, and Jerusalem. Why? Egypt denotes bondage, Sodom denotes wickedness, and Jerusalem denotes hostility to Christ and the kingdom of Christ — all of which were true of Rome.

Rule 10: Sometimes a *figurative* number is also a *literal* number.

For example, the seventy years of captivity was a literal seventy years, but seventy denotes perfection and completeness, and so seventy is also used figuratively to show that the period of captivity was the perfect length of time for God to teach his people the lesson he wanted them to learn.

And, of course, this is not just a coincidence. The literal seventy year period was determined by God, and most likely it was chosen by God because he wanted to teach a lesson based, in part, on the symbolic significance of the number.

The number twelve is the number for God's people in this world, being the product of three and four. That number is used figuratively all throughout this

book, but it is also a literal number in the Bible — twelve tribes and twelve apostles. Again, that is not a coincidence — God determined how many tribes and how many apostles there would be.

Can we be certain about anything in Revelation? Is this all just a matter of opinion? Can we be dogmatic about anything in this difficult book?

First, it is possible to make *some* dogmatic assertions about what this books says. The third verse of the book says that those who read and understand this book will be blessed. Clearly, God meant for us to understand this book. Just because we can't be dogmatic about everything in the book of Revelation doesn't mean we can't be dogmatic about anything in the book of Revelation.

Second, we must have an open mind and not be overly influenced by our pre-conceptions about the book—but, as Chesterton once observed, an open mind is only good when it clamps down on something solid. We need to let the text itself tell us what this book is about.

At times, however, we will have to settle for presenting several different interpretations, each of which could be true in view of the rest of the Bible. But our inability at times to state with certainty what something means does not mean that we can't state with certainty what it does *not* mean. In fact, on occasion we may find ourselves proceeding by the process of elimination.

Some of the Old Testament prophecies had dual fulfillments — one that was immediate and one that was fulfilled later by Christ. In our study, we will seek to explain the immediate fulfillment without denying that there may be some secondary meaning. But we know that some Old Testament prophecies had secondary meanings only because the New Testament tells us that they did. Absent that inspired explanation, one should be very cautious in identifying secondary meanings. They very quickly turn into just speculation about the text.

How to Go *Wrong* in Our Study of Revelation

Despite everything we have looked at so far, let's assume that we want to get Revelation completely wrong. Let's assume that we want to come up with an explanation for the book that can't possibly be the correct explanation. What should we do if we want that as a result? Here are ten steps that would guarantee us a *wrong* understanding of this book!

Step 1: Make sure that our interpretation has no particular message for the initial readers of the book who were suffering persecution and praying to God

for deliverance. Ideally, our view of this book should create panic rather than provide comfort.

Step 2: Make sure that our own generation, and not anyone else, is the focus of this book.

Step 3: Make sure that our interpretation includes signs pointing to the end of the world. Yes, that day will come like a thief in the night, but that doesn't mean the thief won't leave a lot of big warning signs the day before!

Step 4: Make sure that we ignore the context of the book. We should study each verse as if it is the only verse in the Bible.

Step 5: Make sure that we ignore the time frame of the book, no matter how clear it is or how many times it is repeated in the book.

Step 6: Make no efforts to be consistent in our interpretation. When we get to a number, we should just flip a coin to determine whether it is figurative or literal.

Step 7: Ignore the symbols in the book. Instead, we should always and without fail just apply a rigid literalism to the text — except when we don't. Just because the text repeatedly uses the number 12, for example, doesn't mean the text is trying to tell us anything. It could just be a coincidence!

Step 8: Ignore the Old Testament.

Step 9: Ignore the rest of the New Testament.

Step 10: Treat the book of Revelation as two books — a first book with letters for the first century church, and a second unrelated book with a vision about nuclear bombs.

If we do all or any of that, we are guaranteed to go wrong! But let's work very hard not to make any of those mistakes!

Lesson 6

Chapter 1

Revelation 1:1-3

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: 2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

We are about to proceed through the text a few verses at a time, and we should recall the truism that dissection is not infrequently the death of beauty. If this book is an oil painting from God (as it is sometimes described) then we need to do more than just analyze each individual brushstroke. We need to keep the entire painting in mind, and we need to frequently step back so we can see the entire painting.

Verse 1 tells us that the revelation in this book is from Christ, that it was received by John, and that it concerned things that must shortly come to pass.

Many “liberal” commentaries reject the notions that this revelation is from Christ and that John received and recorded it, and the “conservative” commentaries rightly castigate them for disbelieving the opening words of the book they purport to explain. **But many of those same “conservative” commen-**

aries then proceed to ignore the equally clear statement in the same opening verse that this revelation concerns things that must shortly come to pass! Why don't we just believe ALL of verse 1?

“The Revelation **of** Jesus Christ” means that the Revelation is given **by** Jesus Christ, not that it is a Revelation **about** Jesus Christ, although it certainly does have much to tell us about Jesus Christ and about his body, the church.

The Greek word for Revelation is *Apokalupsis* where “Apo” means “away from” and “kalupsis” means a “veiling.” Thus, the Revelation is an unveiling. The message of the book is not hidden or veiled, but rather it is unveiled. It may have formerly been a mystery, but no longer. This book unveils the struggles through which the church would pass and unveils its ultimate triumph under Christ.

This same word translated “revelation” is used elsewhere in the Bible but in this book it is used only here. In Galatians 1:11-12, we see that Paul received the gospel by *apokalupsis* from Jesus Christ. In Galatians 2:2, Paul says that he went up to Jerusalem “by revelation” to preach. See also 1 Corinthians 14:6 and Ephesians 1:17.

The story of the Bible is one of revelation, with the ultimate revelation being Jesus' perfect revelation of the Father. In John 14:9, Jesus said, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” In God the Father there is no Christ-unlikeness! If you want to know how God the Father would react to something or someone, look in the gospels to see how Jesus reacted. When you see Jesus, you see the Father. God the Son reveals God the Father perfectly.

It is a wonderful and comforting thought to know that **God reveals**. God wants to us know; He wants us to understand; He is not in the business of hiding things from us. Men, by contrast, try to hide from God as in the Garden, and they try to hide their evil deeds. When Christ comes, he will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness” (1 Corinthians 4:5). In Revelation 6:15, we will find people who say to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” God reveals; Man hides. What a contrast!

The time frame given here is crucial to understanding the book. John was shown things that “must shortly come to pass” in verse 1 and was told that “the time is at hand” in verse 3. In other contexts, the interpretation of those

clear statements would present no difficulty, and yet here for some reason they are almost universally ignored, rejected, or explained away.

Under what theory of interpretation should we take “must shortly come to pass” to mean “must come to pass thousands of years from now”? Under what theory of interpretation should we take “the time is at hand” to mean “the time is not at hand”? These statements could not be more clear — this book concerns things that “must shortly come to pass.” “The time is at hand!” Those premillennialists who pride themselves in interpreting each word of the Bible **literally** should start with these words in the opening verses of the book!

If we can't understand what “must shortly come to pass” means in verse 1, what hope will we have when we get to 16:13? “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.”

Notice the word “must” in verse 1. The things in this book “must” soon take place. God has spoken, and Rome has been judged. Those judgments must now take place. Those who first read this book needed to know that this judgment of Rome would come soon. God tells them it *must* come soon!

One of the many books about Revelation available on Amazon is entitled “Time's Up!” What caught my attention was the book's subtitle: “How the Bible Shows Us the End is at Hand.” What do you suppose the author of the book meant by that phrase, “the end is at hand?” We know what he meant — and it is the same phrase we find in verse 3: “for the time is at hand!” He seemed to know what that phrase means when he wrote his own book — why can't he understand it in verse 3?

In verse 3, a blessing is given to those who read and keep the book. This book is meant to be understood! Otherwise that blessing is just an empty promise!

In fact, there are seven blessings in this book:

- Those who read, hear, and obey are blessed in verse 3.
- Those who die in the Lord are blessed in 14:13.
- Those who are awake and watchful are blessed in 16:15.
- Those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are blessed in 19:9.
- Those who share in the first resurrection are blessed in 20:6.
- Those who keep the words of this book are blessed in 22:7.

- Those who do what God commands are blessed in 22:14.

There are a remarkable number of “hidden sevens” in this book. By one count there are 29 different words that occur precisely seven times in this book. The word “signified” in verse 1 is one such word, and it is also a clear link to the gospel of John, which uses the same word repeatedly to describe the miracles of Christ.

Notice that John refers to “he” who reads and “they” who hear. Typically, a public reader would have read the revelation in front of an assembly, and in doing so, both were blessed.

It is a great privilege to hear God’s word read in our own language. Not everyone enjoys this privilege. The scripture reading is one of the most important parts of our worship service. The secret to spiritual renewal is time with God’s word.

Revelation 1:4-5a

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; 5a And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

The seven churches addressed here and in Chapters 2-3 were not the only churches in Asia. In particular, Colossae (Colossians 1:2), Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13), Troas (2 Corinthians 2:12; Acts 20:5), and Miletus (Acts 20:17) also had congregations. Why then single out these seven?

Some suggest that these seven churches were the centers of seven postal districts. Others feel that John must have had some special relationship with these seven churches. Still others feel that since the number seven is used 54 times in this book in a manner that often depicts perfection or completeness, this may have been John’s way of addressing the book to all churches. I think the latter is most likely.

And as we said in the introduction, if this book is all about Jerusalem (as some people suggest), then why does the book begin with letters to the churches of Asia Minor — the very area where Caesar worship was most popular and the persecution that it caused was most severe? What did these congregations have to do with Jerusalem? Nothing, but they had everything to do with Rome.

The phrase “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come” in verse 4 is similar to other descriptions and titles for God. For example, in Exodus 3:14 God says “I am that I am,” and in John 8:58, Jesus says “Before Abraham was, I am.” In Hebrews 13:8, Jesus is described as being the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The Greek in verse 4 is quite unusual. A literal translation might be “The Being, the Was, the Coming,” or “The Being One and the Was One and the Coming One.” The definite article precedes each of the nouns in the Greek: “the was, the is, the is to come.”

Barclay tells us that John bursts the bonds of grammar to show his reverence for God. Where we have “from him who is,” John retains the nominative case and in effect has “from he who is.” John’s reverence for God will not allow him to alter the form of his name even when the grammar demands it.

Further, where we have “from him who was,” John has “from the ‘he was.’” John uses a grammatically impossible construction to avoid using a form of “to become” that might imply that God could change. Those suffering persecution were particularly concerned with the changelessness of God. He had saved his people in the past—he would save them now.

There is a very unusual form of the Trinity in these verses in that we have the Father, the Son, and the *Seven Spirits* who are before God’s throne. The figure of the seven spirits is used elsewhere in this book.

Revelation 3:1 — *And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath **the seven Spirits of God**, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

Revelation 4:5 — *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are **the seven Spirits of God**.*

Revelation 5:6 — *And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are **the seven Spirits of God** sent forth into all the earth.*

Some suggest that the Spirit is **one** in name but **sevenfold** in virtue, and they point to Isaiah 11, where we read:

Isaiah 11:2 — *And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*

But there are only six virtues listed there! The seventh is the spirit of godliness and is found in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Others suggests that the seven spirits may correspond to the seven churches.

I think the best explanation is to view the number seven figuratively. Seven denotes divine perfection, and so the number seven is used here to describe the Holy Spirit. And for those who say they take all of the numbers in this book literally, they have an immediate problem here in verse 4. Do we see here the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost — or do we see seven Holy Ghosts? I think we are seeing the one Holy Ghost described figuratively using the number seven.

One last point on this — note what Revelation 5:6 (which we read a moment ago) said: the Lamb has “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” We saw a similar image when we studied Zechariah 3:9. There we noted that eyes depict knowledge, so the seven eyes depict the perfect knowledge of God — he knows everything that can be known.

This passage contains several descriptions of Christ. Jesus is called a witness because he has first hand knowledge of God. He is the perfect witness.

John 18:37 — *Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*

Jesus is the first-born of the dead. This description points to the resurrection of Christ. Paul used the phrase “first-born of the dead” in Colossians 1:18 and the phrase “firstfruits of them that sleep” in 1 Corinthians 15:20.

The term “first-born” also points to preeminence. Jesus is the one with power and honor, the one in first place. In Psalm 89:27, God said of David that “I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” David was not the first-born son of his father Jesse but he was certainly the preeminent son of Jesse.

Colossians 1:15,18 — Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: ... And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Jesus is the prince or ruler of kings. This may refer again to Psalm 89:27, this time as a reference to the Messiah rather than just to David. Nero and Domitian thought they were all powerful and answerable to no one, and yet Jesus was their king. That Jesus is the King of kings means that Jesus is the King over everyone and everything. We do not make Jesus king when we obey him — we obey Jesus because he is already king!

Hal Lindsey claims that Jesus is **not** ruling now. **But what does the Bible say?** In 1 Peter 3:22, we see that all powers have been made subject to him. In Ephesians 1:22, we read that all things are in subjection under him. In Revelation 2:27, we see that Jesus has power over nations. Finally, in Matthew 28:18, we see that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus is king!

Revelation 1:5b-6

5b Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This is a wonderful description of what Jesus has done for man. What did he do? He loved us. He washed us from our sins. He made us a kingdom of priests.

The phrase “*washed us from our sins in his own blood*” in the King James Version should probably read “*set us free from our sins at the price of his blood*” (although both are true). The best Greek manuscripts have ‘*lusanti*’ (freed) and not ‘*lousanti*’ (washed). As Israel was freed from Egyptian bondage to become a new kingdom, so we have been freed from the bondage of sin and death to become a new kingdom.

Note the verb tenses used here. He loves (present tense) us and set (past tense) us free. We were set free by the death of Christ, and that death was a singular past event, but it is a continuous present day expression of God’s love.

Further, Jesus made us “kings and priests” (KJV) or, likely a better translation, a kingdom of priests to God. In Exodus 19:6, God said, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” Under the old law only the priests had access to God. Through Jesus Christ everyone can now enjoy this access. Under the Old Law, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and he could do so only once a year, and even then he had a cord tied around his foot so that he could be dragged out in case he died. Now we all may **boldly** approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19–22).

In Exodus 25:8, God said, “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” In many ways the entire Bible is a variation on that theme of God’s desire to dwell with his people. That blessing was (past tense) fulfilled perfectly in Jesus Christ. We all have access to God through Jesus. We are all priests.

The church of Christ is a kingdom of priests. Isaiah told us about it long ago.

Isaiah 61:6 — *But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God.*

And Peter described the church in very similar terms.

1 Peter 2:9 — *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

Part of our challenge in this book will be to look at things through other’s eyes. To understand the book we need to look at it through the eyes of its first century readers, but we also need to try to see things through God’s eyes. We need to see the church as God sees the church, and this book (perhaps more than any other) will help us do that — the beautiful bride of his son, the eternal kingdom, the royal priesthood.

Revelation 1:7

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Verse 7 is John's motto: Jesus is coming to set things right! No matter how hopeless the situation may seem at the moment, Jesus is coming, and he will set things right. That's not a bad motto for us as well!

But *when* is Jesus coming? Or rather, to which coming of Christ does this verse refer? Does verse 7 refer to the final coming of Christ at the end of the world, what we often call the **second** coming of Christ?

Some would read verse 7 and say that it must be describing the final coming of Christ at the end of the world. But there are two immediate problems with that view: first, that view violates the time frame that was given to us twice just a few verses ago, and second, that view is logically flawed. Let's look first at the second of those problems.

Why do I say that it is logically incorrect to argue that the language of verse 7 can only apply to the end of the world? Because the same language is used elsewhere to describe a past event. What that means is that logically we can't look at language used elsewhere to describe a past event and say that it can only be describing a future event here. Where is it used to describe a past event?

Matthew 24:30 — And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

That verse cannot possibly refer to the end of the world because of what Jesus said just a few verses later:

Matthew 24:34 — Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

Matthew 24:30 is describing Christ coming in judgment against Jerusalem, a first century event. Likewise, I think the similar language here in verse 7 is describing Christ coming in judgment against first century Rome.

That view solves both of the problems we mentioned earlier. It avoids the logical fallacy of arguing that the language used here can only apply to the end of the world, and it is in perfect accord with the time frame in verses 1 and 3.

There is a third reason why verse 7 is better viewed as a first century event — it is an allusion back to Zechariah 12:10, which (as we studied earlier) is confirmed by John 19:33-37 to be describing a first century event. This judgment of Rome is a different event, but the two are certainly connected: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). Those wicked hands were *Roman* hands. (John’s gospel account is the only one that points to that prophecy from Zechariah. That is yet another link between the gospel of John and the book of Revelation.)

But, and this is an issue we will see later as well, verse 7 is a hard verse to give up! It has certainly been quoted a lot in sermons about the end of time! But have verses 1 and 3 been quoted when verse 7 is quoted? No. Instead, verse 7 has often been lifted right out of its context here in Chapter 1. And the same can be said about Matthew 24:30. Both have an express time frame, and neither time frame points to the end of the world.

But if verse 7 doesn’t apply to the end of the world, does that mean Jesus won’t come with the clouds? That not every eye will see him? That no one will wail because of him? No, no, and no. It just means we can’t use verse 7 to establish those things. Each can be established with other verses that do refer to the end of the world, but we shouldn’t use verse 7 or Matthew 24:30 for that purpose.

We may find ourselves violating our time frame in this book, but let’s not do it the first thing out of the chute! If we throw the time frame of verses 1 and 3 out the window for verse 7, then to what can we possibly say that time frame applies?

A better interpretation of verse 7 in view of the time frame is that this verse applies to the figurative coming of Christ to judge Rome just as the similar language in Matthew 24 referred to the figurative coming of Christ to judge Jerusalem. Yes, Jesus will one day literally come again, but I don’t think this verse is describing that second literal coming of Christ. We need to look elsewhere to see what will happen on that last great day.

And, by the way, Matthew 24 is not the only place where language like this is used to describe a past event.

Isaiah 19:1 — *Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.*

God came in judgment against Egypt. God came in judgment against Jerusalem. God came in judgment against Rome. God will come in judgment against the entire world. Those are separate events, but similar language is used to describe each of them. Remember our rule — similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. (The same image can be used to depict different subjects.)

Notice that verse 7 tells us that not everyone would welcome this coming of Christ in judgment against Rome. The tribes of the earth would wail on account of him. In this book, we will find that the wicked are described as those who dwell on earth. To God's people, Christ's coming is a promise of hope, but to the enemies of Christ his coming is a threat. That is something that is true about every coming of Christ, including the one still yet to occur.

Lesson 7

Revelation 1:8

8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and so the phrase “alpha and omega” denotes completeness. It is similar to our phrase “A to Z.” Nothing is left out. The same phrase is used again in verse 11 and also at the end of the book in 22:13. What does it mean that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega? It means that Jesus is all sufficient.

*2 Corinthians 1:19-20 — For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. **For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.***

The premillennialists believe that all of the Old Testament shadows, including the Old Law, will be revived someday. How can that view be squared with this verse? If Jesus is Alpha and Omega, that is if Jesus is all sufficient, what need could we ever have for the old shadows? The answer is none. They will never return. They served their purpose, and now that purpose has come.

This was also a message the first century Christians needed to hear. They already had everything they needed to be victorious over Rome and to overcome the Roman persecution — they had Jesus, Alpha and Omega!

In verse 8, Jesus also describes himself as the beginning and the end. That, of course, does not mean that Jesus had a beginning or will have an end. Jesus is God, which means he is without beginning or end. What it means is that Jesus is in control — he was there at the beginning; he will be there at the end; he will be there at all times between the beginning and the end.

Again, this was a message the early church needed to hear, and it is a message we need to hear as well. Jesus knows what is happening to his people, and he will always be with his people. As Paul tells us, “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). We do not worship a distant God.

These descriptions are of God the Son, but we see similar descriptions elsewhere of God the Father.

Isaiah 44:6 — Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

Also, in verse 4 the phrase “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come” was used to describe God the Father. Here in verse 8 that same phrase is used to describe God the Son.

Verse 8 also says that Jesus is the Almighty — that is, the one who has dominion over all things. Again, this is a common Old Testament title for God the Father, but here it describes God the Son.

The word “almighty” occurs ten times in the New Testament — once in Second Corinthians 6:18 where the Old Testament is quoted and nine times in Revelation. Even though no earthly empire had been able to withstand Rome, John is assuring the church (which one commentator described as “the panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ”) that Jesus — not any Roman — is the Almighty, and that they will be victorious.

Is this book relevant today? Absolutely! We all need to be reminded that Jesus is the true Almighty! Not the nations of this world, not the political leaders, not the armies, not the terrorists, not science, not medicine — but Jesus! If we place our trust in anyone else or anything else, then we are fools. There is but one eternal kingdom and but one eternal king! All other kingdoms will pass away.

Revelation 1:9-11

9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the

testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

The Greek word "tribulation" in verse 9 describes a pressing together (as of grapes) or a squeezing or a pinching. The people of God are told to expect tribulation. In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Hailey: "Tribulation had been the lot of the church from its beginning, but it was now breaking upon the saints with an increasing intensity."

Roman officials could at their own discretion have a criminal executed, enslaved, or banished. The most common places of Roman banishment were the rocky Aegean islands off the coast of Asia, which included Patmos. As we have discussed, John may have been banished there by Domitian himself while his father Vespasian and brother Titus were away from Rome.

Patmos is a rocky and uninviting island located about seventy miles southwest of Ephesus. The island is about ten miles long and six miles across as its widest point. The sea almost pinches it off in one place, forming a harbor. John was surrounded by the sea, and it is interesting that the word "sea" is used 22 times in Revelation.

Banishment to Patmos for John may have involved hard labor at the quarries. Sir William Ramsay says that John's banishment would have been "preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, and work under the lash of the military overseer."

Notice in verse 9 that John did not refer to himself as an apostle or as a close friend of Jesus, but rather as a *brother* of those being persecuted and as one who shares in their tribulation. As Barclay says, John did not preach endurance from his easy chair. No one will ever listen to anyone who preaches heroic courage to others while he himself has sought a prudent safety, and John was nothing like that. Verse 9 tells us that John had been banished “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John had stood up for Jesus, and now he was suffering because of it.

The phrase “in the spirit” in verse 10 means under the influence of the Spirit. This book, as with all Scripture, is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. Each word is God breathed. That phrase “in the spirit” may also mean that John was in an attitude of worship — ready to worship God in spirit and in truth.

The reference to Sunday, the day of the week on which Jesus rose from the dead, as “the Lord’s day” in verse 10 is the first such reference now existing and occurs only here in the New Testament. We know from Acts 20:7 that Christians gathered together for worship on the first day of the week, and almost all commentators agree that the phrase refers to Sunday in verse 10. Why does the text call Sunday the Lord’s day?

One reason is certainly a good reminder for us — the first day of the week is the Lord’s day — it is not a day for us to do with as we please. It is not our day; it belongs to the Lord.

But there is another reason more particular to the initial readers of the book — Jesus was about to have his day with the Romans! Rome thought that it was in charge and that every day was Rome’s day — but Rome was wrong. The same Almighty Christ who rose from the dead was about to have his day — and his way — when it came to Rome! The great power of Rome was about to come up against an infinitely greater power — one that would sweep Rome away.

A sounding trumpet often accompanies the voice or the appearance of God. A trumpet sounded in Exodus 19:16 when the Law was given, and 1 Corinthians 15:52 tells us that a trumpet will sound on the last great day when Jesus returns to claim his own and judge the world. Here what is heard is not a trumpet itself but rather a voice that sounds “as of a trumpet” — meaning it was loud and impossible to miss! The voice is the voice of Christ — a voice that John knew very well — and verse 11 tells us what Jesus said.

Once again, Jesus calls himself Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Jesus has now said that twice within four verses. Again, that is a message of comfort and assurance that the persecuted flock needed to hear.

Next, John is told by Jesus to write down what he is seeing and to send it to seven specific congregations of the church in Asia. We don't know how John got the letter off of Patmos or how long it took him to do so — it is possible that the book was not circulated until quite some time after it was written, which, if true, would explain some of the extrinsic evidence about the book.

What about the order of the churches in verse 11? Many elaborate theories have been put forth to explain it. The simplest theory seems the most likely. The churches listed in verse 11 are arranged in the order that a traveler on foot would take if he started at Ephesus, the closest church to Patmos. There is about 30 to 45 miles between each of the listed congregations. (When we get to the **last** of the seven letters we will see another possible reason why that letter, in particular, was saved for last.)

Before we leave these verses, we should pause and notice something very important about verse 9 — something that the premillennialists should also pause to notice. Verse 9 says that John was a companion with them *in the kingdom*. **If the kingdom did not already exist at the time of this writing, then this claim by John makes no sense!** And yet how many commentaries on Revelation argue that the kingdom has not yet come even to this very day?

The eternal kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2, and John was a part of that eternal kingdom in Revelation 1, as were the other Christians who were suffering tribulation.

Revelation 1:12-16

12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. 14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;

and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

John turns to see who is speaking to him, and he first sees seven golden candlesticks or lampstands.

The golden lampstand (or menorah) is a familiar Old Testament image. Exodus 25:31-37 tells us that such a lamp was in the tabernacle. Such a lamp is also mentioned in the vision of Zechariah 4, which we studied in an earlier series of lessons:

***Zechariah 4:2** — And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof.*

There we saw that the lampstand denoted the church — the promised eternal kingdom of Christ that was established about 500 years after Zechariah's prophecy. The lampstand here also denotes the church — specifically, verse 20 will tell us that the seven lamps are the seven churches that are about to receive this book from John.

A lampstand is a beautiful image for the church. We are “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). “In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” we “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). We are lamps, but Christ supplies the light. His wonderful light shines in this world through his church — unless we put our light under a bushel. Instead, we are told to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). We always need to make sure our lamp is burning bright!

Verses 13-16 show us a wonderful image of Jesus, our Lord and Savior and King, one of the most beautiful in the Bible. The first thing to notice is that Jesus in

verse 13 is “in the midst” of the seven candlesticks — that is, Jesus is in the midst of the seven churches suffering persecution. Jesus loves his people; Jesus cares for his people; Jesus stands with his people. This is a beautiful opening to this book of comfort for the people of God. Jesus is not watching from afar; he is standing in their midst.

The title “Son of Man” in verse 13 is a Messianic title from Daniel 7:13, which we previously studied. That title also appears over 93 times in the book of Ezekiel. That title is frequently used in the New Testament as a title for Christ, and seems to have been Jesus’ favorite way of referring to himself as the Messiah — it appears 84 times in the four gospel accounts.

The long robe and the golden girdle in verse 13 denote the clothing worn by the High Priest when he was officiating on behalf of the people. Hebrews 4:14 tells us that Jesus is our perfect High Priest. And we saw the perfect priesthood in the prophecies of Zechariah that we studied. The Jewish temple had been destroyed, but God’s people have a perfect High Priest officiating on their behalf.

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus’ head and hair were white like wool and white as snow. This description also comes from Daniel 7, but there it is not used to describe the Son of Man (God the Son) but rather is used in Daniel 7 to describe the Ancient of Days (God the Father).

Daniel 7:9 — I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

The inspired text is using Old Testament descriptions of God the Father to describe the risen Christ, something we have already seen in this chapter. The symbol of whiteness depicts the purity and sinlessness of Christ. In this book, we will frequently see Christ described as the Lamb of God. Here we see the lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

The whiteness is also a reminder that Jesus is a purifier of his people, and we will soon see that some of these seven congregations lacked purity.

Isaiah 1:18 — Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Some of these seven churches were about to receive a very tough message. They needed to know that although they had fallen short of the mark, they could still repent and be cleansed.

In verse 14, Jesus has eyes as a flame of fire — Jesus sees all and knows all. He sees and knows everything about his own people, and he sees and knows everything about the enemies of his people. No one can hide from Jesus.

Hebrews 4:13 — Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Perfect eyes are required for perfect judgment, and Christ's eyes are perfect. He sees everything.

The voice of Christ is described in verse 15 as the sound of many waters. God is described the same way in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 43:2 — And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

Remember that as John was seeing this and writing this he could likely hear the roar of the Aegean Sea. This voice in verse 15 was much louder.

Verse 15 tells us that Christ had feet like unto fine brass or bronze. What does that mean? To see what the feet of brass depict, we should do what we will often be doing to understand the symbols in this book — we should see how the same symbol was used in the Old Testament.

In Micah, feet of bronze were used to depict the power to trample.

Micah 4:13 — Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

In Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7, feet of bronze were used to denote the speed and the strength of those sent by God to do his will on the earth. The message is clear — don't get in their way! The message to Rome is the same — prepare to be trampled!

Verse 16 shows a sharp two-edged sword coming from the mouth of Christ. That figure is a common symbol for judgment. In Isaiah 11:4, God smites the earth with the rod of his mouth.

Hebrews 4:12 — For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And John 12:48 tells us that we are judged by the words of Christ.

Verse 16 describes the countenance of Christ as the sun shining in his strength. That description reminds us of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Matthew 17:1-2 — And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

John had seen something like this before! There, as here, we see the glory and the divinity and the power of Christ.

Verse 16 tells us that Jesus held seven stars in his right hand. That symbol is explained in verse 20, which we will consider next.

Revelation 1:17-20

17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. 19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

How did John react to his vision of the risen Christ? Verse 17 tells us: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.”

The Bible has many similar accounts from those who come face to face with the power and glory of God.

***Ezekiel 1:28** — This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.*

***Ezekiel 3:23** — Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face.*

***Ezekiel 43:3** — And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.*

***Luke 5:8** — When Simon Peter saw it [the miracle of Jesus' filling their nets with fish], he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

***John 18:5-6** — They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.*

***Isaiah 6:5** — Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

Do you think it's possible that we have lost some of that awe when it comes to Christ? Is it possible that Jesus has become *too* familiar to us? Remember who it is who is penning these verses. If anyone could have claimed a special familiarity with Jesus, it was John, his cousin and the apostle whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). And yet look at the relationship we see here between John and Christ.

Is Jesus our friend? Absolutely. We will never have a better friend than Jesus. Is Jesus the eternal Almighty God who created and upholds the entire universe and who is the very image of the invisible God whose face appears as the sun shining with full strength? Absolutely! And let's remember that the next time we are tempted to plaster Jesus' name on a t-shirt or a bumper sticker. And let's remember that the next time we hear someone take his name in vain.

The command "fear not" in verse 17 is generally the first thing heard after God appears to his own people! Recall, for example:

*Genesis 26:24 — And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: **fear not**, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.*

And Jesus does more than that here — he lays his right hand on John. John knew and loved Jesus, and Jesus knew and loved John. Jesus does not want John to be afraid — but Jesus is most definitely **not** saying that to Rome. Rome should be terrified!

One of the most beautiful pictures in the entire book is here in verse 17. John has fainted dead away at the sight of Christ, and how does Jesus respond? He kneels down, places his right hand on John, and tells him not to fear. That was also a message to the seven churches, and it is also a message to all Christians. Jesus is on our side, and he is **not** a distant monarch. **Jesus upholds the entire universe, and yet he notices sparrows.** A wonderful savior is Jesus our Lord!

In the next few verses, Jesus describes himself.

In verse 17, Jesus tells us that he is the first and the last. This is similar to the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, which we have already seen in verse 8, and once again, what we see here are Old Testament descriptions of God being applied to the risen Christ.

Isaiah 44:6 — *Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

Isaiah 48:12 — *Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.*

Jesus will have the last word when it comes to Rome! In fact, Jesus will have the last word when it comes to everyone!

In verse 18, Jesus tell us that he is the living one — “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” Again, many Old Testament descriptions of God come to mind.

Joshua 3:10 — *And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.*

Psalms 42:2 — *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

Hosea 1:10 — *and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.*

Jeremiah 10:10 — *But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.*

But wrapped in these Old Testament descriptions of God, we have something new in verse 18 — Jesus tells us that he was dead. We see here not only the living God, but we see the living God who “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

This is a reminder to any of the persecuted Christians who might have wondered whether Jesus still loved the church. Jesus died for the church, which is his body! Revelation 5:9 will remind them of the same thing: “thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” “We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

Lesson 8

In verse 18, Jesus tells us that he possesses the keys of hell and death — or better translated, hades and death. What does that mean?

Having a key to something means the same thing here that it still means today — having a key to something means that you control that thing. I have a key to one of the cars in the parking lot — what that means is that I control that car. I can make it open; I can make it start; I can make it go; I can make it stop. It does what I want it to do. To have a key to a thing means to have authority over that thing. We see such a description of the Messiah in Isaiah.

Isaiah 22:2 — And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

It is in that same way that Jesus possesses the keys of hades and death. Jesus conquered death — Jesus controls it.

Acts 2:24,27 — Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. ... Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Hebrews 2:14-15 — Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Rome thought that it controlled death, but bloodthirsty Rome and its bloodthirsty emperors would soon learn otherwise!

Keys are often associated with locked gates, and death has gates.

Psalms 9:13 — Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death.

***Psalm 107:18** — They draw near unto the gates of death.*

***Isaiah 38:10** — I shall go to the gates of the grave.*

Jesus has the key to those gates. He can open them. He can close them. When Jesus says “Come forth!,” the dead come forth and no gates can hold them back.

Notice that 2 Timothy 1:10 tells us that Jesus “hath abolished death” (past tense). But 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 tells us that Jesus “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” **How can death remain as an enemy if death has already been abolished?**

Death was abolished and conquered (past tense) when Jesus died and rose from the grave — but death will remain as a **conquered** enemy until the last great day. On that last day, “then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Rome and death are in a similar position, and when Jesus is coming in judgment the very last place you want to be is in the same position as death! By the time this book ends, Rome will also have been judged and conquered (past tense), and yet we may find that Rome like death will remain for a time after it has been conquered. But as with death, the final outcome for Rome will never be in any doubt. Just as we see that death has (past tense) been abolished, so in this book we will be told that Babylon is fallen (18:2) in reference to Rome.

Think for a moment about the descriptions of Christ in verses 17-18 — descriptions of Christ spoken by Christ himself. They all carry the same message — Jesus is God! Although it is clear throughout the Bible, nowhere else in the Bible is the divinity of Christ any more clear than it is in these verses and in this book. Virtually every Old Testament description of God the Father is applied in this book to God the Son. Jesus is God!

And yet many then and many today deny that Jesus is God. When you study modern commentaries about Revelation you often hear a lot about “the Antichrist” — even though that word occurs nowhere in this book. 1 John 2:22 tells us that an Antichrist is anyone who denies the divinity of Christ. What that means is that there are **many** Antichrists in the world today. Yes, we will see the son of perdition from 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and yes the son of perdition was an Antichrist — but he was not alone in that. Many then and many today deny the divinity of Christ and are properly called Antichrist.

In verse 19, John is told to write everything down. He is told to write down “the things which are” (that is, what he is now seeing in the first vision) and

“the things which shall be hereafter” (that is, what he is about to see in the second vision, which starts in Chapter 4). Another possibility is that John is writing the things that are already happening (the activities of the seven churches, for example) and the things yet to come (the coming of the son of perdition and the judgment of Rome, for example).

In verse 20, Jesus explains the mystery of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks. As with other mysteries in the Bible, this mystery is something that was formerly not understood but that has now been revealed. The seven candlesticks are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches.

Before we look at what this explanation means, let's pause to note two important things we should take from verse 20.

First, verse 20 confirms that this book contains figures. Jesus refers to stars and candlesticks, but he tells us that these items are figures for other things. So, for those premillennialists who pride themselves in taking everything in this book literally, they need to study verse 20 very carefully. Do they take the stars and the candlesticks literally? Jesus did not.

Second, verse 20 tells us with absolute certainty what these particular figures represent, and we will see other such explanations in this book. This is but one example of someone (in this case, Jesus himself) explaining a part of the vision to John during the vision. These explanations are signposts to let us know if we are on the right track with the other symbols in the vision.

What does the explanation in verse 20 mean? First, the candlesticks or lampstands depict churches. We have already noticed that a lampstand is used elsewhere in the Bible to denote God's people.

As we said before, although we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), we are **not** the source of that light. Jesus is the true light of the world “which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), and the church is an earthly container for that true light. Christian light is always borrowed light. The church is a lampstand.

John 8:12 — Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Second, Jesus tells us that the seven stars are the **angels** of the seven churches. Who are these **angels** in verse 20?

Some suggest that these angels are men sent to John to inquire about his condition on Patmos and then to report back to the churches. Others suggest that these angels are the elders or the ministers of the seven churches. I don't see much evidence for either of those views.

Others suggest that these angels are actual angels who are responsible for the churches. But notice how the letters are written — while the letters are addressed directly to the angels, the comments in the letters are addressed directly to the churches.

Revelation 2:1-2 — Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; ... I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience...

It appears that the angel in verse 1 is the church of Ephesus, unless we take the “works” here to be the works of the angels rather than the works of the churches, which would not make much sense. If this is an actual angel, then we would have to conclude that this angel is somehow responsible for what the church has done right or wrong. If the angel is responsible, then don't we have to conclude that the angel exercises some control over the church? And how would that fit in with our own free will? In short, taking these angels to be literal angels does not fit well with the text and what we know from elsewhere in the Bible about angels and the church.

I think Milligan has the right explanation. He says that the **angel** of a given thing in this book is that thing itself in its essential nature. When the angel of a thing is discussed, that thing is invested with angelic personality in order to act out its part in the scheme of the book.

Later in Revelation we will find rivers, winds, bowls, trumpets, and books that also have angels. Under this view, the angel of a church is the personification of that church so that it can act out its role in this book. This view fits very well with how the letters are written in Chapters 2 and 3.

One final question before we reach the letters in Chapters 2 and 3 is **why** the letters are included in this book? We answered that question in the introduction — these seven letters in Chapters 2-3 provide the all-important context for the vision that follows in Chapters 4-22.

These letters are not an afterthought. They are not separate and unrelated from the rest of the book as many commentators suggest or imply. These letters are an integral part of this book, and any view of Revelation that makes them anything less than integral is an incorrect view of this book. These letters

tell us about the initial audience of this book, and these letters are crucial in understanding the rest of the book.

Revelation is primarily about a great threat to church from **without** by the Roman empire, but these letters show us that the church also faced a great threat from **within**. That threat will be different for each of the seven congregations, but taken together they provide a powerful lesson to every congregation of the Lord's body, even to those today that no longer face great threats from without.

In the remainder of this book, we will see the church largely take on a **passive** role while Jesus takes care of the mighty Roman empire threatening the church from **without**. But in these letters we see the church commanded to take an **active** role when it comes to battling the problems that faced the church from **within**.

Chapter 2

Revelation 2:1-7

The Letter to Ephesus

1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; **2** I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: **3** And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. **4** Nevertheless I have somewhat against

thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The city of Ephesus has been called the “first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” Ephesus had the greatest harbor in Asia, and it was the greatest and wealthiest city in Asia.

Ephesus was one of the few “free cities” in the Roman empire, which means that within its own limits it was self-governing. Ephesus could never have Roman troops garrisoned within it.

Ephesus was the center of worship of Artemis or Diana (the Roman equivalent of Artemis).

Acts 19:35 — What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Philon of Byzantium: “I have seen the walls and Hanging Gardens of ancient Babylon, the statue of Olympian Zeus, the Colossus of Rhodes, the mighty work of the high Pyramids and the tomb of Mausolus. But when I saw the temple at Ephesus rising to the clouds, all these other wonders were put in the shade.”

The temple was destroyed during a raid by the Goths in AD 268. The “image which fell down from Jupiter” in Acts 19:35 was a sacred stone, probably a meteorite, that had been placed in the earliest temple, built there around 800 BC.

Acts 19 tells us about Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis and who saw his livelihood threatened by the spread of Christianity. In Acts 19, we also see that Ephesus is where the seven sons of Sceva had their run-in with the evil spirit, and also where the expensive magic books were burned to prevent their evil from spreading any further. That, we are told in Acts 19:20, caused the word of God to grow mightily and prevail.

Ephesus was also a center for Caesar worship. The city had temples dedicated to Nero and Claudius. Domitian enforced Caesar worship with a renewed fervor, and a large temple to Domitian was established in Ephesus. Domitian also appears to have extended the boundaries of the temple of Artemis.

One commentator said that in Ephesus, pagan religion was at its strongest.

Ephesus was also a center for crime and immorality. The Temple of Artemis was filled with hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes. Heraclitus, the weeping philosopher, attributed his tears to the fact that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at the immorality.

Although Ephesus seemed very unpromising soil for the word of God, some of the church’s greatest triumphs occurred there. Trench wrote: “Nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil, strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love.”

There is a lesson here for us. Sometimes we are tempted to write off someone or some group because we are sure they will never listen to us or obey the gospel. And yet, as Ephesus shows us, God can reap a wonderful harvest from unpromising soil if we will but plant the seed.

We don’t know when or how the gospel first arrived in Ephesus. Acts 2:9 tells us that some of the Jews who heard the first gospel sermon were from Asia. Acts 19:1 tells us that there were disciples in Ephesus prior to Paul’s arrival, although they had not been properly taught about baptism.

Of the cities Paul visited on his missionary journeys, Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other. (Acts 20:31 says he was there for three years.) Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos were in Ephesus (Acts 18). Paul’s great farewell address was delivered to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

What had this congregation done that was right? Many things. They had worked hard for Jesus' sake (verses 2-3), they had endured patiently (verses 2-3), they did not bear evil men (verse 2), they tested and exposed false apostles (verse 2), and they had not grown weary (verse 3).

With all of that going for them, what could possibly be wrong? Verse 4 tells us that the Ephesian congregation had a major problem. They had abandoned their first love.

It is interesting to note how Paul ended his letter to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6:24 — “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” That letter was likely written in the early sixties, after Paul had visited Ephesus in the early fifties. Revelation was most likely written late in Vespasian's reign, which ended in AD 79. So within a span of about fifteen years the church at Ephesus had gone from the condition described in Ephesians 6:24 to the condition described in Revelation 2:4, having abandoned their first love. It can happen quickly!

They had lost their proper focus – perhaps their programs and their labors had become an end rather than a means to an end. Their actions were right, but their motivation was wrong. They were doing okay with the **what**, the **when**, the **where**, and the **how** — but it seems they were falling short with the **who** and the **why**.

And what would happen to the Ephesian congregation if the situation was not remedied — if they did not repent? Jesus says in verse 5 that he would come quickly and remove their candlestick from its place. After all, if the candlestick is no longer casting light, why should it remain in its place?

One thing this letter tells us is that it is possible for an entire congregation of the Lord's church to be plunged into such darkness that it ceases to be a congregation of the Lord's church. They may not change the sign outside the building that says “Church of Christ” — but what you find inside is no longer a church of Christ, a church that belongs to Christ. Its lampstand has been removed from its place. And whether a congregation of people is a congregation of the Lord's church is not determined by what is on the sign out front — it is determined by Christ, the head of the church.

And notice verse 2 — they had works, they had labor, they had patience, and they did not bear those who were evil. And yet, absent love, they were at risk of losing their lampstand. None of those good things was enough absent love.

This book of Revelation is all about the victory of the church over Rome — but the first thing we see is a congregation that was in danger of being rejected by Christ. But if that rejection occurred, it would not be caused by Rome, but rather it would be caused by what that congregation itself had done or not done. Jesus would defeat Rome for them, but it was up to them to remain faithful to Jesus.

In verse 5, we see another **figurative** “coming of Christ” of the sort we have already talked about. Here the coming depicts a coming in judgment against this congregation if they did not repent.

Verse 6 is interesting. Jesus says that he **hates** the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

When Jesus says he **hates** something, it should really get our attention. If Jesus hates it, then we must hate it as well. Jesus **commended** the Ephesians in verse 6 because they also **hated** the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

The Nicolaitans were a sect that some surmise (without much evidence) was started by Nicolas, one of the first deacons in Acts 6:5. Another theory is that the name is symbolic (as most likely is the name “Jezebel” that is used in a later letter). The Greek word “Nikolas” means “destroyer of the people.”

What did the Nicolaitans teach? Verse 6 does not tell us what they taught — only that Jesus hated it. But verse 15, which we will study later, is more informative. It seems to link the Nicolaitan doctrine with the doctrine of Balaam, which involved eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication.

We typically don’t think of sexual impurity as a false doctrine, but the sexual impurity here seems to have been tied to false religious views, which is not uncommon. The surest sign of a false religion is the use of that religion as a justification for sexual impurity. There are many examples of that around us in the world today.

What verse 15 will suggest is that the Nicolaitans mentioned here in verse 6 were a **libertine** sect. That is, their false doctrine promoted sin in the name of religion. That is certainly what the pagan religions taught — the temple of Diana was filled with so-called sacred prostitutes! Why not just be like them, the Nicolaitans likely asked. Why not compromise?

And there we have a **major theme** in the entire book — **compromise**. There again is the big choice we will see over and over again in this book — Caesar or Christ? The world or the word? Light or darkness? Faithfulness or faithlessness? We know which path the Nicolaitans chose — and Jesus **hated** their deeds!

The wolves mentioned by Paul in Acts 20 in his address to the Ephesian elders had arrived. And perhaps it was because of Paul's warning that the Ephesian congregation was not taken in by these false teachers. They recognized and hated their false teachings. (We will see a congregation with a different attitude toward the Nicolaitans when we study the letter to Pergamum.)

What is the lesson to the church from Christ's letter to Ephesus? Look at verse 4. This congregation had lost its focus. They were still doing the programs and the activities, but they had forgotten **why** they were doing the programs and the activities. They were standing firm against all forms of false teaching, but they had forgotten *why* they were doing that, and for *whom*. They had left their first love.

Remember Paul's description of loveless works in 1 Corinthians 13:3 — "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." And remember John 14:15, where Jesus told us what it means to love him: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." There is no such thing as a disobedient love.

Verse 7 is interesting. Those who overcome, we are told, will be given the right "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Certainly that is a promise of eternal life with God in heaven to those who overcome through faith in Christ (1 John 5:4), but the particular interest here is the reference to the tree of life. Why? Because the Temple of Artemis was a tree shrine. A tree was often used as the emblem for the city of Ephesus or its temple to Diana. A date-palm tree is often used as a symbol of Artemis on the coinage of the time. Jesus is telling us here that the tree of life is not found in the Temple of Artemis or in any other false man-made temple. Instead, the tree of life is in the paradise of God (which is heaven, 2 Corinthians 12:4), and that tree of life is promised to those who overcome by remaining faithful unto death.

What can we learn about the **context** of Revelation from this letter to the church in Ephesus and from the history of Ephesus?

First, we learn something about the interaction of Roman gods and Greek gods.

Rome did not insist that those within the empire convert to Roman gods. Instead, Rome tolerated local religious observances, and Rome fused Roman gods with local gods as long as loyalty to Rome was secured. That is why we still find a temple to Artemis in Ephesus under Roman rule.

The people of Ephesus regarded Artemis and their mother goddess and as the divine protector and sustainer of the city. She was thought to have saved the city. A number of inscriptions and coins from Ephesus show emperors linking themselves with the temple. Rome was fine with the temple, but Rome wanted to control it and benefit from it. The town clerk in Acts 19, for example, would have been an elite ally of Rome charged with protecting the status quo. His concern was not for Paul but rather to avoid a riot that could bring wrath from Rome. (“For we are in danger to be called in question for this day’s uproar” in Acts 19:40.) Twice in recent history Rome had intervened into temple affairs — once to stem asylum seekers and once to stop financial misdeeds.

Think for a moment about how an earthly government can interact with the Lord’s church. There are really only three options: (1) indifference, (2) persecution, or (3) embrace. Of the three, the third is by far the most dangerous for the health of the church. Rome’s first choice with the church would have been to embrace it and thereby control it (as Rome had done with the Greek temples), and that eventually happened under Constantine, leading to a great apostasy. But here that strategy of embrace did not work; the Christians would not acknowledge Caesar as god, something that would have been required to fuse Christianity with Caesar worship as Rome desired. So Rome went for the other option — persecution.

And what about today? Would we rather be ignored, persecuted, or embraced by the government? Indifference is best. And second best? Persecution. History tells us that the most dangerous thing for the church is to be embraced by an earthly government.

Second, we learn something about compromise — it comes in many forms, and it is not always easy to identify.

For example, the temple to Artemis or Diana operated as a sort of bank where people could safely store their wealth. (Recall the mention of temple robbers in Acts 19:37.) The temple itself became wealthy through donations, bequests, and sacrifices. The overseers of the temple were a major source for loans in the city. Could a Christian take such a loan? Could a Christian store his money in the temple? The Nicolaitan compromise was easy to spot, but what about this? Paul dealt with such questions with regard to eating meat sacrificed to idols, and those principles could be applied to these and other questions.

Lesson 9

Revelation 2:8-11

The Letter to Smyrna

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Smyrna was the loveliest city in Asia. It was called the ornament of Asia, the crown of Asia, and the flower of Asia. It stood at a crossroads and was a great trading city, and its harbor was Asia's safest and most convenient.

Smyrna was a center of culture housing a large library and many famous temples. It claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.

In a sense, Smyrna had also “died and come to life” as Jesus says of himself in verse 8. Smyrna was founded in 1000 BC as a Greek colony, but it was destroyed in 600 BC by the Lydians. It was rebuilt as a planned city around 200 BC.

Smyrna is known as the persecuted church, and Christians (defined broadly) have been persecuted in Smyrna for millennia. The Great Fire of Smyrna in 1922 killed upwards of 100,000 Greek and Armenian Christians when the Turkish Muslims invaded the city. That fire in Smyrna was the closing act of an Armenian Genocide that killed 1.5 million Christians.

This was the first modern genocide, and in fact the word “genocide” was coined in 1943 to describe this massacre. The world paid little attention at the time, but it did catch the attention of Adolf Hitler. In 1939 he gave a speech in which he justified his own atrocities by asking, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” The answer was no one — and that worldwide apathy led to even greater atrocities. Smyrna has a long history as a place of terrible persecution.

The “crown” promised to the faithful in verse 10 had a special connection with ancient Smyrna. The phrase “the crown of Smyrna” was very familiar to the people of Smyrna. It arose from the appearance of the hill Pagos that had many stately public buildings on its rounded top with the city of Smyrna spreading out down along its rounded sloping sides. Those buildings looked like a crown placed on top of the city.

The guardian deity of Smyrna was the Mother-goddess, Cybele. She was pictured sitting with her feet on the sea and with her head crowned with a circlet of beautiful buildings. But she had no crown of life to offer. That could come only from Christ.

Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a free city. It was self-governing and had no Roman troops.

Smyrna had a history of faithfulness — not to God, but to Rome. The city had cast its lot with Rome long before Rome became the undisputed leader of the world. Smyrna had erected a temple to the goddess Roma as far back as 195 BC. According to Cicero, the Roman feeling was that Smyrna was “the city of our most faithful and most ancient allies.”

Having a temple to the emperor was a matter of great pride to the city of Smyrna, and a refusal by any citizen of the city to pay tribute in that temple was seen as a disgraceful lack of patriotism.

We are willing to suffer for those whom we love, and the congregation at Smyrna was willing to suffer for Jesus Christ. As one commentator said: “It was a dangerous thing to be a Christian in Smyrna. There was no knowing what might happen to you.” Jesus tells them that they could expect poverty, slander, prison, and death.

The Jews in Smyrna were very influential and numerous, and verse 9 tells us they were slandering the Christians there. To receive a certificate to conduct business, you were required to burn incense on an altar to Caesar once a year. The Jews had received an exemption, but the Christians had not. The persecution against the Christians was apparently being fanned into flames by the local Jewish population, who would throw the Christians out of the synagogue and then inform on them to the local authorities.

It was in Smyrna that Polycarp was martyred. When he was commanded to “sacrifice to Caesar or be burned,” he responded, “86 years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” We are told that the Jews participated in this. After Polycarp confessed that he was a Christian, we read that “the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath,” and that they then joined (although it was the Sabbath) with the mob in gathering wood to burn Polycarp alive.

Why the increased level of antagonism against the church? Remember that Jerusalem had now been destroyed. That likely caused the remaining Jews outside of Jerusalem to close ranks against all outsiders, and especially against Jewish converts to Christianity who were likely seen as traitors to Judaism. And these same Jewish converts were teaching that God wanted the Jews to be at peace and be unified with the Gentiles who had destroyed their city. It’s not hard to see how there had been a rise in tensions.

Verse 9 begins with what must have been a very comforting phrase for the church in Smyrna to hear from Jesus — “I know.” Jesus knew their works, he knew their tribulation, he knew their poverty, and he knew who was causing them trouble. Jesus knew what was happening, and Jesus cared about what was happening to them.

Verse 9 tells us that these Christians were in poverty yet were rich. Without that certificate to conduct business that we talked about, it was very hard to find work. There are two Greek words for poverty, one that means destitution and another that means having nothing extra. The one used here means destitution. Their homes may have been plundered as well.

Hebrews 10:34 — *For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the **spoiling of your goods**, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*

And yet they were rich! Again, we are called upon to view the situation through God's eyes rather than through our own. We have **all** spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3 — *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*

Who are the Jews that are not really Jews in verse 9? We find similar statements elsewhere in the Bible.

Romans 2:28-29 — *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Galatians 3:7 — *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

Here is a fact about God's people: **The Jews of that day who called themselves Jews yet were not faithful to God were no more Jews than are the Christians of today who call themselves Christians and yet are not faithful to God really Christians.** God's people are **faithful** people, or else they are not God's people no matter what they may call themselves. God's people in the Old Testament were the faithful remnant, and God's people in the New Testament are the faithful remnant.

Very strong language is used in verse 9 to describe these slandering Jews who were not really Jews. "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

Synagogue of Satan? Who was the mean-spirited, divisive, unloving, hate-monger who came up with that phrase? **What do you know? It was Jesus.** And this was not the first time Jesus had used this description. Listen to what Jesus said to the Jewish leaders in John 8.

John 8:44 — *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

It doesn't sound much like Jesus thought those Jewish leaders were just on another path to salvation, does it? But that message does not go over very well in today's modern pluralistic society.

If there are many paths to salvation, then that means I can be saved apart from the blood of Christ. And if I can be saved apart from the blood of Christ, then that means Christ died for no reason. If there is a path to salvation around Jesus Christ, then his death was not necessary. What would that say about the God? What kind of God would he be if he sent his son to suffer and die for no reason? That's what we would be saying if we said there was a path to salvation that avoided Christ.

There is one way to salvation, and only one way to salvation, and we do no one any favors if we ever teach or suggest otherwise.

1 Corinthians 3:11 — *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Acts 4:12 — *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

John 14:6 — *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

The Bible proclaims peace between Jew and Gentile — but that peace exists in the church. It is in the church that the middle wall of partition has been broken down. For those outside of the church to come to the Father — whether they be Jew or Greek — they must find salvation in Jesus Christ. There is no other way.

The phrase “synagogue of Satan” in verse 9 is strong, but it was fitting. The Jews of that city it seems had stirred up a lot of trouble for the early Christians. Satan had been using them to hinder the work of the church.

Revelation does not apply that strong language to every synagogue. We know from the book of Acts that a lot of powerful teaching about Christ occurred in

synagogues. What that tells us is that there were some people in some synagogues who were receptive to the truth. But not, it seems, in this particular synagogue, and also, as we will see, the synagogue in Philadelphia (3:9).

Yes, there are strong words in verse 9 about this synagogue, but we should keep 1 Timothy 2:4 in mind (“who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”) as well as 2 Peter 3:9 (“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”). Those verses applies to both Jew and Gentile.

When it comes to salvation and the great commission, the Gospel of Jesus Christ divides people into two groups and **only** two groups: those in Christ and those out of Christ. Galatians 3:28 could not be any clearer on this issue. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

God wanted peace between the Jew and the Gentile in the first century, and he still wants it today, but that peace is found only in Christ. No man cometh to the Father except by Jesus.

In verse 10 the Christians are told not to fear the things that they were about to suffer, including being cast into prison by the devil and tried. Why were they told not to fear these things? Three reasons: first, the tribulation would last only ten days, second, those who remained faithful unto death would be given a crown of life, and third, those who overcame would not be hurt by the second death. Let’s look at each of those reasons.

The first reason the Christians were told not to fear was because the tribulation would last only ten days.

This could be a literal ten days. Although these letters have some apocalyptic elements, they are for the most part not written in apocalyptic language. The cities are literal cities, the false cults are literal, the tribulations are literal — the primary vision will not begin until Chapter 4. But even here we should be looking carefully at numbers. After all, there is almost certainly a figurative reason why we have seven congregations here. Likewise, I think the ten days in verse 10 is also very likely figurative.

If ten days is figurative, then it represents a short but complete period of time. That is, it would represent a period that can be measured, a period that comes to an end. The persecution will rage for a time, but it will not be permanent. That view makes sense in the context here. But does that mean the Christians would be freed by the Romans after the period of persecution? Likely not

based on what the text says next. Yes, the persecution would end, but it would end with their physical death.

Why? Because the next thing we see is a command that they be faithful unto death, and a promise that they would not be hurt by the second death. So it looks like what happened next was that **they died** — they were executed by the Romans. If they were cast into prison and quickly executed by the Romans, then their period of tribulation would have been short, and it would have been complete in the sense that when it ended there would be no more tribulation. They would receive their crown of life and not be harmed by anything or anyone further.

The second reason the Christians were told not to fear was because those who remained faithful unto death would be given a crown of life.

James 1:12 — Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Notice **when** that crown is received in James 1:12 — **when he is tried**, he shall receive the crown of life. Here in Revelation 1:10 the crown of life is given after death. So either the temptation or trial in James 1:12 was a trial that ended in death (a distinct possibility) or that verse is referring to our reign in life by Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17 — For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

Either way, we know that the faithful children of God are promised a crown of life. We see in verse 10 one of the key themes of the entire book — life versus death.

Rome was culture of death — from the warfare to the persecutions and the public fights and public executions in the Roman colosseum, Rome wallowed in death. In that sense, Rome has much in common with our own culture, and increasingly so. Not just the mass killings that are becoming commonplace, but the celebration of death we see from Hollywood, the abortion industry that kills 3000 unborn children in this country every day, and the violent video games we use to introduce our children to the culture of death. We also wallow in death.

If you are discussing this problem with your friends, at this point someone will likely trot out some statistics purporting to show no link between real-life violence and violent video games. Here's an example you can give them. At a Paducah, Kentucky, school a few years ago, 14 year-old Michael Carneal stole a gun from a neighbor's house, brought it to school, and fired eight shots into a student prayer meeting that was just breaking up. **Prior to stealing the gun, he had never shot a real handgun in his life.** The FBI says that the average experienced law enforcement officer, in the average shoot-out, at an average range of seven yards, hits with approximately one bullet in five. So how many hits did Michael Carneal make? He fired eight shots; he got eight hits, on eight different kids. Five of them were head shots, and the other three were upper torso. The result was three dead and one paralyzed for life. How did Michael Carneal acquire that kind of killing ability? Practice. He had killed thousands of people in the video games he played every day.

Much has been said about how ancient Rome compares with the United States, and some of the comparisons are fair and some are not. But one comparison that is very fair is that we share Rome's fascination with blood and death. And that has come upon us quickly. We see things every day on the TV that we would never have dreamed of seeing just a few decades ago, and what our kids see in their video games is much much worse. We are swimming in blood, as was Rome, and we are becoming accustomed to it, as did Rome. And we should pause to consider the judgment that God brought upon Rome for its lust for blood — more blood! Before this book is over we will see Rome swimming in a river of blood.

We live in a culture of death — but Jesus is all about life, and as his children we should also be all about life. Yes, we each have an appointment with death, but the gospel is a message of life — eternal life — and a promise of a crown of life. We must continue to proclaim that message of life loudly in the culture of death that surrounds us.

The third reason the Christians were told not to fear was because those who overcame would not be hurt by the second death. We will have more to say about the second death when we get to Chapter 20, but one thing is certain: Rome's power over a person ended with the death of that person. Not so with Jesus' power over Rome!

Those who overcome — that is, those who remain faithful unto death — their death is the end of their trials and tribulations. They will not be hurt by anything that follows their physical death. That is the promise in these verses, but

that is not a promise for Rome. For those outside of Christ, their problems do not *end* at death — they *begin* at death!

And verse 11 confirms that this letter to the church at Smyrna is not a letter to only the church in Smyrna — Jesus says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (plural). Jesus is speaking here to Smyrna in particular, and to the seven churches of Asia Minor, but Jesus’ message is for the entire church — that is why we have these letters in the inspired text. These promises are for us as well.

Verse 9 includes two short phrases that are perfect illustrations of the theme of the entire book of Revelation. The first is the parenthetical phrase “but thou are rich” after the word “poverty.” The second is the phrase “which say they are Jews, and are not.”

The Jews said they were Jews, but they were not. Likewise, those same Jews told the Romans that the Christians who said they were Jews were not Jews. Those Christians identified with the Jews so that they could enjoy protection under the exemptions granted by Rome to the Jews, but the Jews told the Romans that the Christians were not Jews. Here, Jesus says the same thing to the Jews.

Each of those phrases (“but thou are rich” and “they say they are Jews and are not”) is included here to make the same point — **things are not what they seem!**

The Christians were not seeing themselves correctly, and the Jews were not seeing themselves correctly. They had one view of themselves, but God had a different view — and God’s view is always the correct view! If we want to see things as they really are then we need to see them with spiritual eyes; we need to see them as God sees them.

It is like what we see in the book of Ecclesiastes. When viewed only from the perspective of someone under the sun, this world looks one way — but when that person lifts his eyes and tries to see things from God’s perspective, from a spiritual rather than physical perspective, things look entirely different. That theme from Ecclesiastes runs all throughout this book of Revelation — we see two examples of it right here in verse 9.

And what theme could be more vital than that in our own present world? Perhaps at no time in history has secular materialism been more pervasive and powerful than today. We in the church must never give in to that false worldview.

Colossians 3:1-4 — *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

Those four verses from Colossians 3 are a manifesto against all that our culture promotes. Those four verses are telling us to lift up our eyes — and so is the entire book of Revelation!

2 Corinthians 4:18 — *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

The central challenge of Revelation is to look at things not seen. Not things that are *unseeable*, but rather things that are not being seen — but that are capable of being seen (otherwise how could we be commanded to look at them?). Why aren't they being seen? Because they can't be seen with secular materialistic eyes. They can be seen only with spiritual eyes.

1 Corinthians 2:14 — *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Ephesians 1:17-18 — *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.*

This eyesight problem is a problem that runs all throughout the Bible, but nowhere more so than in the gospel accounts. It is a problem that Jesus dealt with daily.

When a man looked at Jesus, whom did he see? The Son of God, or an imposter? It depended on that man's eyes. If he saw Jesus with spiritual eyes, looking at Jesus through the eyes of prophecy and through eyes that saw the mighty works of Jesus, then he saw the Son of God. But if he looked at Jesus with only

natural eyes, then he saw something quite different — and many saw Jesus that way.

What was the unforgivable sin — blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Mark tells us what it was.

Mark 3:29-30 — *But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: **Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.***

That terrible sin was committed when someone's eyes were so corrupt that that person could look upon the Son of God come in the flesh and see instead someone with an unclean spirit. No sin, it seems, could be worse!

How often did Jesus' miracles involve opening the eyes of the blind! Jesus came to open everyone's eyes! Just think about how often Jesus talked about eyesight!

Matthew 6:22-23 — ***The light of the body is the eye:** if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

Matthew 13:15-16 — *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. **But blessed are your eyes, for they see:** and your ears, for they hear.*

Matthew 15:14 — *Let them alone: **they be blind leaders of the blind.** And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

Mark 8:18 — ***Having eyes, see ye not?** and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?*

Luke 10:23-24 — *And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, **Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things***

which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

We must see things with spiritual eyes. We must see *ourselves* that way. We must see *other people* that way. We must see *the world* that way. We must see *the church* that way. We must see *Jesus* that way. “The light of the body is the eye.”

To understand the book of Revelation we must see things as God sees them, and the book of Revelation itself will help us do that. The theme of Revelation is that things are not what they seem! If we can view things as God sees them, then, and only then, will see those things as they really are.

Rome looks invincible. Is that how God sees Rome? The church looks powerless. Is that how God sees the church? Our situation looks hopeless. Is that how God sees our situation?

We will face some real challenges in our efforts to understand this book, but when faced with such challenges we should always try to see things as God sees them. And how do we do that? We read God’s word. That is how we see things as God sees them.

Let’s look at an example of how that will help us in our study. We have already talked about the judgment of Rome, and we will have much more to say about that judgment as we proceed through the book. But let’s ask this question now — what sort of judgment should we expect when it comes to the judgment of Rome? Will it be like Sodom and Gomorrah, where literal fire fell down from heaven? Will it be like Jerusalem, where armies surrounded and destroyed the city? Not necessarily.

But, someone says, look at the language in this book describing that judgment of Rome: “hail and fire mingled with blood, a great mountain burning with fire cast into the sea, the third part of the sea becoming like blood” (8:7-8), and we could go on and on. Shouldn’t we expect a divine fireball falling from the sky in the first century to obliterate the city and vindicate the saints? Again, not necessarily.

That vivid language about fire mingled with blood is describing for us how God views the judgment of Rome — how it would look from a spiritual perspective, and how the persecuted Christians should see it — but the view of that judgment with natural undiscerning eyes might look very different.

How do we know that such is a possibility? We know that from how a prior judgment was described — the judgment of Babylon by God at the hands of

the Medes and the Persians. First, let's look at how that judgment was described by Isaiah, writing about 160 years before it happened.

Isaiah 13:17-22 — Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

After reading that vivid description of Babylon's judgment, we might think that the Medes did to Babylon what the Romans did to Jerusalem — obliterate it — but that is not at all what happened. We have already studied that event in our earlier series of lessons on the book of Daniel. As you recall, Daniel describes what happened in two short verses.

Daniel 5:30-31 — In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

The Medes and the Persians took the city of Babylon without firing a shot. The city was not destroyed, and the walls were not torn down. The people were not slaughtered, but rather many of them were happy with the change, most likely opening the gates to the invading army while Belshazzar drank the night away.

And yet — **and here is the crucial point** — the power of the Chaldeans in Babylon was utterly broken. They and their city were judged just as God had foretold through Isaiah and through Daniel. Babylon had fallen!

And that great fall was described using vivid apocalyptic language. God saw them as a desolation because that is what they were — an utter desolation. They had been weighed and found wanting, so God judged them and removed them. Belshazzar did not live out the night.

But shouldn't we take Isaiah 13 literally? No, we shouldn't, and, in fact, we can't. Verse 22 says that it would occur **soon**, and verse 20 says the city would never be inhabited again. That did not literally occur soon after the Isaiah, and, in fact, has not to this day literally occurred.

Common sense tells us that the prophecy **cannot** be taken literally — if the wild animals of Isaiah 13:21-22 can inhabit the area, what would prevent people from pitching tents there? The language is apocalyptic and figurative — the same type of language we have seen with other judgments in the Bible.

Well, what about Rome? How was Rome judged? Let's wait a bit on that question, but when we get there, let's remember this example from Isaiah 13, and let's remember to view that judgment through spiritually discerning eyes.

Lesson 10

Revelation 2:12-17

The Letter to Pergamum

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone

**a new name written, which no man knoweth
saving he that receiveth it.**

Historically, Pergamum was the most famous city in Asia. It had been a capital city for 400 years. First, it was the capital of the Seleucid kingdom after Alexander the Great. Then it was the capital of the province of Asia that was formed by the Romans. It was located on a hilltop from which the Mediterranean Sea could be seen fifteen miles away.

It has been said that both history and nature marked Pergamum as a royal city. Here is how Ramsay described it:

No city of the whole of Asia Minor — so far as I have seen, and there are few of any importance which I have not seen — possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect. It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation “A royal city!” ... There is something unique and overpowering in its effect, planted as it is on its magnificent hill, standing out boldly in the level plain, and dominating the valley and the mountains on the south.

Pergamum was a center of culture surpassing even Ephesus and Smyrna. It had a library that was second only to that in Alexandria, with 200,000 volumes copied by hand! The Roman general Marc Antony gave the library of Pergamum to his new wife, Cleopatra of Egypt, as a wedding gift. (Antony’s mentor, Julius Caesar, had burned the great library in Alexandria when Rome had invaded Egypt several years earlier.)

The word “parchment” is derived from the name “Pergamum.” In the third century BC, a Pergamene king attempted to lure away the librarian at Alexandria. The Egyptians imprisoned the librarian and banned the export of papyrus to Pergamum. Pergamum, in response, invented parchment (or vellum) from animal skins.

Pergamum was also a great religious center. The city contained a great altar to Zeus that was set 800 feet up on the side of a hill. The altar looked very much like a large throne. This altar may be what is called “Satan’s throne” in verse 13. What remains of that altar can be seen today in a museum in Berlin, where it was taken after being excavated by the Germans.

The city was also a center of Caesar worship. It was in Pergamum that the first Asian Temple for Augustus was built. That temple was for more than forty years the one center of the Imperial cult for the whole Province. I think this temple is a better choice for the identity of “Satan’s throne” in verse 13. Satan at this time was working through Rome, not through Zeus. Pergamum was a center of Roman opposition — which made it a center of Satan’s opposition. Verse 13 says that Satan dwelt there where his seat or throne was located — that tells us that Satan felt very much at home in Pergamum.

Roman governors were divided into two groups – those with the right of the sword and those without. The governor of Pergamum had that right, which meant he could execute Christians for any reason. And yet Christ in verse 12 refers to himself as the one with the sharp two-edged sword.

The Greek word translated “martyr” in verse 13 means “witness.” That Greek word did not come to mean “martyr” until New Testament times when being a “witness” for Jesus often invited a death sentence.

In verse 13, Jesus says that the Pergamum Christians “hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you.” Who was Antipas?

We don’t know anything more about him than what we read here. Later legendary accounts say that he was slowly roasted to death in a brazen bowl during the reign of Domitian, but we can’t put much weight on that. What we know about Antipas is all we need to know about him — Christ Jesus called him “my faithful witness.” When you have that on your headstone, nothing else matters!

In verse 16, we have yet another figurative **coming** in judgment, this time against the church in Pergamum should they fail to repent.

Jesus promises them a white stone in verse 17. What does that mean?

Stones were given to indicate a verdict at a trial, with a white stone denoting an innocent vote and a black stone denoting a guilty vote. Stones were also given as a reward for heroism or victory, as passes to enter the games, and sometimes exchanged between friends. Here it seems to indicate a reward or an indication of innocence or acquittal.

Also, in verse 17, Jesus says that there will be a new name written on the stone “which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” What does that mean?

Later in 19:12, we will be told that Jesus has a name that no one knows, and yet that name is given in verses 13 and 16. Names in the Bible have a special significance. We know that names were often changed to indicate a change in status or circumstances, as for example with Abram and Jacob. To have a new name means to have a new situation. To have a name that no one else knows means that you have a status or a relation that no one else can share. Each of those is true of those who overcome the world by being faithful unto death.

But there is an additional significance to the new name in verse 17. As said earlier, Pergamum was the first city to build a temple to Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor and the adopted son of his great uncle, Julius Caesar. Prior to becoming the emperor of Rome, Augustus had a different name — Octavius. Here is how Ramsay describes that change of name:

[Augustus] had been a new name, deliberately devised by the Senate to designate the founder, and to mark the foundation of the new Empire: it was an old sacred word, used previously only in the language of the priests, and never applied to any human being. ... That old word was appropriated in 27 B.C. to the man who had been the saviour of Rome, and whom already the popular belief had begun to regard as an incarnation of the divine nature in human form, sent down to earth to end the period of war and introduce the age of peace. This sacred, divine name marked out the man to whom it was applied as one apart from the world, standing on a higher level, possessor of superhuman power in virtue of this new name and transmitting that power through the name to his descendants.

The people in Pergamum knew very well what it meant to be given a new name — and the promise here is that Jesus will give his faithful followers a new name. Just as Augustus had been set above the Roman world by his new name, God's faithful people would be set above the world by their new name. Once again, listen to Ramsay:

The Emperor is powerless: the supreme power and authority remain with the victorious Christian, who defeats the Emperor by virtue of the death which the Emperor inflicts. Here for the first time in the Seven Letters the absolute and inexorable opposition between the Church and the Imperial government is clearly expressed. It is not merely that the State persecutes the Church. The Church proscribes and sets itself above the Augus-

tan government. And this is done in the letter to the Church of that city where the Imperial government with the Imperial religion had placed its capital and its throne.

With that background, with that history, and with those promises, one might expect to find a unified church in Pergamum wholly devoted to Christ and his word, but sadly that was not the case. Verses 14-16 tells us that the church in Pergamum was locked in a battle between truth and error.

The Pergamum congregation had some within it who held to the false doctrine of Balaam and the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It is worthwhile noting that what was **hated** by the church in Ephesus was being **tolerated** by the church in Pergamum.

We have already talked about the Nicolaitan doctrine, and many commentators believe that the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans were one and the same. It is generally identified with the group mentioned in Jude 1 and alluded to in Romans 6.

***Jude 1:4,11** — For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. ... Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.*

***Romans 6:1** — What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

This group was, it seems, promoting sin (fornication and the eating of meat sacrificed to idols) in the name of religion.

Why the reference here to Balaam? In Numbers 25, the Israelites played the harlot with the daughters of Moab, who then caused the Israelites to turn to false gods. Later in Numbers 31:16 we learn that these women, along with the Moabite king Balak, acted under the influence of Balaam.

One commentator wrote that “pagan women and pagan food were Balaam’s weapons against the rigid Mosaic code.” Balaam is a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betray believers into a fatal compromise with the world. Balaam worked from **within** to do what had not been possible to do from **without**.

Most likely these false teachers were Gnostics who claimed to have some secret knowledge from God — some special understanding that made them superior to those who did not possess that special knowledge. They no doubt thought of themselves as very spiritual — on a higher plane than the ordinary Christian. It is telling then that verse 17 promises hidden manna and a new name that no man knoweth. Jesus is telling the church that special understanding and knowledge come only from him, and it is a promise to all who overcome — not just to a select few.

These false teachers claimed to have special knowledge and deep spirituality, and yet they were wallowing in their sin. They were flaunting their sin.

That attitude remains with us to this very day. Those today who teach divorce and remarriage for any reason or who teach acceptance of homosexuality in the church claim to have a special understanding and a deeper spirituality than the rest of us. And yet I believe that Jesus' message to them is the same as the message here in verse 15 — “which thing I **hate**.”

Anyone who seeks to corrupt the Lord's church from within can be said to follow the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam — and this book is devoted to telling the church what Jesus will do to those who attack his body, the church — be it an attack from within or an attack from without.

Verse 15 has an important message for the church of any age: Jesus cares very deeply about the doctrine that is taught and proclaimed by his church. Jesus tells us in verse 15 that he **hates** this false doctrine that was being tolerated in Pergamum. If Jesus hates this false doctrine, then so must his church. We must not tolerate that which our Master hates.

A major theme of this letter and of the entire book of Revelation is compromise with the world. Caesar or Christ? Faithfulness or faithlessness? The world or the word?

Where are we most tempted to compromise? I think Martin Luther gave a good answer to that question:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the Devil are at that moment attacking, I am not **confessing** Christ, however boldly I may be **professing** Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Where does the battle rage today? Where today are we most tempted to compromise?

The battles that were raging in Smyrna involved sacrifices to idols and fornication. Not much has changed — those are still the same battles that are raging today! The names of the idols may have changed, but people in the world are still making sacrifices to their false idols today — and Christians are still tempted to join in with them.

We are seeing examples of compromise in these letters, but the problem of compromise was not unique to the first century. It is a problem that has always and will always face the church in this world.

But there is one difference — many of the first century Christians who compromised did so under the threat of death. That did not excuse their compromise, but we can see the tremendous pressures that they faced. What pressures do we face today? Ridicule as a fundamentalist Bible thumper? Disdain for our failure to bow down before the altar of so-called “settled science,” as if science can ever be “settled”? If we compromise when faced with only that, what would we have done in the first century?

Compromise destroys our effectiveness. Jesus will not share his throne with Augustus or anyone or anything else that man might be tempted to elevate as god. And a compromising, easy-going Christianity is no Christianity at all. Such will never accomplish the great mission that has been given to those who wear the name of Christ.

Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. That is the only path for a child of God, and there is no compromise on that path — only faithfulness to our Lord and Savior. That is a central theme of this entire book.

One of the chief dangers facing the church in any age is the danger of **syncretism**. That word refers to the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. Here is what Jesus thinks of syncretism:

***Matthew 6:24** — No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

Where do we see syncretism? We see it here among those who would seek to combine Christianity with Caesar worship. We see it later in the Catholic church, which to this day is a combination of the early church with the Roman

empire, with very little if any of the former remaining. We see it in theistic evolution, which seeks to combine God's word with the present day views of science falsely so-called.

Why is compromise so terrible? Why must compromise be avoided at all costs? Because syncretism is the result of compromise, and syncretism destroys the church — making it unrecognizable and ineffective.

At no time in the history of the church was syncretism a greater danger than in the first century, but it remains a great danger today as well. We must always be on guard against it, in whatever form it takes.

Let's look at a concrete example of modern-day compromise in the church: theistic evolution. Many today try to worship both at the altar of God and at the altar of science — they try to serve two masters. They have turned science into a false god, and they fall down at worship it.

Was Adam the first man or not?

1 Corinthians 15:45 — *And so it is written, The **first man Adam** was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

Were the creation days ordinary twenty-four hour days or not?

Exodus 20:11 — *For in **six days** the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed **the sabbath day**, and hallowed it.*

Is man the result of evolution or the result of creation?

Genesis 2:7 — *And **the Lord God formed man** of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

There's a reason virtually no one in Christendom disagreed on these issues for almost two thousand years — the Bible could not be more clear on the issue of man's origin. The disagreement came when science was elevated to the god-head. That is when the compromise occurred.

The problem with that compromise though is that science is not in any position to play god — and those who treat it as such show how little they really know about science. Let me give you an example.

Isaac Newton is considered by many (including myself) to be the greatest scientist who ever lived, and his theory of gravity one of the greatest scientific discoveries of all time.

So should we treat the theory of gravity as a pronouncement from Mount Sinai? Hardly. Newton himself admitted he knew absolutely nothing about what gravity is or how it does what it does. Instead he famously said, “I feign no hypotheses,” although he said it in Latin (*Hypotheses non fingo*). His theory was based on two premises that are no longer considered true: absolute space and absolute time. And his so-called law of gravity is known now to apply only in limited circumstances having been replaced by Einstein’s theories.

If that’s how your god operates, you need a new god! No one will ever say, “Science: the same yesterday, today, and forever!”

The theory of evolution is no better, but is in fact much worse. Why? Because unlike Newton (who believed in God), evolution is driven not by scientific curiosity but by a completely atheistic mindset. The evolutionists know the answers before they ever ask the questions. Evolution is dogma, and if you don’t believe that just look at how touchy they get when you disagree with them!

Now enter the Christian. How should a Christian deal with a philosophy that is completely opposed to God and to God’s word? Paul told us.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 — (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.

But some do not follow that command. Instead, they compromise. They change the word to fit what they believe they see in the world. And some are very candid about it. Here is what one theistic evolutionist had to say:

Of necessity, this evolutionary effort will also mean that some of the teachings will be translated almost beyond recognition, just as our skin is so unlike that of our scaly reptilian ancestors. Then, too, some passages will have so little utility that they will disappear, just as the primate tail was lost within our lineage of apes.

He would have the word of God evolve right along with everything else in his evolutionary scheme! That is the worst sort of compromise!

Revelation 2:18-29

The Letter to Thyatira

18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. 26 And he

that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The least important of the seven cities got the longest letter. Here is how Ramsay describes the city:

It lies in an open, smiling vale, bordered by gently sloping hills, of moderate elevation, but sufficient to overshadow the vale. It possesses no proper acropolis, and the whole impression which the situation gives is of weakness, subjection and dependence. The most careless and casual observer could never take Thyatira for a ruling city, or the capital of an Empire.

We know less today about Thyatira than we do about the other cities in Revelation 2-3. Much of what we do know comes from the coinage of the day.

What little importance Thyatira had came from its location. It was on a road connecting Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. That location made Thyatira a great commercial town. It was also *strategically* important because it was a gateway to Pergamum, the capital of the province.

Thyatira was a center of trade for dye and wool. Lydia, the seller of purple in Acts 16:14, came from Thyatira.

The city had a large number of trade guilds. In fact, Ramsay tells us that more trade-guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city.

These guilds held meals in the temples, where meat that had been offered to idols was served. Those at the meals often engaged in drunkenness and immorality. The Christians refused to participate and thus suffered commercially.

Lydia was almost certainly a member of one of these trade guilds, at least at some time in her past. Yet, again almost certainly, she must have left that guild after her conversion to Christ. We often speak of Lydia as an example of hos-

pitality and conversion, but if we were to hear the rest of the story I suspect we would see that Lydia was also an example of one who suffered greatly for Christ — perhaps losing her livelihood for his sake.

Thyatira had what Ephesus lacked. Verse 19 tells us that Thyatira rivaled Ephesus in busy Christian service, but it also tells us that Thyatira had the love that the Ephesians were lacking. In fact, Jesus tells them that their latest works exceeded their first works, which means that while Ephesus was backsliding, Thyatira was growing and maturing.

And yet verse 20 tells us that the church in Thyatira had a serious problem. There was a malignant cancer growing in the body, and they were permitting it to grow unchecked. Verse 19 tells us that they had been patient. Verse 20 tells us that perhaps they had been too patient!

The Ephesians could not bear false prophets, and yet they lacked love. Thyatira had love, but they tolerated false prophets. Neither group was right with Christ. We must always seek both love and truth, or we will eventually end up with neither.

Although the church in Thyatira faced some serious threats from without, this particular threat against the church in Thyatira came from within. There was always a temptation to put business interests ahead of Christ's interests, and apparently the false prophetess referred to in verse 20 as Jezebel wanted to compromise with the trade guilds by participating in their immorality and idolatry. And, worse, she was teaching and seducing Jesus' servants to do the same.

The confession of Caesar as lord was required before one could buy or sell. Some, no doubt, would compromise and make this confession for business reasons. Historians tell us that the slogan of those who compromised was "A man must live." You can imagine the rationalizations that must have gone on with some.

And yet the text implies that these compromisers saw themselves as deeply spiritual people. The "depths of Satan" in verse 24 is thought by many to refer to those who felt they had a duty to experience every kind of sin. Their goal was to wallow in sin yet keep their soul unaffected. And they could accomplish that feat, no doubt, because of what they saw as their own deep, deep spirituality. But their self-proclaimed spiritual **depth** was really spiritual **death**.

Jesus' judgment of this Jezebel is described in verses 22-23. The children in verse 23 are most likely her disciples. (Isaiah 57:3-8 seems to use the term in a

similar way.) Both she and her disciples will be judged. We have each been given a mind — it will be no excuse on that last great day to stand before Jesus and say that we were led astray by a false teacher. Those led astray here are being judged right along with the one who led them astray. Look at verse 23 — “I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” That is personal responsibility — “every one of you.”

Verse 21 tells us that they were given the opportunity to repent, but they did not. If she continued in her sin, verse 22 says she would be cast into a bed, along with her followers, and suffer great tribulation.

Two points here: First, as we saw with Rome’s lust for blood, sometimes God’s judgment of a person is just to give that person more of what he or she wants. Rome wanted blood? God gave them a river full of blood. Jezebel wanted to commit fornication? God casts her into a bed. Second, Jezebel and her followers will suffer tribulation — but this is different from the tribulation the saints were suffering. Jezebel’s tribulation was a judgment from God. This is the same distinction that we see in the suffering described by Peter.

*1 Peter 4:15-16 — But let none of you **suffer** as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man **suffer** as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

In verse 20, Jesus says, “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest... .” The RSV translates the verse this way: “But I have this against you, that you **tolerate**... .” The modern reader recoils at that sentence — how, they ask, can anyone be **too** tolerant? Tolerance, after all, has become the greatest virtue in our society.

We are told that we must tolerate everything today except intolerance. The United Nations Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance states that tolerance involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism. So, according to the UN, if you believe dogmatically in anything or if you believe anything is absolute, then you are intolerant and worthy of rebuke.

The world may see tolerance as the greatest virtue, but God does not see tolerance that way. We must never tolerate sin in the church or those who teach others to sin. If we do, then we fall under the condemnation of verse 20. As

Alexander Chase said, “the peak of tolerance is most readily achieved by those who are not burdened with convictions.”

We see in these verses how Jesus views tolerance, and not surprisingly it is quite different from how tolerance is viewed by the world. The church of Christ must be intolerant whenever Christ is intolerant, and the Bible tells us what we must never tolerate.

We must not be tolerant with regard to departures from the word of God. The world may see tolerance as the greatest virtue, but Jesus does not share the world’s opinion. His first criticism of this congregation was that they tolerated a false prophetess.

Note that verse 23 says that Jesus’ message is a warning to **all** the churches. Again, we see that the messages in these letters apply to **all** congregations of the church.

The Christians in Thyatira were having a very tough time. They were being persecuted and driven out of business by the Romans, but at the same time they were being invaded by false teachers working against them from within. Yes, they were tolerating her, but perhaps that was just because they had so much on their plate. Verse 24 hints at that — Jesus tells them to take care of the problem, but in verse 24 he says, “I will put upon you none other burden.” Instead, they were told to just hold fast what they already had until Jesus came.

What does that phrase mean at the end of verse 25 — “**till I come**”? I think that question is answered in verse 26 — “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works **unto the end**, to him will I give power over the nations.” This is not the end of all time; this is the end of **their** time. They were told hold fast until this day. They were to keep Jesus’ works until this day.

*Hebrews 4:10 — For he that is entered into his rest,
he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did
from his.*

Yes, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ on the last great day — but we will know our eternal fate just a moment after we take our last breath. We are to remain faithful unto death. That was the message of Revelation 2:10, and I think that is the same message here in Revelation 2:25-26.

Lesson 11

Last week we read Christ's letter to the church in Thyatira, and we were in verse 26 when class ended. Before we pick up again in that verse, let's pause to review a few things.

First, let's review the major themes we have seen so far in these letters. The themes in these letters will be the same themes we will see all throughout the book.

- Caesar or Christ? Life or Death? (Compromise)
- Things are not what they seem! (Man's view or God's view?)

Are these themes still relevant today? They could not be any more relevant!

Just this week, a Democratic candidate for Congress in Hawaii made the news. His name is Doug Chin, and it seems that back in 1995 he was a youth intern at the Oahu church of Christ. While there he gave a lesson that was recently unearthed and posted on YouTube. In that 1995 lesson, Chin said that one should follow what the Bible says rather than what their family says when it comes to issues such as gay marriage. And if your family disagrees with the Bible, then God is right and your family is wrong. Fast forward 20+ years, and Chin is in danger of having his political head cut off if he holds fast to those views. What should he do? Caesar or Christ? Chin now says that his views have evolved and that he is sorry "for making anyone feel like something was wrong with them because of who they loved or how they identify." **He chose Caesar.**

These themes are very relevant today. We are still faced with those same choices and those same issues. Thankfully, in this country at least, we are not in danger of losing our lives — but we are in danger of losing our livelihoods. And elsewhere in this world, the choice between Caesar or Christ can still lead to the executioner's block.

***Revelation 2:10** — Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Second, let's review a key verse from our study of Daniel and our study of Zechariah. It will also be a key verse in our study of Revelation. In fact, it is a key verse in the entire Bible — one of the most important prophecies ever given,

and, in many ways, the entire book of Revelation is an explanation of this prophecy.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

The kings in that verse are the Roman emperors of the first century that we have been studying. Rome was one of those kingdoms that would be broken and consumed by the eternal kingdom. The eternal kingdom is the church.

Now back to Chapter 2.

Jesus says in verses 26-27 that at this time he possesses power and authority over the nations. How do we know that? Because Jesus must possess that power and that authority to be able to give it to others — and verse 26 says that we will share that power over the nations.

When? When will we share in that power? We already do! 1st Corinthians 3:21-23 says that the world and all things are ours. Romans 5:17 tells us that we are now reigning in life through Jesus. This book is evidence that the early Christians already had power over nations because (as we will see later in the book) it was their prayers for vindication that caused God to topple the mountain of Rome.

As we just saw, Daniel had prophesied centuries earlier that the eternal kingdom, the church, would break in pieces and consume the Roman empire. Verses 26-27 are just a restatement of the prophecy from Daniel 2:44.

This great power, verse 26 tells us, belongs to the *church*. Again, **things are not what they seem!** To most observers, it was very clear that Rome was the only power on earth that exercised authority over the nations, and ruled them with a rod of iron, and smashed them like potsherds. And yet, Jesus has a very different view of things! Paul made the same point:

***1 Corinthians 1:27-29** — But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to*

nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

No one would have bet on the church in its battle with mighty Rome, but the church has an advantage shared by no one else — the church has God on its side. In fact, the weak things and base things from the world’s perspective are reigning in life with Christ (Romans 5:17).

But if the Christians were already reigning in life, why did Jesus promise them something here that they already had? That is a question we will ask often in this book, and the answer each time will be the same.

Sometimes a promise is simply an assurance that a present blessing will continue. Jesus’ promise here means that the blessing will continue, that it will be renewed, that it will be strengthened, and that it will be made manifest for all to see, including Rome (“And he shall rule them with a rod of iron”).

This same idea is also shown by the promise of the morning star in verse 28, which symbolizes a fresh start, or a renewal of peace, or a resurrection. **Although they were reigning with Christ now, that reign with Christ would be clear to all after their triumph over Rome.** They would soon experience new circumstances, something we will see beautifully unfolded as we progress through this book.

We see in these verses yet another theme of the book of Revelation: God makes all things new! The theme of renewal.

2 Corinthians 5:17 — Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Revelation 21:5 — And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

One more quote from Ramsay:

The Emperor, the Roman State with its patriotism, its religion, and its armies, the brutal populace of the cities, the Jews, and every other enemy of the Church, all are raging and persecuting and slaying to the utmost of their power. But their power is naught. The real Church stands outside of their reach, immeasurably above them, secure and triumphant, “eternal in the heavens,” while the individual Christians work out their victory in their own life and above all by their death; so that the more

successfully the enemy kills them off, the more absolute is his defeat, and the more complete and immediate is their victory.

Much of this book is devoted to making all of that manifest — manifest to the church and manifest to Rome. And what sort of situation do we expect to see after that has all occurred? “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

So far we have seen the loveless church in Ephesus, the persecuted church in Smyrna, the compromising church in Pergamum, and the corrupt church in Thyatira (where I am using those terms just as shorthand reminders).

In the next chapter we will see the dying church in Sardis, the loyal church in Philadelphia, and the lukewarm church in Laodicea.

Chapter 3

Revelation 3:1-6

The Letter to Sardis

1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. **2** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. **3** Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. **4** Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their gar-

ments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

No city in Asia had a more splendid history in past ages than did Sardis. 700 years earlier Sardis had been one of the greatest cities in the world. No city of Asia at that time showed such a contrast between past splendor and present decay as Sardis. Its history was the exact opposite of the record of Smyrna. Smyrna was dead and yet lived. Sardis lived and yet was dead. Here is how Ramsay described it:

Sardis was the city whose history conspicuously and pre-eminently blazoned forth the uncertainty of human fortunes, the weakness of human strength, and the shortness of the step that separates over-confident might from sudden and irreparable disaster. It was the city whose name was almost synonymous with pretensions unjustified, promise unfulfilled, appearance without reality, confidence that heralded ruin. Reputed an impregnable fortress, it had repeatedly fallen short of its reputation, and ruined those who trusted in it. ... The Church here is addressed, apparently with the set purpose of suggesting that the fortunes of ancient Sardis had been its own fortunes, that it had endured those sieges, committed those faults of carelessness and blind confidence, and sunk into the same decay and death as the city.

Sardis was really two cities. The original city stood 1500 feet up on a hill in a position that was almost impregnable. Later, the city spread to the foot of the hill as well. Thus, Sardis was really two cities - one on the hill and one at the foot of the hill.

The city of Sardis had been destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake in AD 17. Pliny describes that earthquake as the greatest disaster in human memory. Other cities, such as Philadelphia, were also affected but Tacitus names Sardis as having been the city most severely hit. The Roman emperor Tiberius helped rebuild the city through tax exemptions and large monetary donations.

We have already discussed the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars mentioned in verse 1.

In verse 1, Jesus says, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” The congregation in Sardis had a reputation among men of being alive, but that reputation was not accurate. Again we see one of our major themes — things are not what they seem! Men saw the congregation in Sardis one way, but God saw them in a completely different way. Men saw Sardis as being alive; God saw them as being dead.

With whom did Sardis have this reputation for being alive? We are not told, but most likely that reputation was believed by two groups. First, it was believed by other congregations that knew about Sardis’ past, but which had not kept up with current events. We are likely also aware of congregations from our own past about which we have fond memories, but then are shocked to learn that the congregation has drifted off into error.

But second, the reputation about the church in Sardis was likely believed by the church in Sardis itself. The change had likely occurred so gradually that they themselves did not recognize what had happened to them. They likely still saw themselves in light of their past glories rather than in light of their present reality. There is no deception like self-deception!

The church in Sardis had a reputation. Perhaps it was considered very progressive and contemporary like some today. Perhaps it was even well regarded in the larger community. **But things were not what they seemed! Where men saw a living thriving church, God saw a dead empty shell.**

In verse 2, Jesus told them that their works were not right in the sight of God. And if your works are not right in the sight of God, it does not matter how your works look in the sight of man. In fact, when the world has nothing but good things to say about you, it should be a warning that you have become too much like the world.

Luke 6:26 — Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Jesus had a message for Sardis. He told them in verse 2 to “be watchful,” and in verse 3 he said he would come as a thief.

This message had some historical significance to the city of Sardis. At one time, the phrase “to capture the acropolis of Sardis” was proverbially “to do the impossible” — but that impossible feat had occurred not once but twice in the history of Sardis.

Cyrus the Great of Persia has once besieged the city and had offered a reward to anyone who could find a way to enter the city. A soldier, who had seen a Sardinian soldier climb partially down the hill to retrieve a lost helmet, led a group up the hill following the same fault line at night. They discovered the battlements completely unguarded, and they took the city.

The city slipped into obscurity under Persian rule and later surrendered to Alexander, under whom it became a center of Greek culture. But history repeated itself, when Antiochus besieged the city after Alexander’s death and took the city using the same trick that had been used by Cyrus. Again, Sardis fell because there was no one there to watch. It is to these people that Jesus says “be watchful!”

The church in Smyrna was at peace and that peace had allowed them to drift into a coma and nearly die. They were resting in peace!

And that is a danger we must avoid today as well. Christ brought us peace with God — not peace with the world. We are never told to be at peace with worldliness. 1 Peter 2:11 says that a Christian is always at war. In Ephesians 6:14-17 we find that a Christian is always dressed for battle. Too many Christians have made peace with the world! **We cannot be at peace with God and at the same time be at peace with the world.**

It is very telling that there is no mention of persecution, either by the Jews or by the Romans, in this letter to the church in Sardis. We know the city had a large Jewish population. The earliest reference to Sardinian Judaism may perhaps be contained in Obadiah 20, which mentions a place of Jewish exile named Sepharad, which some scholars believe refers to Sardis. We know from other sources that the Jews were unusually influential in Sardis. The synagogue in Sardis was roughly the length of a football field.

Why wasn’t the church in Sardis being persecuted? Simple. They were not standing out. They were not standing up. Instead, they were blending in. When you live like an unbeliever, the unbelievers won’t persecute you. The

Jews likely also saw the church there as little different from the pagans, which meant they were seen as being no threat to the Jewish system in Sardis.

Satan is perfectly willing to attack the church from without, but he is much happier when he can attack the church from within. **Satan loves sleepy comfortable Christians who feel very much at home in this world!**

This letter has a profound message for the church. Being persecuted by Rome is certainly bad, but *not* being persecuted by Rome is much much worse! This letter is a message for those who thought they could overcome by compromising with Rome rather than by remaining faithful unto death.

2 Timothy 3:12 — Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Logically, that verse is equivalent to this statement: If you are **not** suffering persecution, then you are **not** living godly in Christ in Jesus. So a lack of persecution should be much more disturbing to us than the existence of persecution. Now certainly the level and type of persecution may change over the years, but the truth of 2 Timothy 3:12 will not change over the years. Godly people will be persecuted.

In verse 1, Jesus says, “I know thy works.” Jesus is not only interested in our works, he **knows** our works. We are not saved by our good works (Ephesians 2:8-9), but neither will we be saved if we have no good works (Ephesians 2:10). “Every good tree bears good fruit” (Matthew 7:17), which means that if we are not bearing good fruit, then we are not a good tree.

In verse 4, Jesus says, “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

Although our shorthand description of Sardis is the dying church, not everyone in that congregation fell into that category. There were a few faithful Christians left in that congregation. They had maintained their purity (when confronted by pressures both from without and within the church), and Jesus calls them worthy. They remain an encouragement to anyone who ever finds himself in a congregation that is drifting and who has no other option of where to attend.

In verse 5 we find that one’s name can be blotted out of the book of life. Those who overcome will not have their name blotted out of the book of life. We know what it means to overcome.

1 John 5:4 — *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

We are not told here whether any Christians were persecuted by the Jews in Sardis, but perhaps those in white garments were. If so, one of the threats against the Jewish Christians was that their names would be deleted from the register of names at the synagogue, thus causing them to lose the exemptions enjoyed by the Jews. Jesus is reminding them that there is another book in which their name is recorded, and if your name is to be blotted out, it is infinitely better to be blotted out of man's book than out of God's book!

What does verse 5 say about the doctrine of "once saved—always saved"? It tells us it is a false doctrine. If my name can be in the book of life and then be blotted out of that book, then I can be saved and later lost if I fail to be faithful to Christ.

One well known Calvinist commentator was "troubled lest someone interpret the concept of being blotted out of the book of life as indicating the possibility of people losing their salvation." **WHAT ELSE COULD IT POSSIBLY MEAN?** The only way Calvinism could possibly be true would be for God to use indelible ink in the book of life — and this verse confirms that God does not.

And don't common sense and logic support that view (along with countless Scriptures we could cite)? Jesus is speaking here to Christians who were compromising with the world. He was speaking to a congregation at risk of losing its candlestick. He was telling them to remain faithful unto death. **WHAT IF THEY DID NOT DO THAT?** What if a Christian compromised with Rome and started living like a pagan? What would happen? Jesus tells us here exactly what would happen. They would fall from grace and be lost.

One of the biggest problems I have with Calvinism is that logically it just does not make any sense! It defies causality. Rather than say that a Christian fell, the Calvinist will tell you that the person was never really a Christian to begin with. Is that what we see here in Revelation 2 and 3? Is Jesus writing to Christians or non-Christians? To those in the church or out of the church? These letters are directed to the church!

I had a discussion with one Calvinist about this verse, and the best argument he could come up with was that the verse doesn't say anyone's name was actually blotted out. **Let me tell you — when that is your best argument, it's time to rethink your complete system!**

Verse 5 ends with a wonderful promise for those who overcome. Jesus tells them that he will “will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” What does that mean? Matthew 10 answers that question.

Matthew 10:32-33 — Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

We confess Christ, and Christ confesses us. That promise is not just for the faithful in Sardis; it is a promise for us as well.

What is the lesson to the church from Christ’s letter to Sardis? Look at verse 2. The lesson for the church today is that we must remain watchful. As soon as we say that such and such would never happen to us, Satan sees his opportunity. We have just announced to him a part of our defenses where we have no guards, and he will seek to take advantage of that weakness.

1 Corinthians 10:12 — Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Satan will always attack us at our weakest point, and our weakest point is usually the point where we have no defenses, such as the unguarded battlements of Sardis. Watch!

Revelation 3:7-13

The Letter to Philadelphia

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my

name. 9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia should provide extra encouragement to congregations of the Lord's church that are small in number. Why? Because the letter to Smyrna and this letter to Philadelphia were the only two of the seven letters in which Jesus mentioned no weakness of the church — and these two congregations were most likely the smallest of the seven churches in terms of numbers. Jesus' encouragement to them is a reminder to us that faithfulness is more important than numbers — and although it is certainly possible to have both, the church must never sacrifice its faithfulness for the sake of numerical growth.

The AD 17 earthquake that struck Sardis also struck Philadelphia. Strabo, who wrote about two or three years after the earthquake, says that Sardis suffered

the most at the time of the quake, but he gave a remarkable picture of the long-continued terror at Philadelphia following the quake. Apparently, frequent aftershocks were experienced in Philadelphia for a long time afterwards. As a result, most of the people lived outside the city in huts. Jesus tells the Philadelphia Christians in verse 12 that they would go out no more.

The name of the city was changed to Neocaesarea and later to Flavia, but neither name lasted and the name Philadelphia was eventually restored. Jesus tells the Philadelphia Christians in verse 12 that they would receive a new name — and this name would be a lasting name!

Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities. The city was founded by colonists from Pergamum sometime between 159 and 138 BC to be a missionary city of Greek culture to the Lydia. And it worked! By AD 19, the Lydians had forgotten their own language and were all but Greek. In verse 8, Jesus tells the Christians living in this famous missionary city that an open door had been set before them.

Verse 8 tells us that they were very weak, and verse 9 tells us they faced fierce opposition — and yet Jesus himself had opened a door for them — and Jesus expected them to go through it! What does that say to us — who are neither weak nor persecuted as they were — when Jesus opens a door for us? We are surrounded by open doors! Jesus expects us to go through them, just as he expected the Philadelphia Christians to go through their open door. John will find himself standing before an open door in the first verse of Chapter 4!

The church in Philadelphia was weak in influence compared to its Jewish opposition. The synagogue of Satan, which we discussed before, is mentioned again in verse 9.

One lesson we can learn from verse 9 is that Satan is real and he is actively working against us using whatever tools he can find. Incredibly, some have read Revelation to teach that Satan is *not* at work in this world. I think those teachers would have had a hard time convincing the church in Philadelphia and the church in Smyrna of that idea!

Satan is mentioned six times in these two chapters. That alone should tell us something important. Jesus knows that Satan is real and that Satan is active. Jesus recognizes that his church is facing a vicious adversary, and he is giving us a warning.

2 Corinthians 2:11 — *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

1 Peter 5:8 — *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

Why is the Jewish opposition mentioned only here and in the letter to Smyrna? It was not because the other cities did not also have a Jewish opposition. Instead, I think we can infer the opposition was more intense in these two cities.

Verse 9 is a reminder that vengeance belongs to God: “behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” Someday every knee will bend and confess to God (Romans 14:11). That includes everyone who has ever raised their fist against God or against the people of God, be it Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, Nero, Domitian, or Mohammad. And the Jewish opposition will also find themselves among that group — not among God’s chosen people, but among those who fought against the plan of God and the people of God. “Vengeance is mine; **I will repay**, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

Lesson 12

When we ended last week, we had started looking at the letter to the church in Philadelphia, known as the *loyal* church.

In verse 10, Jesus promises to keep these Christians from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. What does that mean?

First, as we will soon see, the phrase “them that dwell upon the earth” is used in Revelation to describe those opposed to the church. Those in the church are pictured as dwelling in heaven even while they remain on the earth. That usage reminds us of something Paul wrote.

Colossians 3:2-3 — Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

The promise in verse 10 is a promise to all faithful Christians of that time — it is a promise that the coming judgment against Rome would **not** be a judgment against them.

But is verse 10 also a promise that the Christians would not **suffer** during that judgment? Not necessarily. We again need to see things from God’s perspective. God always has our *eternal* life in mind, while we sometimes focus only on our *earthly* life, which God tells us is like a vapor that vanishes away.

Jesus’ promise in verse 10 to **keep** these Christians did not necessarily mean they would be spared from suffering. In Ezekiel 9:1-8, God promised to *keep* his people, yet in Ezekiel 21:3-4, they experienced suffering and death. God provides **spiritual** deliverance. Once again we need to see things the way God sees things — we need spiritual eyes and a spiritual perspective.

But if Christians suffered during the judgment of Rome, how can the promise in verse 10 be true? My answer to that question is to point us back to two important words in verse 8 — “I know.”

Jesus knows who are his people and who are not his people.

John 10:14 — I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep.

2 Timothy 2:19 — *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*

And as for the innocent suffering during a judgment from God, here's a question: did children die in the great flood? Yes. Were those children being judged by the great flood? No. But they all died so, some might ask, what difference did it make? It made every difference imaginable! Why? Again, those same two words from the mouth of Christ — "I know!" We have a righteous and all-knowing judge.

In verse 11, Jesus tells them he will come quickly. We are still in the same time frame that we saw in the opening verses of the book. God's judgment against the Roman persecutors was coming soon.

We talked earlier about the false Calvinistic teaching of one saved, always saved, and we saw how that idea was disproved by the fact that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life. We see in verse 11 another clear refutation of that false teaching.

Can we lose our crown of life? Yes, according to verse 11. We can fail to hold fast to it, and we can let someone else take it from us. How? We can follow their false teaching as they lead us astray, or we can yield to temptation and follow them to do evil. The lesson is clear — we must hold fast to what we have so that our crown will not be taken from us and our name will not be blotted out of God's book.

Verse 12 is a beautiful promise, and particularly so to the church in Philadelphia. They had been hit by a terrible earthquake that crumbled the pillars in their buildings and caused them to live outside the city in tents away from the buildings. Jesus tells them, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

Ramsay: "The city which had suffered so much and so long from instability was to be rewarded with the Divine firmness and steadfastness."

What does it mean in verse 12 to write these **three** names on a Christian — the name of God, the name of the city of God, and the new name of Christ?

Why do you write your name on something you own? So that you won't lose it, and so that others will know that thing belongs to you. I think the answer is the same here.

2 Timothy 2:19 — *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*

Christians belong to God. Christians are citizens of the church (the new Jerusalem). Christians belong to Christ. They have a special relation with Christ. God claims us as his own special people (1 Peter 2:9) when he writes his name on us.

Later in this book we will see people with someone else's name written on them. And we will see Christians pictured as having the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on them to distinguish them from those opposed to Christ and wearing someone else's name.

I have made the point before that the "church of Christ" is our description, not our name. That is why we often write "church" with a lower case "c." We are the church that belongs to Christ — the church of Christ. He has written his name on us!

Most people out in the world see us as just another denomination, and they think that "Church of Christ" is our name, just as some other group might call themselves a "Baptist Church" or a "Methodist Church." Here is a good way to start a conversation with such a person:

The story was told of a large, prominent denomination in town that was raising money from community businesses to build a new building. They approached a business man who was a Christian, and he made them an offer. "I will give you \$1000 if you put up a sign in front saying 'This is a church of Christ.'" "We can't do that," they said, "this is a [BLANK] church" (where the blank was filled in with the name of a local denomination). "Well," the Christian business man responded, "I'll still give you a \$1000 if you will put up a sign saying 'This is NOT a church of Christ.'"

Would they be willing to put up such a sign? Would they be willing to announce to the world that they are not a church that belongs to Christ?

When you understand that story, you understand the non-denominational nature of the church! It's really not that hard. We belong to Christ Jesus, and Christ Jesus has written his name on us! We are the Lord's church!

The new Jerusalem in verse 12 is the church, the city of God — the dwelling place of God and God's people. In place of the old city of Jerusalem, where the

people of God once dwelt, there is now a *new* Jerusalem where the people of God now dwell — and that new Jerusalem is the church.

Notice that the new Jerusalem in verse 12 comes down out of heaven from God. As Daniel told us in Daniel 2, Jesus tells us here — the church is not a product of man. It is the eternal kingdom not made with human hands. It was created and established by God.

Psalm 127:1 — Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.

That verse should be placed as a warning on the front sign of every denomination!

And one thing we know with certainty from verse 12 — the new Jerusalem is **not** heaven. How do we know that? Because verse 12 tells us that the new Jerusalem **comes down out of heaven**. They must be two separate things for that to be true. We should also keep that same distinction in mind when we get to 21:2 — “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down from God out of heaven**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Why does Jesus refer in verse 12 to his “new name”? What does that mean? We discussed that before — to have a new name means that you have a new status. We saw that on earth when Octavian became the Emperor Augustus. But that was nothing compared with what Jesus had done. He had come to this earth, lived a perfect life, and finished the task God had given him. Jesus now reigns as king over all creation and over his eternal kingdom of prophecy that was established in Acts 2. The new name in verse 12 belonged to Christ — not to any earthly ruler.

Revelation 3:14-22

The Letter to Laodicea

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold

or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Laodicea was the only congregation about which Jesus had nothing good to say about their present condition. The Laodicean church is the only one of the seven churches that is absolutely and wholly condemned. Not even a faithful remnant is left that kept itself pure and white as in Sardis, the dead church.

But even here there was hope. Jesus says in 3:19 that he loves them, and Jesus suggests in 3:21 that they could still overcome if they repented. But there is no suggestion here that such would occur.

Doesn't it tell us a lot about our Savior that he saved this letter for last? He had nothing good to say, and so he was not in any hurry to get to them. He wanted to have something good to say about them!

According to Calvin, some people were created just to fuel the fires of hell. Does that sound anything like the God we serve? Does that sound anything at all like the God we read about in the Bible?

Ezekiel 33:11 — Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Jesus had nothing good to say about Laodicea, and it seems he was in no hurry to get to them!

Here is how Ramsay begins his description of Laodicea:

There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes, and hardly any very strongly marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. Those were the qualities that contributed to make it essentially the successful trading city, the city of bankers and finance, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise.

The city of Laodicea was founded in 250 BC by Antiochus II and named after his wife, Laodice, whom he later divorced.

The city was positioned on the most important road in Asia, which connected Ephesus to Syria. This road made the city a great commercial and strategic center. The peace provided by Rome allowed Laodicea to flourish.

Laodicea was proud and felt that it had need of nothing. When the city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 61, the people refused Roman help and rebuilt the city on their own.

It was one of the wealthiest cities in the world and was a center of banking and finance — yet Jesus told them in verse 17 that they were **poor**.

The city was a center of clothing manufacture and was famous for its soft, violet-black, glossy wool — yet Jesus told them in verse 17 that they were **naked**.

The city was a medical center and housed a medical school that was famous for its ointment for the eyes and ears — and yet Jesus told them in verse 17 that they were **blind**.

This congregation was proud and contented — and Jesus did not have a single good thing to say about them! He told them in verse 18 that if they wanted to be truly rich, truly clothed, and truly able to see, then they must come to him for those things.

Those in Smyrna were destitute, and Jesus told them in 2:9 that they were rich. These people in Laodicea were rich, and yet Jesus tells them that they are destitute. How often is the truth just the opposite of what men believe?

***Proverbs 13:7** — There is that maketh himself rich,
yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor,
yet hath great riches.*

Once again we see a familiar theme of this book. **Things are not what they seem! We must always strive to see things as God sees them!**

In verse 14, Jesus is referred to as “the Amen.” What does that mean?

It is likely pointing us back to Isaiah 65:16, which in the KJV speaks of the “God of truth,” but literally is “the God of the Amen.” As we know, the word “amen” is an acknowledgment that something is valid and binding. So, when applied to a person, it indicates someone who is trustworthy — someone whose word is valid and binding. That view is confirmed by what follows next — Jesus is the “the faithful and true witness.” These titles present a sharp contrast between the trustworthiness of Christ and the unfaithfulness of the Laodicean church.

The description of Christ in verse 14 as “the beginning of the creation of God” refers to Jesus as the *source* of the creation. Jesus is God, and he was there from the beginning (John 1:1-3). Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). It was by Jesus that God made the worlds (Hebrews 1:2). Nowhere in the Bible are we ever told to worship any part of God’s creation, yet we are told to worship Christ. Jesus was not created, but rather Jesus is the source of all creation.

***Colossians 1:16** — For by him were all things created,
that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and
invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or
principalities, or powers: all things were created by
him, and for him.*

That connection between Colossians 1:16 and Revelation 3:14 is interesting.

Laodicea was located in the Lycus valley. Two other cities in that valley are mentioned in the New Testament: Hierapolis and Colossae. By the time the letter to the Colossians was written, there were churches in all three of these cities (Colossians 4:13). Colossians 4:16 tells us there was an “epistle from Laodicea.”

Many commentators believe that the reason Colossians 1:16 and Revelation 3:14 are so similar is that they were addressed to similar and related situations. They suggest that the peculiar mixture of Judaism and Gnosticism that was a problem in Colossae was also a problem in Laodicea, and, if so, it seems to have perhaps been a greater problem in Laodicea.

Commentators differ widely on their interpretation of verses 15-16: “thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

Let’s start with what most **agree** on — most agree that the references to cold water, hot water, and lukewarm water are based on actual water conditions in and around Laodicea. And that makes sense. We have already seen how many of Jesus’ statements in these letters are based on features of the cities in which the congregations were located.

One thing is known for sure about Laodicea from the extra-Biblical sources: Laodicea had a problem with its water supply. Excavation of the city’s terra cotta pipes reveal thick lime deposits, which suggest heavy contamination in the water supply.

Laodicea lacked its own water supply, having no direct access to the cold water of the mountains or the hot water of the nearby springs in Hierapolis to the north. In contrast to its claims to self-sufficiency, Laodicea had to pipe in its water. Although much of the aqueduct from the south was underground, nearer the city it came through stone barrel pipes, which made it vulnerable to any intended besiegers who wished to cut off the city’s water supply. More important, this water had grown lukewarm by the time of its arrival to the city. Colossae, by contrast, had a perpetual supply of cold water from the mountains. And where the water of Hierapolis was hot and mineral laden, the water of Laodicea was lukewarm and mineral laden. As a result, we are told that Laodicea became well known for its tepid and revolting water, which almost everyone found repulsive.

So where is the big disagreement about verses 15-16? The big disagreement can be summed up in this way: Was the **cold** water intended to represent a **good** thing or a **bad** thing? Our answer to that question will then determine our view about the point Jesus was making in these two verses — was Jesus condemning the Laodiceans for not being **decisive**, or was Jesus condemning them for not being **useful**?

Let's look at each of those two possibilities.

For many years, the most common view was that the hot and the cold in verse 15 refers to the people's spiritual condition.

The Greek word used for "hot" (which occurs only here) is *zestos*. That word has the same root word as the Greek word for "fervent," as in the phrase "fervent in spirit," which we find in Acts 18:25 and in Romans 12:11.

The Greek word used here for "cold" is more difficult — it is not used elsewhere to describe a spiritual condition. In fact, the only other place it is found is in Matthew 10:42, where it describes cold water. (Another word for "cold" is used in Matthew 24:12 to describe those whose love shall wax cold.)

The biggest problem some see with this view is Jesus' statement in verse 15: "I would thou wert cold or hot." Why, they ask, would Jesus ever want someone to be spiritually cold? Two responses.

First, it is logically incorrect to read verse 15 and conclude that Jesus wants anyone to be spiritually cold. Jesus doesn't like cold or lukewarm Christians — he just prefers one over the other. Cold is bad, but it is not as bad as lukewarm.

Second, as to why lukewarm is worse than cold — ask yourself this question: who has done more harm to the church — those within or those without? And a related question — why does the media react with such undisguised glee when they are able to show the hypocrisy of someone who claims to be a Christian and yet has been caught in some terrible sin?

The lukewarm Christian was then and is now the curse of the church. How often has the "hypocrites in the church" complaint been used as an excuse against the gospel call. (Yet I recall what Marion Williams once said in response to that complaint: "I had rather spend an hour with those hypocrites on Sunday than an eternity with them in hell!")

A lukewarm Christian is not actively against Christ — instead, his carefree attitude shows no concern for Christ, and he does great damage to the Lord's

body. Do we have any lukewarm Christians here? Most congregations do — but you rarely find them in Sunday school!

We might be tempted to think that a cold Christian would be worse than a lukewarm Christian, but not according to Jesus. At least the cold Christian has made a decision — it was the wrong decision, but at least he has acted. The cold Christian has left the church. But not so with the lukewarm Christian. They hang around and cause all sorts of trouble.

We can look to the denominational world for an example of hot, cold, and lukewarm. In a recent vote to ordain a gay bishop in the Episcopalian religious group (**not** “church”), some voted yes and some voted no. But did you notice that there were also two abstentions? I have more respect for those that voted yes than for those who abstained, which is not to say that I have much respect for either group!

Perhaps the message of verse 15 is that Jesus would rather us be actively opposed to him than for us to say we are on his side and yet live a life of total indifference to his will.

So what then is the **other view** of verses 15-16? The other view is that the cold water is not intended by Jesus to refer to spiritually cold people, but is instead intended to refer to one of two ways in which water can be useful — water can be hot or water can be cold, and each is useful — hot water for bathing and cold water for drinking. But of what use is lukewarm water? None.

Under this second view, Jesus’ criticism in verses 15-16 is not that the church is indecisive (unable to decide whether they are for or against Christ), but rather that the church is ineffective and not useful to God.

So which view is correct? I once strongly preferred the first view, but today I would have to say I’m not sure which view is correct. Both views make fair criticisms of the church in Laodicea — it was unwilling to make a stand for Jesus, preferring instead to keep one foot in the church and one foot in the world. But it was also ineffective and not useful to God. In fact, those two things go together, which is why it is hard to choose between these two views.

Perhaps the ambiguity is here for a reason. Perhaps Jesus wanted us to draw both of these lessons from these two verses. Whichever view we choose, on this we can all agree — we do not want to ever be in the lukewarm category!

Were these people without hope? Not at all. Verse 19 tells us that Jesus wanted them to repent. Verse 20 pictures Jesus as standing at the door of his own church and knocking. Jesus wanted to be let back in to his own church!

2 John 9 — *Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.*
[ESV]

Ezekiel 23:35 — *Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.*

It seems many religious groups today have forgotten God in their attempt to go on ahead of God, and in doing so they have cast the word of God behind their backs.

The letter to Laodicea has a message for the church of any age, but that message is particularly strong for the modern Christian. One commentator writes:

Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 20th century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity that is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion.

I mentioned Marion Williams a moment ago. One of her favorite authors was the Scottish theologian George MacDonald (1824-1905). He was a Scottish preacher, and C.S. Lewis once said that he never wrote a book in which he did not quote MacDonald. Here is what George MacDonald had to say about the Laodiceans:

You must note that in this last message to the Laodiceans, he has not a word of praise for them—not a word of praise. Almost all the rest have some praise given them, but there is not a word of praise for these halfhearted Laodiceans. They want to go comfortably on, and not to be troubled much, and they will get into heaven as they please, in some sleepy way or other.

Neither cold nor hot: What a word almost of contempt! Only there is no contempt in Him. Using our language it sounds like it, but I call it “indignation,” and the strong effort of His heart of love to make them feel what a low condition they are in. “Neither cold nor hot—I won’t have you; I will spew you out of my mouth.” That Christ should speak like that to us and we deserve it—who will endure it? But, oh! it is of the mercy of God that He speaks to us like that.

He speaks very plainly what He thinks of them, and He shows very clearly how His thought about them ran counter altogether to their own judgment of themselves. “Oh, we are all right! We accept this and that doctrine; we believe so-and-so; we are all right.” Or, on the other hand: “We have broken free from the traditions of the elders; we have got a better way, and so we are all right.” Are you doing the things that Jesus Christ tells you? If not, you are all wrong. Your ideas, your opinions, your systems, let them be as correct as astronomy, and you are no better, but probably much the worse for them.

It’s hard to think of much that needs to be added to that description of this sad letter to the Laodicean congregation.

We ask again — was their situation hopeless? Not at all. Jesus still loved them, as we see in verse 19. In fact, that is why Jesus was telling them these things that they needed to hear, as we also see in verse 19. If they repented, they could still overcome and reign with Christ, as we see in verse 21.

And when we have trouble overcoming, verse 21 reminds us where we should look — we should look to Jesus, the perfect example of one who overcame. “I also overcame,” Jesus tells us.

We said the Laodiceans were not useful to God, and they were not, but as with so many things, God can turn evil into something good, and he did so with this congregation. What is that good thing that God created? He created this letter, which forever serves as a warning to others that they should not follow the example of the Laodiceans. Perhaps it just proves the old adage that, for some of us, it may be that our purpose in life is just to serve as a warning to others!

And one last thing about the Laodiceans — think for a moment about the place of this letter in the entire book of Revelation. In the verses that immediately follow this letter, John will see a wonderful vision about Christ’s love and care for his victorious church. Rome will be weighed in the scales and found wanting. And would Laodicea take part in that great victory? Not unless they repented. If they stayed as they were, they would sit on the sideline as Jesus and his church went by without them. What could be more sad than that! To have come so close, and yet fallen short!

The church in Laodicea is known as the *lukewarm* church, but perhaps a better shorthand description for them would be the *losing* church — the church that fell short and missed out on the great victory.

Conclusion to Chapters 2-3

So where are we at the end of Chapter 3? What is next for John?

The letters to the seven churches are complete. Each church was challenged to overcome.

The situation looks bleak at this point in history. The church seems unable to resist the hostile worldly powers that surround it. But, history is not determined by political powers. As we are about to see, history is determined by God.

The question now is, what will be the fate of God's enemies and what will be the fate of God's people?

Satan, as usual, will try to thwart God's will, and Satan's goal as always is to extinguish the church. But with regard to Rome, Satan's time is short!

Revelation 12:12** — Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, **because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

The book of Revelation is a book of judgment. In the first part of the book, Christ pronounces judgments against the church's enemies from within. In the second part of the book, Christ will pronounce judgments against the church's enemies from without. What comparisons can we see between these two judgments?

In each case, Jesus tells his listeners that the way they see themselves is really the opposite of the way they really are! One church thought it was rich; Jesus said they were poor. One church thought it was poor; Jesus said they were rich. Rome thought it had all the power; Jesus will tell them that they are powerless. Rome thought the church was of no consequence; Jesus will tell them that the church is infinitely more powerful and more important than Rome.

There is a message in here for us as well. To see ourselves correctly, we must see ourselves as God sees us, and the best way to do that is to see ourselves through the word of God.

As scarce as truth is, the supply has always exceeded the demand. Jesus likely gave some of these people more truth than they wanted! They no doubt did not enjoy seeing themselves through God's eyes. They would much rather have heard pleasant things from Christ, but Christ told them the truth, which is what they desperately needed to hear.

This situation is not new. Consider:

***Jeremiah 5:30-31** — A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?*

***Isaiah 5:20** — Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*

***Isaiah 30:9-11** — That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.*

How do we find out today what we **need** to hear? We quit listening to man and the world, and we start reading God's word. He has told us all that we need to hear. Our job is to listen to that message and then to heed that message.

One final comment about the seven letters — each of them begins with the same phrase: "I know." We understand that Jesus is the head of the church, but sometimes we act like he is a distant monarch. These letters paint a very different portrait of our king.

Jesus is intimately concerned about his church. The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ and as the bride of Christ. Jesus knows what is going on in his church, and he cares very deeply about what is going on in his church — and that should be a great source of comfort for us today when the church seems to be in such turmoil all around the world. Does Jesus care? Yes, he cares. I know he cares. Jesus knows what is happening in his church.

Lesson 13

Chapter 4

Revelation 4:1

1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

We should all pause for just a moment to thank God that heaven has a **door**! And we should be thankful that heaven's door is an **open** door! Jesus Christ opened that door for us! McGuiggan says he's glad it's not a window! It's not just for **looking** through. It's for **walking** through!

Chapters 4 and 5 go together, and together they set the stage for all that follows. McGuiggan makes a great point here. He says that the central message of Chapters 4 and 5 is found in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

- In Chapter 4, we are told to believe in God. In Chapter 5, we are told to believe also in Jesus.
- In Chapter 4, we see the power of God. In Chapter 5, we see the love of God.
- In Chapter 4, we see God as Creator and King. In Chapter 5, we see God as Redeemer.
- In Chapter 4, we see God far above all human interference. In Chapter 5, we see God made vulnerable but victorious.

- In Chapter 4, God draws aside the curtain of heaven and gives to John a vision of the majestic throne of the Ruler of the Universe.

This voice in verse 1 is the same voice that John heard in 1:11 (“as of a trumpet”), which means that this is again the voice of Christ.

John sees an open door, but John is not invited just to **look** in through the door but he is invited to **enter** through the door.

We have already seen two earlier doors in our study of Revelation. The church at Philadelphia had an open door set before them in 3:8, and the Laodiceans closed their door in Jesus’ face in 3:20 — but Jesus continued to stand at that door and knock!

In 1:19, Jesus told John to “write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” In verse 1 here Jesus tells John that he is about to see “things which must be hereafter.” In both cases, the word “hereafter” seems to be in contrast to the letters in Chapters 2-3, which showed the present condition of those congregations.

How long “hereafter”? Verse 1 of Chapter 4 doesn’t tell us, but verses 1 and 3 of Chapter 1 tell us it would be soon (as do 22:6, 22:10, 22:12, and 22:20). Let’s keep our all-important time frame in mind as we begin Chapter 4.

We are about to see in this vision prophecies of events that will occur on earth. Verse 1 tells us that these events on earth have their origin in heaven! The true view of history is the view from the throne of God, and that is the view that John is about to see.

“I will show thee,” Jesus says in verse 1. From the very first verse of this great vision starting in Chapter 4, God is inviting us to see things as He sees them. We are being asked to see things with spiritual eyes. If we ever want to truly understand something, we need to let Jesus show that thing to us.

In verse 1, John is told to come up hither. That command is directed to John, not to the entire church. Why is that distinction important? Because premillennialists teach that verse 1 is describing the secret rapture of the church. It’s so secret it’s found nowhere in the Bible! It’s certainly found nowhere in verse 1. That command to come hither is directed to John in the first century, **not** to the church at the end of the world.

Revelation 4:2-3

2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

This scene of heaven opened and God upon the throne was said by George Frideric Handel to have been the inspiration for his famous *Messiah* oratorio.

In John 1:18, the apostle wrote: “No one has seen God at any time.” In Exodus 33:20, God said to Moses: “You cannot see My face; for no man can see Me and live.” In 1 Timothy 6:16 we read of the one “who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see.”

How then could John have seen God? The answer is given in the opening part of verse 2 – John “was in the Spirit.” He was experiencing a spiritual vision just as had been experienced by Isaiah and Ezekiel before him. John was not seeing God with his physical eyes but rather with his spiritual eyes.

John not only sees the throne, but he sees the one seated upon the throne. Ezekiel described the occupant of the throne in Ezekiel 1:26 as having “a likeness as the appearance of man,” but John portrays no form. The text makes no attempt to describe God in any human shape. Instead the throne’s occupant is described in terms of brilliant light cast from precious stones.

In verse 2 we see another important theme of the book of Revelation — **Behold, a throne!**

The word “throne” is found thirty nine times in the book of Revelation, more times than in any other book of the Bible. It is found seventeen times just in Chapters 4 and 5 — which is more times than the word appears in the rest of the New Testament. The “One seated on the throne” is John’s favorite description of God. Verse 8 will confirm that the occupant of this throne is the Lord God Almighty.

The message is clear — **the throne that rules the world is *not* in Italy. It’s not in Rome.** This vision begins with a clear depiction of the absolute sov-

ereignty of God. All things must be viewed with regard to their relation to the throne of God. **If we want to see things as they really are, we need to view them from the perspective of the throne of God.**

Psalm 47:8 — God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

Rome thought it was all very impressive. The Roman emperors thought that they too were very impressive, with all of their pomp and pageantry. The city of Rome was filled with impressive palaces and imperial buildings. And it was all nothing. In fact, it was all less than nothing when compared with the throne of God and the worship of God in the heavenly court.

Caesar did not create anything. Caesar was not eternal; he was created. Caesar did not redeem anyone with his blood. Caesar had no hope to offer because Caesar himself had no hope, being without God in the world.

The book of Revelation has a question for the emperor of Rome — where are your clothes! In truth, the emperor has no clothes. And just like the little girl in that story, Christians need to have the courage to proclaim that truth to the world, both then and now — the emperor has no clothes! He may look impressive, and he may act like he has much to offer — but all he has are empty promises! And that is true of anything or anyone that would seek to share the throne of God.

What about the stones mentioned in verse 3? Jasper is a translucent rock crystal. Carnelian (KJV: sardine) is a blood red stone that is also called sardius after the city of Sardis where it is found. In Exodus 28:17, these stones are in the breastplate of the high priest. Perhaps the white jasper represents God's holiness and righteousness, while the red sardius denotes his judgments. This view would fit nicely with Psalm 89:14, where we read that righteousness and judgment are the foundation of God's throne.

Many commentators get bogged down trying to find elaborate meanings in details of this book such as the choice of stones. And, without denying there may very well be an elaborate meaning to some or all of these details, we need to remember that this book has rightly been called an oil painting from God. Revelation is intended to have an *emotional* impact on the reader. That impact is obscured when we focus unduly on the brush strokes. Here is how one commentator described Chapter 4:

This vision is filled with movement and sounds and color. The vision is a flood of Old Testament symbols and experiences from

Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic visions. ... What is important for those who read this text is to sense and feel the color, movement, and wonder of the total scene. Individual parts in themselves are baffling, but the large scene is what we must try to see.

Listen to what Hailey says on this point:

To the literalistic mind, lacking the power of imagination, Revelation will forever be a sealed book; to the speculative and visionary mind the book will provide fuel to inflame far-fetched assumptions and conjectures which totally miss the truth. But to the mind prepared by the rest of the Bible for reality in picture and action, impressions of truth will be made that give strength for victory in every conflict of life.

As with the parables, many of the minor descriptive details may not be intended to carry a special significance of their own. Here the details serve to paint a vivid picture of beauty and majesty. Later we will find vivid pictures of horror and death.

Remember that John was standing before the throne of God! Do we really think that John was puzzling over why the stones were white?

In verse 3 we see a rainbow that is around the throne. Ezekiel also saw a rainbow:

***Ezekiel 1:28** — As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.*

We are also reminded of Psalm 104:

***Psalm 104:2** — Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.*

Why a rainbow? It certainly adds to the beauty of the scene, but the rainbow is also a reminder — a reminder of God's mercy and a reminder that God keeps his covenants.

Very soon we will see in this visions some terrifying judgments directed in particular against Rome and directed in general against any who would persecute God's people. And this rainbow is also a reminder that God's goal here is not to destroy his creation but is rather to save it.

A quick aside here: It has been rightly observed for millennia that homosexual behavior is a **corrupting** and **corrosive** influence in any society. When I see evidence of that corruption today, I think of a verse from Titus.

Titus 1:15 — Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

That verse tells us that those who are defiled will seek to corrupt **anything**. And we see much of that corruption in the world around us today, including, for example, their corruption of the marriage bond. But, as bad as that is, there is another thing they have corrupted that in my mind is just as bad — the homosexuals have corrupted the **rainbow** by hijacking it to become their own symbol!

Not long ago, the White House was lit in rainbow colors — not to celebrate the mercy and the covenants of God — but to celebrate gay marriage. **How far have we fallen!** You have to be pretty far gone to corrupt a rainbow, but they have managed to do it! “Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.” Including rainbows!

But despite what man may attempt to do it, the beautiful rainbow of God will forever remain a sign in the sky that **God keeps his promises** — and that fact should be a particularly important thing to remember for anyone marching under a rainbow in a gay pride parade! How can they ever claim ignorance of that fact that God does what he says when they have marched under a **rainbow** — **the very symbol of God's faithfulness to his covenants!** We can think about that the next time we have their rainbow flag waved in our faces.

Now back to our regularly scheduled Bible class!

Revelation 4:4

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and

twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

These twenty-four elders appear several times in the book of Revelation. Here in Chapter 4 and later in Chapter 14 they sit around the throne of God. In Chapters 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19, they worship and praise God. Who are they? What or whom do they represent? Let's consider the clues.

Our first clue is that they are wearing golden crowns. These crowns tell us that the twenty-four elders represent someone or something that is royal. Yes, they are sitting around the throne of God, which tells us that they are not ruling over anything by their own might or power, but they are shown here as rulers. In fact, that they are shown as **sitting** (rather than standing) around the throne of God further emphasizes their royal nature in verse 4. So the twenty-four elders represent someone or something that is royal.

Our second clue is that they are clothed in white garments. Revelation 19:8 tells us what this means: "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: **for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.**" White garments are pure garments. Remember Revelation 3:4 — "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled their garments;** and **they shall walk with me in white:** for they are worthy." So the twenty-four elders represent someone or something that is pure and unblemished.

Our third clue comes from the number twenty-four, and what that number represented under the old covenant. First Chronicles 24:1-19 tells us that there were twenty-four orders in the Levitical priesthood. Thus, these twenty-four elders represent someone or something that had a priestly role.

Our fourth clue also comes from the number twenty-four, which is twelve times two. The number twelve is a symbol for the people of God, both under the old covenant, with the twelve tribes, and under the new covenant, with the twelve apostles. Why twenty-four here rather than twelve? Perhaps because these twenty-four elders are intended to represent the people of God under both the old and the new covenant. That is, these twenty-four elders depict **all** of God's people with no one left out.

So let's review our clues. The twenty-four elders represent something that is royal, something that is pure, something that is priestly, and something that includes all of God's people, with no one left out. If anyone is still puzzling

over what this is, then we need a review starting all the way back in Daniel!

The twenty-four elders represent the church!

1 Peter 2:9 — But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Ephesians 5:27 — That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Acts 2:47 — And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The church is a royal priesthood. The church is without spot or blemish. The church includes all of God's people, with no one left out. Who else could these twenty-four elders possibly represent? They represent the church of Christ — the eternal kingdom made without hands.

The church of Christ is a royal priesthood, just as Christ himself is both our King and our High Priest. When we studied Zechariah 6:9-15 we saw the High Priest being crowned, something that could only happen after the Old Law had passed away. The church is a royal priesthood.

Let's pause for another quick aside — this time about the number **two**. We are going to see that number several times in this book, and sometimes its appearance will be a bit subtle — as it is here in that twenty-four is twelve times two. Why, we asked, was the number for God's people multiplied by two? Although the number two in this book is easy to overlook (as I largely did the first three times I taught this book), after further study I think the usage of two in this book is an important symbol. Why?

First, think about the themes we have seen so far: Caesar or Christ? Life or death? Man's view or God's view? Old or new? Throne of God or throne of Satan? Each of those themes can be expressed as a **choice** between **two** things. We either choose one or we choose the other. I think that one reason we see the number two in this book is that it is a reminder of the choice we all have to make, and in particular it is a reminder of the choice the first century Christians had to make — a choice that in their case could lead to a quick execution.

But second, there is something about Rome itself that should resonant with the number two. In fact, in Revelation 13 we will see Rome represented as two

beasts — a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. What is it about Rome that would cause God to depict it as **two beasts**? Romulus and Remus.

Since ancient times, the image of the twins brothers Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf has been a symbol of the city of Rome and the Roman people. According to Roman mythology, Romulus killed Remus and then went on to found the city of Rome and the Roman Kingdom. Coins minted at the time of this book showed the twins living as two beasts, being nursed by a wolf.

As we work our way through this book, let's be on the lookout for other uses of the number two. Each time it appears it is a reminder of the themes we are seeing in this amazing book.

Revelation 4:5-6a

5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6a And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal:

Verse 5 continues with John's incredible vision of God's throne.

Thunder and lightning and voices are commonly used to depict God's wrath and his power to judge. Recall, for example:

***Exodus 19:16** — And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that **there were thunders and lightnings**, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and **the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud**; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.*

***Psalms 18:12-14** — At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. **The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice**; hail stones and coals of*

fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.

Psalm 77:18 — The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.

Thunder and lightning also serve another purpose in this book — they are used to announce things of unusual importance in the book. For example, thunder and lightning precede:

- The breaking of the seventh seal in 8:5.
- The blowing of the seventh trumpet in 11:19.
- The pouring of the seventh bowl of wrath in 16:18.

Here the thunder and lightning announce the entirety of the great vision that John is about to see and record.

The “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne” are “the seven Spirits of God.” We talked about that image before. The seven Spirits of God most likely represent the Holy Spirit, with “seven” being used as a symbol for the perfection of the Spirit. After the seven letters in Chapters 2-3, the number seven here may also be a reminder that what follows is being done for the church.

Verse 6 introduces yet another recurring theme in the book of Revelation — **the sea**. The word “sea” occurs twenty six times in the book of Revelation. As with the word “throne,” we need to pay close attention to the word “sea.”

What does the sea represent in the Bible?

First, the sea depicts separation. In Solomon’s temple a sea stood between the priest and the holy place where God dwelt (2 Chronicles 4:2-6). That there is a sea before the throne of God is a reminder that God is the creator and we are the creation. The sea is a reminder, as Swete wrote, of “the vast distance which, even in the case of one who stood in the door of heaven, intervened between himself and the throne of God.”

Yes, God longs to dwell with men, and God does dwell with men in the church. And yes, Christ, the perfect Son of God, walked among us. And yes, we can boldly approach the throne of grace through Christ (Hebrews 4:16). But, we must never forget that we are but dust, and that it was God our creator who breathed life into that dust. There is forever a vast distance between the Cre-

ator and his creation, and if God did not traverse that vast distance on our behalf it would never be traversed.

The image of a separating sea was an image that must have struck home with John! He was in exile on an island.

In addition to separation, the sea is used in the Bible to represent something else — the wicked.

Isaiah 57:20-21 — But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

The sea in Revelation is often a reservoir of evil. For example, it is out of the sea that the terrible seven-headed blasphemous beast of Chapter 13 will arise.

But the sea before the throne of God is not a restless and troubled sea full of blasphemous beasts — instead, it is a **calm** sea. Verse 6 describes it as a sea of glass. A calm sea of glass depicts God's power over the wicked. He can take their wild and restless sea, with all of its mire and dirt, and turn it into a sea of glass.

So the sea here in verse 6 depicts the transcendence of God over his creation, and it depicts God's power over the wicked.

When we get to the end of this book, here is what we will find:

Revelation 21:1 — And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

No more sea means no more separation and no more wicked. When will that great day come? Perhaps it's already here! How many wicked people are in the body of Christ? And how much separation is there in the body of Christ between God and his people? More on that when we get to Chapter 21. Meanwhile, let's be on the lookout for the word "sea" in this book.

Revelation 4:6b-8

6b and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like

a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

As with the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures that we meet here in Chapter 4 will reappear later in the book. We will see them again in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, and 19.

Who are the four living creatures? They may be the **cherubim**. In the Old Testament, God was pictured as sitting enthroned above the cherubim that sat atop the ark of the covenant, and God was often addressed that way in prayer.

*2 Kings 19:15 — And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, **which dwellest between the cherubims**, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.*

*Psalm 99:1 — The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: **he sitteth between the cherubims**; let the earth be moved.*

We are also told that the cherubim are God's chariot on which he rides swiftly to judgment — an image that is particularly appropriate in the context of Revelation Chapter 4.

Psalm 18:10 — And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.

Another place we see God riding upon the cherubim is in Ezekiel 10 — and there we find a similar description to what we see here in Revelation 4:7.

Ezekiel 10:14-16 — And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubims

were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them.

Where Revelation 4:7 has a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle, Ezekiel 10:14 has a cherub, a man, and lion, and an eagle.

We find something similar in Isaiah 6, but there we see not the cherubim but the **seraphim**.

Isaiah 6:1-3 — In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

The seraphim are mentioned only by Isaiah. They may be the same as the cherubim, with the name “seraphim” being used by Isaiah to describe their dazzling appearance.

There are differences among the descriptions of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, the cherubim in Ezekiel 10, and the beasts in Revelation 4. For example, Isaiah’s seraphim have six wings; Ezekiel’s cherubim have four wings; John’s beasts have six. Ezekiel’s cherubim have four faces each; John’s beasts have one face each. (And as for the “beasts” in the KJV being used to describe angelic beings, a better translation is “living creatures” as we find in the ASV. A different Greek word is used for the “beasts” of Chapter 13.) Despite these differences in their descriptions, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 10, and Revelation 4 are most likely just using slightly different figurative language to depict the same beings surrounding the throne of God.

Why are they around the throne of God? What is their purpose? The purpose of the cherubim is to defend God’s holiness. They kept Adam from the tree of life in Genesis 3:24. They were woven into the veil in Exodus 26:31 that stood between man and the presence of God in the temple. They stood over the ark of the covenant in Exodus 25:22 looking down upon the law of God, ready to

demand immediate justice were it not for the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat.

Exodus 25:20 — And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.

These four living creatures are the judge of all who would enter the presence of God. They are endlessly concerned with God's reputation and the vindication of his character. Day and night, they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

Proverbs 14:34 tells us that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Where does America lie on that spectrum? I think we would all agree that we are on a rather swift decline, but how far have we fallen?

In 1939, a single four-letter word in the movie "Gone With the Wind" became a national scandal. Today, less than eighty years later, God's name is regularly blasphemed by that same Hollywood in ways that defy belief and imagination — yet few raise any objection. "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" (James 2:7). They most definitely do.

Think of the four living creatures in verse 8 the next time you hear someone use the name of God in vain. They are watching, and they are listening! They are full of eyes within, verse 8 tells us. They miss nothing. Night and day, without rest, they say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." And one day, all of those who use Jesus' name as a curse word will stand before them as they hear their judgment pronounced.

Back to verse 7, why are the four living creatures shown as a lion, a calf (or ox), a man, and an eagle?

Some suggest they depict nobility (the lion), swiftness (the eagle), strength (the ox), and wisdom (the man). Barclay says, "the four living creatures stand for everything that is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in nature. Each has the preeminence in his own particular sphere." In this way, the four living creatures would together represent all of God's creation worshiping and praising God the Creator.

Psalms 19:1-2 — The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto

day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

Why are there **four** creatures? The number four confirms our understanding that the focus here is on the creation of God worshipping the Creator.

The number four denotes the created world — the **four** elements (earth, air, fire, water), the **four** seasons, the **four** directions. In fact, our DNA (designed and encoded by God) consists of **four** chemical bases: A, G, C, and T. Four is the number of creation, perhaps because it is the sum of one with the divine number three.

What we see in these verses is the **opposite** of what we see in Romans 1:25, which describes those who “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” Here we see God’s creation worshipping the Creator.



If you have seen many stained glass windows or other religious artwork (as shown on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com), then you have seen these four living creatures representing the four gospel writers. The first such identification dates all the way back to AD 170 with Irenaeus. Augustine identified Matthew with the lion because he depicted Jesus as the Lion of Judah, Mark with the man because he showed the humanity of Christ, Luke with the ox because he showed Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for all, and John with the eagle because the eagle is the only creature that can look straight into the sun. Others identify Matthew with the man and Mark with the lion.

Here is the message of these verses to the church in a nutshell: You think Rome is powerful and impressive? Just look at who we have on our side! Rome does not stand a chance!

Lesson 14

In Chapter 4, God draws aside the curtain of heaven and gives John a vision of the majestic throne of God. Chapter 4 is focused on God the Father. Chapter 5, as we will soon see, is focused on God the Son. These two chapters together provide the basis for all that follows in this book. The judgments we are about to see all come from the throne of God.

Revelation 4:9-11

9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

When the four living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to God, the twenty-four elders fall down before God and worship him, casting their crowns before the throne. This act of casting their crowns shows that their authority is a delegated authority. They owe their existence and their present status completely to God's power and to God's will. Yes, they reign, but (unlike the Roman emperors) these twenty-four elders do not claim to reign apart from God. Instead, they recognize that their reign comes from God, who is the true king over all.

We know that Christians have a **special delegated reign** from Christ — Romans 5:17 and 1 Peter 2:9. But is there a sense in which **all men** have a delegated reign from God. **Yes.** And we see that all the way back in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:26 — *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: **and let them have dominion** [literally, **let them rule**] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

In fact, the context there suggests that man's ability to rule is one way in which man shares the image of God. And all men have a responsibility to rule according to the will of God because their right to rule is God-given. All rule by men is a delegated rule from God. The Roman emperors did not believe that — but they would soon learn otherwise.

Twice we see the phrase “who liveth for ever and ever.” That description of God emphasizes God's eternal nature, which stands in stark contrast to the supposed Roman deities who had been created and who had an appointment with death. It reminds me of Psalm 22:29 — “All they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.” The Roman emperors believed they were all powerful — but they could not keep themselves from dying.

The Greek word translated “worship” in verse 10 means to prostrate oneself before deity and to kiss the feet or hem of the garment. Verse 10 tells us that the elders **fell down** before God and worshipped him.

To a first century reader, verse 11 brings the central theme of this book front and center — **Caesar or Christ?** The throne of Caesar or the throne of God? Why? Because a Roman emperor believed that he was Lord and that he was worthy of glory, honor, and power. In fact, the phrases “worthy art thou” and “our Lord and God” were also used in the worship of the Roman emperor. The emperor Domitian took “Lord and God” as his official title and required all government announcements and proclamations to begin with the phrase “Our Lord and God Domitian commands.”

Verse 11 leaves no doubt as to who alone is worthy of our worship — and it is **not** Caesar! In fact, verse 11 explains why that is true — it is true because God is the **creator** of all things, and all things were created for God's pleasure. No Roman emperor could ever make that claim! The Roman emperors were creatures, not creators.

The beautiful scene in this chapter is one of **unending worship** of God by the cherubim and by the church. Chapter 4 shows all creation worshipping the Creator.

This point is made so frequently in the book of Revelation that we should likely add it to our list of themes — **nothing created is worthy of our worship**. Only the Creator is worthy of worship, or, as John will later be told, “**Worship God!**” (Revelation 22:9).

By contrast, Romans 1:25 depicts sinful men worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator — and (not surprisingly) that verse from **Romans** described **Rome** perfectly!

Finally, as we come to the end of Chapter 4, let’s pause to think about the persecuted first-century Christians who were initially reading these verses. These verses are here to provide them **comfort!** They needed to know that — despite how things might have seemed to them when viewed from an earthly perspective — God was in charge, and God was ruling the universe from his throne in heaven. The first century church had **not** been forgotten. Rome was **not** going to win.

And no matter what happens in this life, the church must continue to worship and serve God. The church in these verses (represented by the twenty-four elders) offers unending praise to God. Do you mean we should praise God **during** persecution? Yes — we must offer unending praise to God, even (and, in fact, especially) during times of persecution. **Praise puts persecution into perspective!** That’s why Chapter 4 is here.

Chapter 5

Revelation 5:1

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

The contents of this scroll will be revealed in the chapters that follow, but here we get a description of the scroll. It is written within and on the back, and it is sealed with seven seals.

What we sometimes call a “book” was really a scroll. Scrolls of that day were typically made of single papyrus sheets about ten by eight inches. When a long scroll was needed, the sheets were joined together horizontally. The writing was in narrow columns about three inches long. The scroll usually had a wooden roller at each end. It was held in the left hand, unrolled with the right, and, as the reading went on, the part in the left hand was rolled up again. The book of Revelation would have required a scroll that was about fifteen feet long.

This scroll was written on the front and on the back. In making papyrus paper, a row of papyrus strips was laid vertically with another row of strips laid horizontally on top of them. The whole thing was then moistened with water and glued and pressed together. The side that ran horizontally was known as the recto, and the writing was done on that side because the lines of the writing ran with the lines of the fibers. The other side was called the verso and it was not commonly used for writing.

But papyrus was expensive. So, if you had a lot to write, you would write both on the front and on the back. A sheet written on the back, the verso, was called an opisthograph.

That the scroll in God’s hand was an opisthograph (written within and on the back) tells us that it contained the full will of God for his people and for Rome, the great enemy of his people. That it is **written** tells us that God’s will in this matter has been determined, and it will happen. It has been decided. There will be no deliberation and no delay. There will be no turning back.

We see similar language in the description of Ezekiel’s book of lamentations in Ezekiel 2:10 — “It had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.” And Rome will soon find that for them the comparison with Ezekiel’s scroll goes beyond **how** it was written. For them, this scroll will also contain words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

The **seven seals** on the scroll indicate that the scroll was perfectly and completely sealed. Also, Roman law required last wills and testaments to be sealed with the seals of seven witnesses. These seven seals confirm that the scroll is straight from God; no one has tampered with it.

As of verse 1, God's plan has not yet been put into effect and has not yet been revealed. The judgments within the scroll have not yet been executed. But that is all about to change as the seals are removed one by one in the chapters that follow.

The use of a seal reminds us of Daniel 8:26, where Daniel was told to "seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence." The period called "many days hence" in Daniel 8:26 was in fact about four hundred years. By contrast, the seals are about to come off of this scroll, and in 22:10, John will be told **not** to seal up his book for the time is near! Again, we must ask on what basis some people argue that the events in this scroll have not happened even to this very day — two thousand years after the seals were removed! These seals came off in the first century!

Revelation 5:2-5

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

The question is not who is **able** to open the scroll and break its seals, but rather who is **worthy** to do those things. Whoever opens the scroll will be responsible for what follows. The word "worthy" (*axios*) literally means "of sufficient weight." The word occurs seven times in Revelation.

We will see this (or perhaps another) strong angel again in 10:1 and 18:21. In Chapter 10, the strong angel will lift his right to heaven and swear there will be no more delay, so whenever we see this strong angel we should remember the time frame of this book.

Even this “strong angel” was not worthy to open the scroll. In fact, no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was worthy. The phrase “under the earth” likely denotes the grave or the place of the dead.

***Ephesians 4:9-10** — Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into **the lower parts of the earth**? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.*

***Romans 10:7** — Who shall **descend into the deep**? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)*

Taken together, the phrase “in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth” denotes the entire universe of created beings — both living and dead. Recall, for example, what Paul wrote to the Philippians:

***Philippians 2:10** — That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.*

We also see similar language in the command of Exodus 20.

***Exodus 20:4** — Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

No one in all of God’s creation was worthy to open the scroll and loosen the seals. And John wept. **Why? Why did John weep?**

If the scrolls were not opened, then there would be no protection for God’s people, there would be no judgments against the enemies of God’s people, there would be no ultimate triumph for believers, and there would be no new heaven and new earth. Why did John weep? **John wept at the delay that would occur if the scroll remained sealed!**

And how would John have reacted had he been forced to read a modern commentary that says nothing in the book has yet been fulfilled even to this very

day? How would John have reacted to that delay? How many more tears would he have shed?

And what was John told to do? He was told to quit crying and look at Jesus, and **that is good advice in any circumstances!** “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah!” No one in God’s creation was worthy to open the seals; so John was told to look instead to Jesus, the eternal source of all creation.

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah! It reminds me of Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:2 — Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What does it mean to look unto Jesus? After we are added to God’s eternal kingdom, Jesus changes how we see everything. Jesus changes how we see ourselves, how we see other people, how we see the earth, how we see our material possessions — everything. If we want to see things as God sees them, we need to see those things in the light of Christ — we need to look unto Jesus. C.S. Lewis explained this very well:

We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else.

Jesus is like the sun — it is only by the light of Jesus that we can see things as they really are. Absent that light, we are living in darkness. Everything about us is determined by how we see Jesus.

John 8:12 — Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 12:35-36 — Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

John 12:46 — *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

And note where each of these verses comes from — **the book of John**. This theme of seeing things as God sees them is not confined to the book of Revelation; it is also a central theme in the book of John. John's eyes had been opened, and he wanted everyone else to have their eyes opened as well.

We see three descriptions of Jesus in verse 5: the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and we are told that he "**hath prevailed**" (past tense). Let's look at each of those three descriptions.

The lion is the most often named animal in the Bible, yet only here in the Bible is the lion given an unmistakable Messianic meaning. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is used here as a Messianic title. We know that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), and we recall the description of Judah found in Genesis 49.

Genesis 49:9-10 — *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? **The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.***

The Root of David is also a Messianic title. We know that Jesus descended from David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). And we recall Isaiah 11, speaking of David's father, Jesse.

Isaiah 11:1,10 — *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, **and a Branch shall grow out of his roots** ... And in that day there shall be **a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.***

Finally, Jesus is described in verse 5 as the one who **hath** (past tense) prevailed or conquered to open the book. **Not** that he is about to conquer, but that he has already conquered. Jesus is not opening the scroll so that he can prevail; Jesus is opening the scroll because he has already prevailed. Again, we can turn to the gospel of John:

John 16:33 — *I have overcome the world.*

The tense of that verb is **past** tense. Yes, it was spoken prior to the cross, but it was spoken just prior to the cross and in anticipation of what Jesus was about to endure in laying down his life for his sheep. **Here is the key point** — Jesus overcame the world long before the events we are now reading about. There is no great battle between good and evil in the book of Revelation with an uncertain outcome. **The outcome is never in doubt because the outcome has already occurred!** Later in Revelation 12:8 we will be told that the dragon (Satan) “prevailed not.” Satan was defeated at the cross.

Jesus conquered Rome at the cross! In fact, Jesus was conquering Rome at the very point that Rome thought that it was conquering Jesus.

And if we follow the example of Christ, then the world may see our great victory as a great defeat! What spiritual eyes see as a great victory is often seen by physical eyes as a great defeat. Once again, things are not always what they seem!

What is the purpose of the beautiful picture of Christ that we find in these verses? This picture emphasizes how great a thing it is to which Christ is here called. He will protect and sustain the kingdom that he died to create — and likewise he will protect and sustain us today. Jesus loves his church!

Finally, it is self evident that God did not need to search for someone to open the scroll. God did not need to search for Christ. The searching and the waiting are presented for dramatic effect. The angel in verse 2 knew the answer to his question before he asked it!

The book of Revelation is written to have an emotional impact upon the reader. That is why we see these dramatic images and vivid symbols. That is why we see the dramatic tension in these verses. And did it have an emotional impact on its initial readers? Yes — and a particularly strong one. Just look at verse 4: **“And I wept much.”**

Revelation 5:6-8

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the

earth. 7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. 8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

John looks over expecting to see the great heroic lion that will unloose the seals and save the day, but what does John see? **He sees, not a Lion, but a lamb.**

In fact, John sees a little lamb standing as it had been slain. **Where is the power in that? Again, things are not always what they seem!**

Three words in the New Testament are translated lamb: **aren, amnos, and ar-nion.** The first word occurs only in Luke 10:3, the second occurs four times in John, Acts, and 1 Peter. The third word for lamb occurs twenty nine times in Revelation, 28 of which are in reference to Jesus. (The other use in Revelation is in 13:11.) The only other place where this word for lamb appears in the New Testament is in John 21:15 where Jesus asks Peter to “feed My lambs.”

The Greek word for lamb used twenty eight times in reference to Christ in Revelation means “**little** lamb.” A better English translation would be “lambkin,” and this book applies that word to Christ twenty eight times. To the world, it would be hard to image something more vulnerable and more defenseless than a baby lamb. **But, again, things are not always what they seem!**

Yes, the church will be victorious — but as with the Lamb of God, that victory will come through sacrifice.

***Matthew 16:25** — For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

***1 John 5:4** — This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

The victory of the church did not then and does not today come through physical force or through great demonstrations of earthly power. Our victory

comes through faith. Our victory comes through giving up our life for Christ. **Faith is the victory! And the path to victory is faithfulness unto death.**

What is meant by the phrase “as it had been slain”? It means that the Lamb had the marks of slaughter upon it. It does **not** mean that the Lamb merely looked like it had been slain; it means that the Lamb had been slain. And the marks of that event were still evident upon it. But this **slain** lamb is **standing** — a vision of **victory** through sacrifice and suffering.

This Lamb, of course, is Jesus who overcame the world through his perfect sacrifice.

*John 1:29 — Behold **the Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

*1 Corinthians 5:7 — For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed. [ESV]*

*1 Peter 1:18-19 — Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, **as of a lamb** without blemish and without spot.*

*Isaiah 53:7 — He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought **as a lamb** to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He conquered not by force but by death — his own death on the cross. He conquered not by taking the lives of others — but by laying down his life.

*John 10:14-15 — I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: **and I lay down my life for the sheep.***

Jesus conquered not as a lion but as a lamb, and by this example his disciples must also conquer.

We tend to see a lamb as a docile and helpless creature, but we will find that this lamb is very different. **We need to remember that this lamb is also a lion!** Later, in Revelation 6:16, we will read about “**the wrath of the Lamb**”

(literally, the wrath of the lambkin!), which is certainly one of the most remarkable and terrifying phrases in all of the Bible.

Why does this lamb have **seven horns**? We saw that same symbol in our study of Daniel and in our study of Zechariah. Horns depict power. The seven horns here depict Jesus' complete and perfect power. Later in Revelation (as in Daniel) we will see that horns are used to depict kings. So these seven horns also depict the perfect royalty of Christ and his complete sovereignty as King over all things.

The Lamb also has **seven eyes**, which are the seven spirits of God. We looked at this symbol earlier, and we saw that the seven spirits there depicted the Holy Spirit. That is true here as well, but this symbol also shows us that Jesus knows what is happening to his people — he has perfect knowledge about all things. He has seven eyes; he misses nothing.

The “golden vials full of odours” are the prayers of the saints. We will see later that everything in this book came about as a result of the prayers of the saints. **We should notice something wonderful about these prayers — while despised on earth, these prayers are brought to God in golden bowls.** The picture here reminds us of Psalm 141.

Psalm 141:2 — Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

A central lesson for us today from this book is the **power of prayer**. We will soon see that this judgment against Rome is happening because of the prayers by God's people. Yes, we are to love our enemies and pray for them, but sometimes that prayer can be that God will judge them, and perhaps in that judgment they will finally see the error of their ways.

Notice that each of the elders in verse 8 is holding a **harp**. So, I guess that means harps can be used in our worship service, right? **Wrong!**

We know from elsewhere in the New Testament that God's chosen instrument for worship in the new kingdom is the human voice and the use of anything else is contrary to the pattern that God left for us to follow. Remember one of our interpretative rules — however we interpret this difficult book of Revelation, that interpretation must not contradict what we find elsewhere in the Bible, and particularly what we find in very easy to understand verses elsewhere in the Bible.

Why then do we see harps in these verses? Remember that what we are seeing here are **symbols**. This language is figurative. For example, only in a vision could a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes take a scroll from someone's hand. **These harps are symbols for praise, just as the incense is a symbol for prayer.** We will see a similar symbol in 14:2 — “and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.”

Why use a harp to depict praise? Because we praise God using the harp made by God — the human voice — and that harp was **not** made with human hands.

Acts 17:24-25 — God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

Sometimes proponents of instrumental music in worship wonder why God would not be pleased with such things. The answer to that question is given by the verse we just read from Acts 17. **The eternal kingdom is not made with men's hands — and for that reason God is not to be worshipped with men's hands. Man-made churches use man-made instruments in worship, but not so with the one church made without human hands!**

Instrumental music places the focus on man rather than on God — and if you don't believe that just take a look at some of the rock and roll churches you can see everyday on TV. That's the same reason we don't have special choirs in our worship. God wants all Christians to sing, and he wants us to use the instruments that he made, not instruments made with human hands and played with human hands. Only then does the focus of worship remain where it should remain — on God, who alone is worthy of our worship. **Anyone who thinks that Revelation supports the worship of God with man-made instruments is missing the entire point of this book!**

And if we were take harps in heaven as a rule of conduct for the church on earth, then on what basis do we stop there? There is no marriage in heaven (Matthew 22:30). If we take the harps, how do we hold on to marriage? And on that note, doesn't Matthew 22:30 teach us that while marriage is pleasing to God on earth, it is **not** pleasing to God in heaven? So even if these were literal harps in heaven (which they aren't), it still would not automatically follow that the use of harps in worship by the church on earth is pleasing to God.

In short, those who take this great scene of worship as evidence in favor of instrumental music in worship have it completely and absolutely backwards! This great scene of adoration and worship in Chapter 5 is strong evidence **against** such practices! God alone is worthy of worship — and he is not worshipped with men's hands (Acts 17:24-25).

In verse 7, the Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of God. Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and do what it contains.

One commentator said that “right at this moment, we who read and study the Book of Revelation are at the theological center of the book.”

And what a message of comfort! The little lamb has the scroll! Satan does not have it. The Roman emperor does not have it. The Lamb has it. It is Jesus who holds the scroll. It is Jesus who holds history in his hand. **What do we have to fear?**

Lesson 15

In Chapters 4 and 5, we are being shown the throne of God and of the Lamb. These two chapters are the perfect prelude to the judgments against Rome that are about to follow. If the choice is between Caesar and Christ, then these two chapters are here to demonstrate what John writes elsewhere:

1 John 4:4 — *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

What follows next has been rightly called “one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration anywhere recorded.”

Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

In these verses, as one commentator stated, “Heaven is revealed to earth as the homeland of music.” We find here the greatest chorus of praise the universe has ever heard. This new song is a song of redemption. It is a song about Jesus and about his church, the ransomed from the earth.

In 4:11, God was worthy of glory, honor, and power because of his **creation**. Here in 5:9-10, Christ is worthy to open the scroll because of his **new creation**, the church.

In 15:3, we will see the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. The Song of Moses, found in Exodus 15, is another song about deliverance from a great enemy of God’s people and about the goodness of God.

Why do we need a **new** song? Because a greater deliverance requires a new and greater song. Also, this new song depicts a new expression of God's love.

***Psalm 98:1** — O sing unto the Lord a **new song**; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.*

***Isaiah 42:10** — Sing unto the Lord a **new song**, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.*

Who are the redeemed or ransomed in verse 9? Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:6 that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all." And yet not all are ransomed because those outside of Christ remain under a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). **The redeemed in verse 9 are the church.** We belong to Christ — he bought us.

***1 Corinthians 6:20** — For ye are **bought with a price**: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

***1 Corinthians 7:23** — Ye are **bought with a price**; be not ye the servants of men.*

***Mark 10:45** — For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and **to give his life a ransom for many**.*

***1 Peter 1:18-19** — Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; **But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot**.*

Verse 9 tells us that the redeemed come from "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Unlike Judaism, the eternal kingdom of God is a universal kingdom with no national, political, cultural, or racial boundaries. It is open to all who will obey the gospel.

And who are the **kings and priests** in verse 10? Once again, we see the church. We are a kingdom of priests to our God, as had been prophesied.

Exodus 19:6 — *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*

1 Peter 2:9 — *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*

The kingdom and the priesthood were taken from Israel and given to the church.

Matthew 21:43 — *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.*

There is a great deal of commentary on the final phrase in verse 10. The KJV has “and we shall reign on the earth,” while the ASV has “and they reign upon earth.” Notice the **two differences**: “we” versus “they” and “shall reign” versus “reign.”

As for “we” versus “they,” some argue that the twenty-four elders are not the church, but are instead singing about the church — and so they refer to the church as “they” rather than as “we.” Two problems with that: **First**, we know that the twenty-four elders are the church — they are an unblemished royal priesthood — who else could they be? **Second**, verse 10 applies to the church whether it is “we” or “they.” If it is “we,” then it refers back to the twenty-four elders, who are the church. If it is “they,” then it refers back to the redeemed in verse 9, who are also the church.

Remember — the church of the first century had an inferiority complex when it came to Rome. God wanted the church to see itself as it really was — to see the church as God sees the church. For that reason, the inspired text shows us the church from many different angles. It is as if God is walking all around the church and telling us what he sees. That is why we have so many different symbols all representing the church.

What about the difference between “shall reign” and “reign”? Neither translation contradicts the fact that we are reigning now.

Romans 5:17 — *For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*

Revelation 3:11 — *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

Ephesians 2:5-6 — Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

If the correct translation is “**shall** reign,” then that just indicates that the church’s reign would be renewed and strengthened by Jesus’ judgment against Rome. For example, in Revelation 20:6 we read that we “**shall** be priests,” yet in Revelation 1:6 we find that we already are priests (“And **hath** made us kings and priests unto God and his Father”). Both, of course, are true.

The promise in these verses is that these Christians would continue to reign with Christ and would continue to be priests. **If they remained faithful unto death, then that relation would not end regardless of what Rome did. Rome did not have a say in their final destiny — that would be determined by the Lamb.**

Revelation 5:11-14

11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts said, Amen.

And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Jesus is worshipped here by angels and by every living creature. The purpose of this scene is to emphasize Christ's worthiness and Christ's power. He is **worthy** to do what must be done, and he is **able** to do what must be done.

The phrase "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" simply denotes an indefinitely great number. Compare:

***Hebrews 12:22** — But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an **innumerable** company of angels.*

We are also reminded of Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:10** — A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: **thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Look at verse 12 — what are these innumerable angels doing? **Speaking or singing?** Verse 12 tells us they are speaking. The singing in verse 9 was by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Now that the angels have joined them, they are speaking instead of singing.

Do angels sing? Most of us would likely answer yes. But interestingly there is not a single **definitive** example anywhere in the Bible of an angel singing. The closest we get is in Job 38:7 — "The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy." But, **Hark the Herald Angels Say?** It just doesn't have the same ring to it!

If the angels don't sing, then what could the reason be? One commentator said it is because "the angels have never been redeemed. They do not know what it is to sing for the very simple reason that they were never lost sinners and were never redeemed." Perhaps, but, in my opinion (and that's all it is), angels do sing. How could they not sing?

Also, did you know that **God sings?**

***Zephaniah 3:17** — The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee*

*with joy; he will rest in his love, **he will joy over thee with singing.***

Verse 12 tells us that Jesus is worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. (Notice that the list consists of seven items.) These seven attributes are not attributes that Jesus is about to receive having not already had them, but rather these are attributes that Jesus already possesses and that he is worthy to possess. The Greek word translated “receive” in verse 12 is elsewhere translated as “have.”

Elsewhere in the New Testament each of the qualities mentioned in verse 12 is ascribed to Christ:

- **Power and wisdom** — “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).
- **Wealth** — “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- **Strength** — “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).
- **Honor and glory** — “For he received from God the Father honour and glory” (2 Peter 1:17).
- **Blessing** — “The blessing of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:29).

Jesus already has these attributes. They are further evidence of **why** Jesus is worthy to open the scroll.

We will see the word “wisdom” again in this book, and we will see that we need to share in this wisdom if we are to properly interpret what is in this book.

Revelation 13:18 — **Here is wisdom.** *Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.*

Revelation 17:9 — **And here is the mind which hath wisdom.** *The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*

How do we get the wisdom needed to understand this book? James tells us in James 1:5 — “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” So do we just ask God and then wait for the arrival of a miraculous dose of wisdom? No. We ask

God in prayer for wisdom, and then we open the Bible that God has given us, and we use the mind that God has given us. God has already given us all the wisdom we need, but sadly for some that wisdom is collecting dust on a shelf somewhere. The more time we spend with God's word, the wiser we will get.

***Colossians 3:16** — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*

That's how we get the wisdom that this book tells us we need if we want to understand what it is saying.

But what about verse 13? Did literally “**every** creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea” worship the Lamb at this time? No. We know they did not because if they did then this book of judgment would not have been needed. In fact, the reason for this book is that Rome was **not** worshipping and honoring Christ, but instead was setting itself up **against** Christ and his church. So why the word “**every**” in verse 13?

One possibility is that the universal language in verse 13 stresses the **worthiness** of Christ to receive worship from every creature. All of creation owes its existence to Christ. Christ is worthy to receive the adoration of the entire created world — and so verse 13 shows that happening as the beautiful climax of this scene.

Another possibility is that the creation in verse 13 is not the entirety of the physical creation, but is instead the entirety of the **new creation**, the church.

This distinction between the entire creation and the new creation will be valuable to us in our study of Revelation. But in what way is the church a new creation?

First, the church is a new creation by the simple fact that it was created by God in Acts 2, about 50 years prior to when the book of Revelation was written. That makes it literally a **new creation**. It had been prophesied long before, but at the time of this book it had only recently been created.

Second, the church is a new creation because it consists entirely of new creatures.

***2 Corinthians 5:17** — Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Galatians 6:15 — *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

Ephesians 4:24 — *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is **created** in righteousness and true holiness.*

Colossians 3:10 — *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that **created** him.*

And **third**, the church is a new creation because that it how it is described in the Bible.

Daniel 2:44 — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven **set up** a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.*

Ephesians 2:15 — *Having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might **create** in himself of the two one new man, so making peace. [ASV]*

Romans 8:22 — *For we know that the whole **creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

So whenever we see the creation in this book, let's always stop and ask whether we are seeing the physical created universe or perhaps instead we are seeing the newly created eternal kingdom of God, which is the church.

If the church is in view here, then that would certainly answer our earlier question as to how every creature could be offering praise to God in verse 13.

The entire scene reminds us of Psalm 148.

Psalm 148:1-4 — *Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.*

The throne of God in verse 13 is also the throne of the Lamb. Note, for example, Revelation 22:1 — “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of **the throne of God and of the Lamb.**”

Think for a moment about the **remarkable contrasts** in this chapter. As we have said, perhaps the central choice in this entire book is the choice between Caesar and Christ. Each persecuted Christian was called upon to make that choice (often at great physical or economic peril). Would the choice be Christ or would it be Caesar? On what basis should they make that decision?

Chapter 5 contrasts the two choices — not by listing the inferiorities of Caesar, but by listing the superiorities of Christ. Power? Riches? Wisdom? Strength? Honor? Glory? Blessing? They all belong to Christ rather than Caesar. And **worship**? That belongs to the one who liveth for ever and ever — and that is certainly **not** Caesar! **Before you worship someone you need to make sure that the object of your worship will be around to help you when you need help!** It is Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever — not Caesar!

If someone reading this book had started out thinking that the church did not have a chance against the mighty Roman empire — they would certainly be rethinking the odds by the end of this chapter. The church has God and Christ on its side! “If God be for us, who can be against us?” That is the message of Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 6

Revelation 6:1-2

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

As Chapter 6 opens and the first seal is removed from the scroll, we see the first part of what is one of the most well known images from the book of Revelation — the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Few scenes from this book have been as influential in art, literature, and the wider culture as this one.

We were told earlier that only Christ was worthy to remove the seals from this scroll, and here we see Christ begin to do just that. Tearing off a seal uncovers and reveals what is to come. The one who opens the scroll will carry out what is written inside, which means that Christ is about to execute the judgments of God found in this scroll.

In the KJV, the living creature says, “Come and see,” as if inviting John to come and see what is about to happen. The best Greek manuscripts simply have “Come!,” which is not an invitation to John but rather a summons for the first of the four horses and its rider to come out onto the stage.

This vision is modeled after the visions found in Zechariah 1:8–17 and Zechariah 6:1–8, which we have already studied in detail in another class. Let’s read the latter of those two references, and, as we do, note the similarities with John’s vision.

Zechariah 6:1-3 — And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses.

The riders in Zechariah’s vision were brought forth from every direction to bring judgment from God upon Babylon and Egypt. These riders perform the same function, but against Rome rather than against Babylon or Egypt.

The living creature in verse 1 speaks “with the noise of thunder.” Once again, thunder reminds us that we are about to see judgments from God.

As we begin Chapter 6, we are faced at once with a difficult and widely debated question: **Who is the rider on the white horse?**

To say that opinions vary on that question is quite an understatement! Many commentaries say that the rider is Christ — but just as many say that the rider is the Antichrist! **I think both of those views are wrong.**

First, let's consider (and reject) the notion that we are seeing "The Antichrist" here. Hundreds of books and even movies have appeared purporting to tell us all about "The Antichrist" in the book of Revelation. And how many times is someone referred to as "The Antichrist" in the book of Revelation? **Precisely zero!** The word "Antichrist" never occurs in this book. John does talk about "Antichrist," but he does so in his **letters** rather than in the book of Revelation:

1 John 2:18 — *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there **many antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time.*

1 John 2:22 — *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son.*

1 John 4:3 — *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of **antichrist**, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

2 John 7 — *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**.*

We hear a lot today about the Antichrist — but those verses tell us there are many Antichrists. We also hear today that the Antichrist is yet FUTURE — but those verses tell us there were Antichrists in John's day.

An Antichrist is anyone who "confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," which means there are **many** Antichrists in the world today, just as John said there were many Antichrists in his own day.

Yes, Domitian was an Antichrist, but he had a lot of company then, and he has a lot of company now. Anyone who denies the divinity of Christ is an Antichrist. Antichrists are not hard to find. Just look at the theology faculty at almost any university! Just look at the Jehovah's Witness knocking on your door.

Also, these riders are sent out **by God against** Satan and his minions, **not** for Satan. As in Zechariah, "these are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." This rider is **not** the Antichrist.

Others say the rider is Jesus himself, and while this view does have some surface appeal, it also has some problems. First, let's look at the evidence in **support** of the view that this first rider is Jesus.

This rider opens the entire affair, which is something we would expect Christ to do. This rider is a conqueror, which is true of Christ. This rider wears a crown, which is also true of Christ. This rider rides a white horse, and in Chapter 19 we will (without any doubt at all) see Jesus riding a white horse.

But this rider is about to unleash a very violent scene. Could that be true of Christ? Yes.

***Matthew 10:34** — Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

This is a book of judgment against the enemies of God. We are about to see the wrath of the Lamb!

As I said, this view definitely has some surface appeal. But even so there are some **problems** with the view that this rider is Christ.

For many commentators, the white horse ridden by Jesus in Chapter 19 is considered “proof” that Jesus is also riding the white horse here in Chapter 6. But one of our interpretive rules is that the same symbol can be applied to different objects. That's true of the “lamb,” for example. Most of the time that symbol applies to Christ, but in 13:11 the “lamb” refers to the beast from the earth. So we can't just automatically assume that every time we see a white horse, Jesus has to be the rider. That kind of surface approach to this book will get us into trouble every time.

Second, there are **four** riders in this part of the vision, and it seems unlikely that Christ would be portrayed this way alongside three other riders. When we see Jesus riding a white horse in Chapter 19, he will not have these three companions. We just saw that only Jesus was worthy to open the scroll — that Jesus is unique — do we really think we would be seeing Jesus pictured with three others in the very next part of the vision?

Third, the crown that Jesus will be wearing in Chapter 19 is a **royal** crown (**diadema**), but the crown that we see here in Chapter 6 is a **victor's** crown (**stephanos**). So while the riders in Chapter 6 and Chapter 19 are both wearing crowns, once we look under the surface we see that they are wearing different kinds of crowns.

Who then is this rider on the white horse in Chapter 6?

Something we haven't mentioned yet is the **bow** that verse 2 tells us this rider has in his hand. In the ancient world, the bow was a sign of military power. So perhaps we should examine this rider on a white horse from a military perspective.

But the mighty Roman army was not afraid of any other military power on earth, right? **Wrong.** The Romans were afraid (terrified, some might say) of one particular foreign military power, and I think this rider represents that military power. All throughout the Old Testament we see God using the threat of foreign invasion against nations he was judging, and I think we see that same kind of language used here. **But what foreign nation could strike such cold fear in the heart of the Romans?** The Parthians.

The Parthians were a warlike federation of tribes located east of the Euphrates, which was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. (See the map on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com, and look at the far right area.) The tension between Rome and Parthia was largely over land, and the most intensely disputed land was Armenia and the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

The Parthian army was the only military force in the ancient world feared by the Romans. Why? Because they had defeated a Roman army twice, first in 55 BC and then again in AD 62, not long before this book was written. The Romans were unnerved by that unprecedented defeat, and they feared an invasion from the east. One commentary said that the Romans had an **irrational fear** of the Parthians.



And what do we know about the Parthian soldiers? (Some ancient depictions of them are shown on the handout that is available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com.) The Parthian warriors were famous for being mounted archers, the only such group in the ancient Mediterranean world. They had perfected the ability to shoot arrows accurately from a charging horse. White was the sacred color of the Parthians, and every Parthian army included sacred white horses.

But why is the Parthian in verse 2 given a crown? Two reasons. **First**, the crown shows that Parthia was independent of Rome. Rome liked to think that it controlled everything in the world, but Parthia was a constant reminder that Rome did not control everything and everyone. And **second**, the crown was a more specific reminder of the Parthian's recent victory over Rome. Par-

thia was the victor in that contest, and so this mounted soldier wears a victor's crown.

There is another reason why Rome feared the Parthians, and it involves one of the two primary villains in this book — **the Emperor Nero**. (Nero and Domitian were great persecutors of God's people, and both are described in this book. The difference is that Nero **predates** the writing of the book, while Domitian **postdates** the writing of the book.)

After Nero's death in AD 68, a rumor spread that Nero had not died at all but instead had gone off to the east to raise an army and reclaim his throne. The Parthians themselves fueled this rumor by supporting a succession of pretenders to the Roman throne. The Romans (and not just the Roman Christians) feared that Nero would return to finish what he had started when he had burned down much of the city of Rome.

Continuing with that Nero connection, some commentators see a reference to the Greek god **Apollo** in these verses. Apollo was usually shown carrying a bow, and Nero was depicted as Apollo on some of the coins minted during his reign. I don't think there is a connection with Apollo here, but it is an interesting theory.

One thing is certain: **the Romans feared the Parthians**. And so it is not surprising that we will see the Parthians again several times in this judgment of Rome (9:14 and 16:12). It reminds me of someone with a fear of snakes who is repeatedly made to look at a snake!

The message to Rome in a nutshell is this: Be afraid! Be very afraid! You think the Parthians are scary? They are just the very first thing to come out of this scroll! There is much, much more to come! And it will be much worse than this.

Revelation 6:3-4

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill

one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The second seal is removed in verse 3, and its removal unleashes a red horse that depicts war — not a specific war with Parthia, but war in general.

As with all wars, this horse was going to cause great suffering. And as with all wars, this suffering would not discriminate between the young and old or guilty and innocent.

We should pause here to note again that God’s people were suffering when this book was written, and they would continue to suffer during these judgments. But, and this is the key point, their suffering was **not** a punishment from God. We may see all suffering alike, **but God does not see things the way that we see them!**

This rider would take peace from the world. Rome had created a time of peace, and as we discussed in our introductory lessons, the church had used that peace for its own advantage. Paul, for example, had used the Roman peace to travel all over the Roman empire preaching the gospel. God is telling Rome that the peace will end, and the end of Roman peace would be a hardship to both the godly and the godless.

History tells us that the famous *pax Romana* or Roman peace was no true “peace” at all but was instead a façade built on the Roman sword. And that peace was already beginning to show signs of stress. We have already discussed the conflict with Parthia, but they were not the only problem.

The suicide of emperor Nero in AD 68 was followed by a brief period of civil war, the first Roman civil war since Mark Antony’s death in 30 BC. Between June of AD 68 and December of AD 69, Rome witnessed the successive rise and fall of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius until the final accession of Vespasian, the first ruler of the Flavian Dynasty. The military and political anarchy created by this civil war had serious repercussions, such as the outbreak of the Batavian rebellion — an uprising against Roman rule by the Batavi and other tribes in the province and in Gaul. They managed to destroy two legions and inflict humiliating defeats on the Roman army, but were eventually defeated by a massive Roman army. This conflict with Gaul was a taste of things to come for Rome.

In the Old Testament, God often depicted his judgment as a loss of peace.

Zechariah 14:3 — *Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.*

Isaiah 19:2 — *And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom.*

The conflict with Jerusalem that Jesus described in Matthew 24 had occurred in AD 70 and was yet another sign that Roman peace was showing signs of stress.

Lesson 16

Last week we began looking at Chapter 6, in which the seven seals on the scroll begin to come off one by one, revealing the four horses of the apocalypse.

With the first seal, we saw a Parthian soldier mounted on a white horse and holding a bow. And we discussed the irrational fear that Rome had when it came to Parthia, the great military power on their eastern border.

With the second seal, we saw the red horse of war that would take away the famous Roman peace.

The third horse appears in verse 5.

Revelation 6:5-6

5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

When the third seal is removed, a black horse is released. This horse represents famine and economic hardship.

The balance in the rider's hand was for weighing food. Its presence here reminds us of Ezekiel 4.

Ezekiel 4:16 — Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment.

Ezekiel says that the people would eat bread by weight and with fearfulness. And in Leviticus 26:26, God told the people that if they were disobedient, then “they shall deliver you your bread again by weight.”

We know from Matthew 20:2 that the penny or a denarius in verse 6 was a day’s wages. Normally at this time it would have bought ten times as much food as it buys in these verses.

We see famine in these verses, but this famine is not yet as bad as it could be. How do we know that? Because, although expensive, wheat and barley are still available. And also because the rider is commanded not to hurt the oil or the wine. This famine was not too extreme **yet**, with “yet” being the key term. As with the plagues of Egypt, the worst plagues against Rome will be saved for the end.

It was not uncommon for there to be wine and oil but little or no grain. The olive tree and the grape vine are more deeply rooted than grain and would endure a drought that would wipe out the other. Remember that when Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for corn, he was still able to send with them “the best fruits in the land” (Genesis 43:11). What we see here is a situation in which luxuries are plentiful while necessities are scarce.

Once again we can find a historical comparison with Rome. During the time of **Nero** there had been a famine that left the luxuries untouched. During that famine, when a ship arrived from Alexandria, the starving populace of the city rioted when they discovered that the ship contained **not corn** as they expected but **sand** to cover the ground for the gladiatorial games.

Later, during the reign of **Domitian**, there was such a shortage of grain and such an overabundance of wine that Domitian ordered half the vineyards to be cut down. The violent reaction that followed caused the order to be rescinded.

Why is this rider told not to do too much damage? Why is this rider being restrained? The answer is that these judgments are still at an early stage. We are only in Chapter 6! Things will get much worse later when the bowls are poured out. Even here, during the judgment itself, we are continuing to see the patience and longsuffering of God.

Yes, God is patient and longsuffering — but God is not mocked. Judgment is coming. For now there is still time to repent. Later there will be no time for repentance.

Revelation 6:7-8

7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

With the removal of the fourth seal, the pale horse takes the stage, and perhaps most frightening of all is this final pale horse of pestilence. The Greek word translated “pale” is *chloros*, which means yellow-green. The rider of this horse is named Death, and hell or Hades follows along with him.

If this judgment is not yet too extreme, Rome should shudder to think of what is coming!

Verse 8 says that power was given to them to kill a quarter of the people of the earth “with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth” (ESV).

Who gets this power? Who is being identified by the word “them” in verse 8?

Some say that all the four horses from the first four seals are in view here, and they base that view on the fact that these powers in verse 8 have some overlap with the first three horses. But the overlap is certainly not exact. And I don’t think we have to conclude that this fourth seal is referring back somehow to the first three seals.

A better view is that the group labeled “them” in verse 8 is the group we see earlier in that same verse — the rider named Death on the pale horse along with Hades who follows close behind. They are the natural antecedent of the pronoun “them.”

These four powers to kill remind us of Ezekiel 14:12-23, which describes a judgment against Jerusalem by referring to sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts as God’s four deadly acts of judgment. They also remind us of Leviticus

26:21-26 where God tells his people the penalties for their disobedience — wild beasts, sword, pestilence, and famine.

What we are seeing in these verses are traditional images used by God to describe what happens when he focuses his wrath upon those who are opposed to him.

Rome thought it had the power of sword, and in fact it did to an extent. Paul had written a few decades earlier that the Roman officials “beareth not the sword in vain” (Romans 13:4). But Rome was not using that sword as God had intended for it to use it; instead, Rome had turned that sword against the people of God (including Paul himself), and so God would now turn that sword against Rome.

Rome would also suffer death by famine, which reminds us of the third horse. It did not take very long for that limited famine to become much worse. In this fourth seal, people are not just suffering from lack of food — they are **dying** from lack of food.

We are also told in verse 8 that Rome would also suffer death by pestilence or disease. Where the KJV has the word “death” in verse 8, the ESV had the word “pestilence.” Which is correct?

The Greek word used here is *thanatos*, which means death — but most likely what is meant here is **disease** rather than death — why?

First, the verse itself says that the rider was to **kill with *thanatos***. If *thanatos* means death here, then the rider is being told to kill people with death, which is an odd usage of the word death.

Second, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible several times used the Greek word *thanatos* to translate the Hebrew word for pestilence or disease. That usage confirms that *thanatos* can mean disease rather than death, which I think is the case here.

The fourth type of death brought by the rider on the pale horse is death by beasts. As with the sword, this was a type of death that Rome enjoyed inflicting on Christians. God is going to turn things around against Rome.

Notice in these verses that death and Hades are being sent forth and commanded by God. All throughout this book of Revelation, both death and Hades are regarded as defeated enemies who must do whatever the Lamb bids.

2 Timothy 1:10 — *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abol-*

ished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Christ controls death, whereas the Roman emperors were controlled by death. Jesus conquered death, whereas death conquered Caesar.

Why do only a quarter of the people of the earth perish in verse 8? As with everything else we are seeing here, this is not a literal quarter of the earth's population. As with the prior seal, what we are seeing here is a figure showing that this initial judgment is neither final nor complete. The survivors will live to experience much worse. This terrible plague is just the warm-up act!

Revelation 6:9-11

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

With the fifth seal, the focus moves from the **enemies** of God back to the **people** of God. We see an altar, and under the altar we see the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. God is keeping them safe from the judgments unleashed below.

What is the identity of the altar in verse 9? The theme of sacrifice suggests it may be the altar of burnt offering. But the prayers that rise like incense suggest it might depict the altar of incense. Most likely it is intended to be a blending of those two altars.

This altar in heaven reminds us of Hebrews 8-9, where we learn that the earthly tabernacle of the Old Testament was constructed according to a heavenly pattern. It should be a reminder to us that we still live and worship according to a heavenly pattern.

Hebrews 9:23 — *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.*

The witness or testimony for which these souls had been martyred was the testimony of Jesus. This same testimony was mentioned in 1:2, and we will see it again in 12:17, 14:12, and 19:10. Jesus had told his disciples what to expect in John 16:2 — “whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” And in Matthew 24:9, Jesus told his followers that they would be “hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

Notice that these martyrs are beneath the altar. We are reminded at once of Leviticus 4.

Leviticus 4:7 — *And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock **at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering**, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.*

The life blood of these Christians has been poured out as a sacrifice to God. We see the same image from the pen of Paul.

Philippians 2:17 — *Yea, and if I be **offered upon the sacrifice** and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.*

2 Timothy 4:6 — *For I am now **ready to be offered**, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

I like what Barclay said on these verses:

There is a great and uplifting truth here. When a good man dies for the sake of goodness, it may look like tragedy, like the waste of a fine life; like the work of evil men; and, indeed, it may be all these things. But every life laid down for right and truth and

God is ultimately more than any of these things—it is an offering made to God.

Where are the dead in Christ today? Some say that they are with **Abraham** (as we know the righteous were prior to the cross), while others (myself included) say that they are with **Christ**. Without wading into that discussion here, we should note that the dead in Christ in verse 9 are shown in heaven with God and Christ. (Revelation 8:3 and 9:13 will describe the golden altar as being before the throne and before God.)

Remember that by the time of this book, the Apostle Paul was one of these martyrs. What had Paul said by inspiration about where he expected to go when he died?

***Philippians 1:23** — For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.*

***2 Corinthians 5:8** — We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

I think Paul was right — he went to be with Jesus. After all, what would have prevented him? Aren't we told that we can boldly approach the throne of grace? (Hebrews 4:16). I think what we are seeing right here confirms Paul's inspired expectation.

Verse 10 is one of the most important verses in this book. Why? Because verse 10 explains how we got here. It explains why we have this book.

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” **The entire book of Revelation is a response to that question!** Verse 10 is the eternal cry of the suffering righteous — **how long?** The book of Revelation is the answer from God to that plea from his people for divine retribution. **And what is God's answer?**

- **How long, O Lord?** It must shortly come to pass (1:1).
- **How long, O Lord?** The time is at hand (1:3).
- **How long, O Lord?** There will be no more waiting (10:5) [ASV].
- **How long, O Lord?** It must shortly be done (22:6).
- **How long, O Lord?** The time is at hand (22:10).
- **How long, O Lord?** Quickly (22:12).

- **How long, O Lord?** Quickly (22:20).

How long? According to most modern commentaries, the answer to that question is at least two thousand years and counting. **Is that the answer we just read from the Bible?** Is that the answer that we just read **seven times** from this very book?

Could the **inspired** answer to the question “how long?” be any more clear? **We need to be very suspicious of any view of this book that gives a different answer to the question in verse 10!**

What support is there for stating that nothing in the book has been fulfilled yet? Is that what an initial reader would have thought? Is that the answer they would have expected to the question in verse 10? **No, and it is not the answer they got!** They were told over and over again that the time was near and that the judgments in this book would come quickly.

The question in verse 10 reminds us of Psalm 79.

Psalm 79:5-10 — How long, Lord? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place. ... 10 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.

And yet, in verse 11 the martyrs are told to “rest yet for a little season,” that is, they are told to rest a little longer. God had a plan, and they needed to wait until the time was right for their vindication, but that time would be soon! They would have to wait only a little longer. God’s judgment was at the doorstep.

For a short time, Rome was to have a position of power over God’s people. But during that time, Rome was only digging its own grave. Recall Isaiah 33:1 where God told Assyria, “when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.” In short, God said to them, “when you have finished destroying, I will destroy you.” God has that same message for Rome. Their time is almost up!

But none of this should have been surprising. Daniel had said the same thing 600 years earlier. In Daniel 2, Daniel prophesied that God's eternal kingdom would conquer Rome, and, in Daniel 11, Daniel wrote that the king of the North (which was Rome) would prosper then be destroyed. We see those same prophecies in the book of Revelation, but here they are much closer to their fulfillment.

Who are those that "dwell on the earth" in verse 10? We have seen that group before. That phrase is the standard description in Revelation for those who are hostile to God. Those on God's side are usually pictured in this book as already dwelling in heaven even though they are still alive on earth. And there is a great lesson for us in that description of God's people. We are pilgrims! This world is not our home! We are just passing through! Isn't that what Paul told us?

***Colossians 3:3** — For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

***Philippians 3:20** — For our citizenship is in heaven.*
[ASV]

What is meant by the closing phrase in verses 11 — that the martyrs should wait "until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled"?

It means that, although the judgment of Rome was coming soon, it would **not** happen immediately. **Why not?** Because certain prophecies had to be fulfilled first.

In John 10:35, Jesus told us that "the scripture cannot be broken." What that means is that if God has prophesied that a certain event will occur, then not only can we see that event **will occur**, but we can say that event **must occur**. What that means is that Rome cannot be taken out of the way now if prophecies tell us that Rome still has a part to play that has not yet been fulfilled — which, although not the case today, was the case at the time this vision was being seen by John in the first century. In fact, we studied prophecies about Rome from the book of Daniel that had not happened yet as of the the date of this vision in Chapter 6.

Paul made the same point in writing about the man of perdition (whom I believe is the Emperor Domitian).

***2 Thessalonians 2:3-6** — Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there*

*come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? **And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.***

Domitian had been prophesied by Daniel long before the rise of the Roman empire. Those prophesies had to be fulfilled before God could act in judgment against Rome or (as Paul told the Thessalonians) before Christ could return at the end of the world. Paul told us that Domitian would be “revealed in his time,” and the judgment of Rome would also occur according to God’s timetable. Domitian had not yet become emperor when this book was written. His father, Vespasian, was still on the throne, and his other son, Titus, would precede Domitian as emperor.

Rome was filling out its own death warrant with each Christian it killed. When the warrant was completed, the judgment would follow. God controls the time schedule here, not Rome.

Notice that the cry for vindication from these martyrs rises from their own blood. It makes us think of Genesis 4:10 — “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” The blood of the martyrs could not go unanswered. There was a moral necessity for judgment and for retribution — and judgment and retribution were coming soon.

Some suggest that such a cry should never be voiced by a Christian. How can we love our enemies while asking God to judge them and avenge ourselves?

First, we see such a cry in verse 10, and we see God’s response in this book. God answers that cry and judges the enemies of his people, avenging their blood.

Second, we see God’s longsuffering patience even in those judgments, and so we too can pray that God will judge our enemies, and yet while doing so give them a final opportunity to repent.

Third, the Bible is filled with pleas from his people for divine vindication:

Psalm 79:10 — *Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the*

heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.

Psalm 94:3 — Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?

It is not wrong for a Christian to pray for vindication from evil men. God's response in this book, if nothing else, should convince us of that!

Can we pray for the judgment of God's enemies today? Can we pray for the casting down of imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God? Absolutely! Not only **can** we pray for such things, we **must** pray for such things!

We are at war! And it is no sin to pray that your enemies be defeated when you are at war against them!

Revelation 6:12-17

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; 13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the

throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

The removal of the sixth seal reveals the wrath of the Lamb and the judgment of the ungodly.

Does this seal describe the **final judgment** and the end of time? Most commentators say that it does, but in studying Revelation I am always reminded of something Mark Twain once said — **when you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's probably time to change sides!**

The language in verses 12-17 is language of judgment, and as language of judgment it **could** be used to describe many different judgments, including the great and final judgment at the end of the world. But is that the judgment that is being described here?

What is the context? What is the time frame? Which judgment is under consideration here? **If we ever stop asking ourselves those question in our study of this book, then we will almost certainly go off the rails in our interpretation, as so many others have done.**

People treat this book like a cafeteria line in which the reader can select verses they like and then use them for whatever purpose they want — and then those same people wonder why the book is so hard to understand! This book is much easier to understand than they think it is!

Remember one of our key interpretive principles — **similarity of language does not prove identity of subject.** There are many judgments in the Bible, and they are often described with the same symbols and the same images.

Matthew 24:30, for example, sure sounds a lot like the end of the world when considered alone and apart from its context and its time frame. But when we consider the time frame (verse 34 — first century) and the context (a discussion of the temple in Jerusalem), we see that Matthew 24:30 is **not** describing the end of the world but is instead describing the end of Jerusalem in AD 70. We likewise need to be careful in our interpretation of these verses in Revelation 6. As one commentator reminds us:

We must take the trouble to learn as much as possible concerning the historical situation to which the book of Revelation be-

longs. It is only when this historical situation is reconstructed that Revelation comes alive and we are able to enter sympathetically into the mind and heart of the author and his readers. Perhaps no other book of the Bible has suffered more from being wrenched from its historical context than has Revelation.

The language used to describe the opening of the sixth seal is a mosaic of phrases used elsewhere in the Bible to describe other past judgments by God.

What about the great earthquake in verse 12? Read Luke 21 about the judgment against Jerusalem in AD 70:

*Luke 21:11 — And **great earthquakes** shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.*

And read Isaiah 29 about another even earlier judgment against Jerusalem:

*Isaiah 29:6 — Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, **and with earthquake**, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.*

What about the darkening of the sun and the moon in verse 12? Read Joel 2, which Acts 2 tells us was fulfilled in the first century:

Joel 2:31 — The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.

What about the falling of the stars and the removing of the heavens in verses 13-14? Read Isaiah 34 about a judgment against Edom:

Isaiah 34:4 — And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

And read Isaiah 13 about a judgment against Babylon carried out by God through the Medes:

*Isaiah 13:13 — Therefore I will **shake the heavens**, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the*

wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

And read Matthew 24 about a judgment against Jerusalem in the first century:

Matthew 24:29 — *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and **the stars shall fall from heaven**, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.*

What about the movement of islands and mountains out of their places in verse 14? Read Haggai 2 about the judgment against Jerusalem **and** the establishment of the eternal kingdom in the first century:

Haggai 2:6 — *For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and **I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.***

Read Nahum 1 about a judgment against Nineveh:

Nahum 1:5 — ***The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt**, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.*

Read Micah 1 about a judgment against Samaria and Jerusalem:

Micah 1:4 — ***And the mountains shall be molten under him**, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.*

Read Isaiah 13 (again) about a judgment against Babylon:

Isaiah 13:13 — *Therefore I will shake the heavens, and **the earth shall remove out of her place**, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.*

So we ask again, **do verses 12-17 from Revelation 6 describe the end of the world?** Many would say that the language used in these verses could only apply to the end of the world. **Tell that to Babylon! Tell that to Edom! Tell that to Nineveh! Tell that to Samaria! Tell that to Jerusalem!** The same vivid language was applied to them regarding events that happened thousands of year ago — **not** the end of the world!

There may be some good arguments for applying these verses to the end of the world, but saying that the language used here could **only** describe the end of the world is **not** a good argument. Why? Because the Bible repeatedly uses the same language to apply to events other than the end of the world.

Our investigation of this language from verses 12-17 provides an **important reminder** — we cannot study Revelation apart from the Old Testament. No other book in the New Testament alludes to the Old Testament more often than does the book of Revelation. As Barclay says:

Strange as John's pictures may seem to us, there is not a single detail which is not ... in the Old Testament.

Symbols are often based on previous **literal** events. Their purpose is to remind one of that earlier event. Israel, for example, is a symbol for God's people, and so Israel and the new Jerusalem are symbols for the church. Likewise, Egypt is a symbol for slavery and bondage. Babylon is a symbol for Rome. The ten plagues are symbols for God's judgments.

But in these verses the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky, and the whole earth are affected. Why do we see such **global terms** used in reference to Rome?

First, of course, the immediate answer is that to the people of this day, Rome was global! It ruled much of the entire known world!

***Luke 2:1** — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.*

Second, whenever the ungodly are dominant and oppressive, the entire world is said to be theirs. Isaiah 13:11 says with regard to Babylon, "I will punish **the world** for their evil." Satan is called "the prince of this world" in John 14:30.

The picture in these verses is of God dismantling and attacking his own created world so that he can judge the ungodly who seem to be in charge of that world. God is letting them know who is really in charge! If they think they can hide, they are badly mistaken. God will dismantle his creation to find them and punish them. That is the picture in these verses, as well as in the many verses we just read describing prior judgments in the Old Testament.

Usually in our study of this book, we should try to see things from **God's** point of view, but here it helps to see things from **Rome's** point of view. The picture here is one of a total and unexpected breakdown of order. Notice from verse 15 that this fear touches all levels of society from the least to the greatest.

Rome thought it had covered every base, but it had forgotten to include God in its plans. And men always find themselves in trouble when they forget to factor God into their equations!

James 4:13-14 — Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

That attitude was Rome's attitude. Rome had great plans for itself, but they were all apart from God. And, as with a human life, the life of mighty Rome would also prove to be a vapor that appears just for a little time.

Lesson 17

Last week when we ended we were discussing verses 12-17 of Chapter 6. Those verses describe a judgment by God — but which judgment? That was the question we were considering when the class ended.

A **surface approach** to the book would likely answer that this **must** be the final judgment at the end of the world. **But why must it?** We looked at numerous examples last week in which this very same language was used to describe past judgments of God, including the judgment against Jerusalem that occurred shortly before this book was written. If the language there is not describing the end of the world, then why must the same language here be describing the end of the world?

A **better approach** is to ask the same questions that have carried us through Daniel, Zechariah, and now through Revelation — what is the context and what is the time frame? We already know the answers to those two questions. The context comes from Chapters 2 and 3 — it is the Roman persecution of God's people in the first century. The martyrs that we saw earlier in this same chapter had been killed by Rome because of their testimony about Jesus. And the time frame? We saw last week that this book states very clearly seven times that the events in the book were to occur soon.

There is no reason to suddenly leap thousands of years into the future at the end of the Chapter 6 — and there is every reason not to do that. The vivid language of judgment that we find here is used all throughout the Bible to describe various judgments by God — we just need to examine the context and the time frame to determine which judgment is being discussed here. When we do, we will find that Rome is still in view here. The text is telling us that Rome's day of judgment is coming soon!

The judgment of Rome is the **immediate** fulfillment of the prophecies in these verses. But could there be another **future** fulfillment? Could we be seeing a prophecy here that has a dual fulfillment? The answer is yes, we **could** be, but we can't say that for sure. All that we can say for sure from the text is that the immediate fulfillment was the judgment of Rome.

Why can't we say for sure whether there is a dual fulfillment? After all, we know for a fact that some prophecies in the Old Testament had dual fulfillments — one immediate and another yet future. Yes, we know that — **but**

how do we know that? We know that because the Bible tells us there was a dual fulfillment. We will see an example of that in the next chapter.

Here is the **key point**: yes, there are some dual prophecies in the Bible, but the only reason we know that is because the inspired text told us about both fulfillments. Absent that divine guidance, we can only speculate about whether there is a second fulfillment in view.

Are we seeing prophecies in this book of Revelation with dual fulfillments — one immediate fulfillment as to the judgment of Rome, and a second yet future fulfillment as to the final judgment? **Perhaps**, but the text does not tell us that, so we can only state that as an opinion.

Last week we mentioned that **literal** past events or places can provide the basis for symbols in this book — such as Israel, Egypt, and Babylon. Just as symbols can be based on literal **past** events, symbols can also be based on literal **future** events.

Some day the earth will literally be destroyed by fire, and the heavens will literally be rolled up like a scroll — and God sometimes uses those literal future events associated with the final judgment as symbols to depict these earlier judgments. These earlier judgments serve as **reminders** of the great judgment that will someday come to the entire world. Is it more than a reminder? Is it in fact a prophecy with a dual fulfillment? Perhaps, but we must leave it there. We cannot be dogmatic about a second fulfillment when the text has not told us that a second fulfillment is in view.

The search for a hiding place in verse 16 is also seen in Isaiah 2, which describes the reaction of the ungodly at the establishment of the eternal kingdom in Acts 2.

Isaiah 2:19 — And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

The message is clear: there is no place to hide from God. It is interesting to watch the ungodly trying to **hide** in a book entitled **Revelation! God reveals! The ungodly hide!**

Swete: “What sinners fear most is not death, but the revealed presence of God.”

The “**wrath of the Lamb**” in verse 16 is one of the most remarkable and most terrifying expressions and most vivid pictures found anywhere in the Bible. The word “wrath” is applied to Jesus only one time in the gospels.

***Mark 3:5** — And when he had looked round about on them with **anger**, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.*

We see the same word also in John 3.

***John 3:36** — He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the **wrath** of God abideth on him.*

We all know what makes God happy. But it is just as important that we all know what makes God angry!

C.S. Lewis: “In the end that face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.”

There is no middle ground in that verse we read from John 3:36. On that last day, each person will either receive eternal life or wrath. Verse 17 in this context is describing the judgment of Rome, but the message could apply to any judgment from God, including the final judgment: “For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” The answer of course is no one. It is only in Christ that anyone can stand.

***Romans 14:4** — Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 is an interlude between the sixth seal and the seventh seal. It is intended to provide comfort to the church and to reassure the church that they will be victorious over Rome if they remain faithful unto death.

Chapter 7 answers the question that appeared at the end of Chapter 6: Who can stand before the wrath of God?

As we will see, Revelation 7 is modeled after Ezekiel 9, which describes a judgment that was to come against Judah from Babylon. In Ezekiel 9, God's people are marked so that they would be untouched when judgment came. Did that mean they experienced a **physical deliverance** from suffering? No, because in Ezekiel 21:3-4 we see that the righteous died as well as the guilty when that judgment came. Their deliverance was **spiritual** rather than physical. Yes, they suffered, but they were not among those for whom that suffering was a judgment and a punishment.

There is a vast difference between suffering **with** the guilty and suffering **because** you are guilty, even though admittedly at the time there may not appear to be much of a difference to the one who is suffering. But the difference is real, and the difference is clear from God's perspective, which is the perspective revealed to us in this book.

When we think of patience in suffering, we think of Job, and there are some remarkable parallels between the book of **Revelation** and the book of **Job**.

- In each, Satan plays a key role as an accuser of God's people.
- In each, God's people suffer at the hands of Satan, but that suffering is not punishment and is not permanent.
- In each, God allows that suffering to continue for a little time.
- In each, a key theme is the sovereignty of God.
- In each, a key theme is that things are not always what they seem.
- In each, there is a happy ending for the people of God.

Revelation 7:1-3

1 And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

The number **four** is mentioned four times in these verses. As we have seen, the number four is a symbol for the created world — the four elements, the four directions, the four seasons. Sometimes this symbol is used in a subtle way. In 5:12 when **heaven** praises Christ, it is with a **seven**-fold blessing. Later in 5:13, when the **earth** praises Christ, it is with a **four**-fold blessing. When we see the number four, as we do here, we should expect to see something about the created world.

What does it mean in verse 1 to hold back the four winds? A wind is both powerful and invisible, and so a wind is often used to denote the activity of God.

***Jeremiah 18:17** — I will scatter them as with **an east wind** before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.*

***Psalms 18:10** — And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the **wind**.*

By holding back the four winds, these four angels are holding back God's judgments against his creation. The judgment will come when the angels let loose the wind. **How soon will the judgment occur?** Well, how long can the wind be held back? The image used here denotes something that will occur **soon**.

Another angel appears in verse 2 on an errand of mercy, and this angel comes from the east. Other translations have "from the rising of the sun," which is what the Greek word used here literally means. The sun is often used to represent the goodness of God.

***Psalms 84:11** — For the Lord God is a **sun** and shield.*

***Malachi 4:2** — But unto you that fear my name shall the **Sun** of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.*

This book is all about revelation, and nothing reveals like the sun! Evil hides in darkness, but sunlight dispels darkness. This angel arriving from the rising sun is bringing good news from God for the people of God!

In verse 3, a call for delay is given. If nothing in this book was going to happen for 2000 years, then why would a call for delay be needed? Is that the picture we see here — a long slow process that will take millennia to even get started? Or do we instead see something that is about to happen, so soon in fact that it is like holding back a strong wind? So soon, that there must be a call for a delay.

Why the delay in verse 3? The judgment is delayed until the righteous are marked or sealed in their foreheads. This is where Revelation 7 starts to look a bit like Ezekiel 9.

*Ezekiel 9:4-6 — And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and **set a mark** upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.*

This entire scene is a reminder of something we have already seen frequently in this book: **God knows!** Seven times in the seven letters Jesus said, “**I know.**” The church thought they had been forgotten. The church thought that God did not know what Rome was doing to them. Wrong! God knows! **And that fact should bring comfort to the godly and fear to the ungodly — both then and today!**

*2 Timothy 2:19 — Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, **having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.** And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

Is there a more **comforting** verse in the Bible than that one? Is there a more **challenging** verse for the people of God? The foundation is sure! The Lord knows them that are his! Let those who belong to Jesus depart from iniquity! There are a thousand sermons in that one verse.

God knows his people. In an earthly kingdom, everyone knows the king, but the king does not know everyone. That is not how it is in the heavenly kingdom. God knows every single person.

God knows them that are his. And that fact is shown in this chapter to provide comfort and assurance to those who were being persecuted — to those who were wondering if God had forgotten about them. God had not forgotten. God knows.

What is the **seal** in verses 2-3? Is it the Holy Spirit? Some say yes, and point to Ephesians.

***Ephesians 1:13** — In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*

But we need to be careful here. These people in Revelation 7 were already saved before they received the seal in verses 2-3. They were receiving the seal to show that they were God's people; not to make them God's people. They were already faithful Christians. They had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit that was promised in Acts 2:38 and Acts 5:32. They had already received the seal of Ephesians 1:13 and 2 Timothy 2:19.

So then does that mean the seal here is **not** the Holy Spirit? No, and that is why we have to be careful. I think we are seeing something here that we have seen before in this book and that we will see again in this book — these people are being shown as receiving something they already possessed! Why? Because they had forgotten what it means. Because they needed to be reminded of what it means. Because God wanted them to see it in a new light. Because God wanted the rest of the world to see it and understand what it means. Because it was about to be made manifest to them and to the world in a new way.

This seal in Chapter 7 is a **reminder**. It is a reminder of a relationship these Christians already had with God, but they were not seeing properly. If they thought God had forgotten about them, then they did not understand how God sees them. So what does God do here? **God shows them how he sees them — and God shows us today how he sees us!**

So how does God see them? Just as we write our name on things that are important to us and that we don't want to lose, God has written his name (he has set his seal) on his people. God has marked his people to reassure them that

he knows who they are and that they belong to him. Not one will be misplaced or stolen.

So is the seal the Holy Spirit? I think that it is. I think that is the function of the non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit — it is how God writes his name on his faithful children. It is given as a seal. That is precisely what we are told in Ephesians 1:13.

There has long been a difference of opinion in the church on whether the Holy Spirit dwells in a Christian only through the word or separately apart from the word. So long as we can agree that the Holy Spirit does not dwell miraculously in a person (in the sense that the Holy Spirit gives that person supernatural guidance, insight, or abilities), then that disagreement is just a matter of opinion on which we can differ.

My view is that the Holy Spirit does dwell apart from the word, but the Holy Spirit does not work apart from the word. But I have often encountered an objection to that view: if the Holy Spirit dwelling in me doesn't do anything apart from the Word, then why do we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? What is the purpose? **The verses we are looking at now answer that question** — the Holy Spirit is how God marks those who are his.

And just think for a moment about what that means. Do we see ourselves as God's special possession — “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9)? What if there were a visible mark on our foreheads that we could see and the rest of the world could see. Would that visible mark help us live a righteous life? Would it make us less likely to sin, knowing that the world could see that mark from God upon us?

Well, we have that mark! We have that seal! And if the world can't see that mark from God on our lives, then that is not a reflection upon God, but rather a reflection upon us. **The seal of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life should be as visible to the world as a mark on our forehead! That was certainly true of the Apostle John.**

*Acts 4:13 — Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, **that they had been with Jesus.***

And so I suppose having this special mark from God will protect us from persecution, right? No! **In fact, it will cause more persecution.** The mark from God

promises spiritual deliverance, not physical deliverance — and we know that very often those two types of deliverance are opposite to each other.

Matthew 16:25 — For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Revelation 2:10 — Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Soon we will meet people in this book who are wearing someone else's mark — the mark of the beast. And make no doubt about it — **everyone then and everyone today is wearing someone's mark.**

Romans 6:16 — Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

There is no one walking around not wearing a mark. The only question is whose mark are you wearing? Caesar or Christ?

But if I can't see the mark of God on myself, how do I know that it is there? Have you heard the gospel? Have you obeyed the gospel by believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized for the remission of your sins? Are you living a life of faithfulness to God? Then you have that mark on you. And if you answered yes to all of those questions, then that mark is more visible than you may think it is!

Revelation 7:4-8

4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. 5 Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. 6 Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe

of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. 7 Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. 8 Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

Are numbers use figuratively in this book? Look at verses 5-8. 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! 12000! We see the number 12,000 mentioned twelve times in those four verses. **What do we think?** Is it possible that God is trying to tell us something by using the number twelve? Is think it is more than possible; I think it is unavoidable. The number twelve is found twenty two times in this book, more times than in all but one other book of the Bible. (First Chronicles uses it twenty six times.)

I don't know about you, but when I see a premillennialist taking these numbers literally, I picture God just shaking his head! "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Matthew 13:14). Numbers are used **symbolically** in this book — verses 4-8 leave no other reasonable option. And if these numbers here are symbols, on what basis can anyone claim in a later chapter that the number one thousand is literal?

Who are the 144,000 in verse 4 who were sealed? Don't panic (and the exits are clearly marked!), but some mathematics is needed here. Square roots and cube roots are needed to understand this symbol!

The number twelve is the symbol for God's people (twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, twelve apostles), and twelve squared is 144, where the power of two may denote the righteous under both covenants. The number ten is the symbol for completeness (ten fingers, ten toes), and one thousand is ten raised to the power of three, the symbol for divinity. What that means is that several sym-

bols are wrapped up in the number 144,000 — symbols for God’s people, for the old and new covenant, for completeness, and for God.

What is it that contains the all of the righteous people of God, both those who lived and died under the old covenant prior to the death of Christ and those who lived or are living under the new covenant after the death of Christ? What else could it be? It is the eternal kingdom of God, the church. What we are seeing here is yet another beautiful image for the church.

Do you mean to say that the righteous people of God who lived under the old covenant are in the church? Absolutely! Where else would they be? The church is the body of the saved.

What does Ephesians 2:20 say about the church? It says that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles **and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Not only are the Old Testament prophets in the church, they are part of the foundation of the church!

So back to the 144,000 in these verses. Let’s approach that number from another angle by asking this question: **How many of God’s people were sealed?**

Before we answer that question, let’s ask this question: **what would we expect the answer to be?** What would the initial persecuted first century readers of this book, seeking comfort, have expected the answer to be? How many of God’s faithful people would they have expected God to write his name on? There is only one answer that makes any sense — **all** of God’s people!

That is what they would have expected the answer to be, and that is the only answer that would have provided them comfort and assurance. And guess what? **THAT IS THE ANSWER!** That is what the symbol of 144,000 depicts — **ALL OF GOD’S PEOPLE** with not a single one left out!

But, some might object, if God meant “all” here, why didn’t he just say “all”? Why use 144,000 if he meant “all”? Well, we could just as easily ask this question: Why is the book of Revelation so long? Why didn’t God just say, “You win!”? Couldn’t the entire book have been reduced to that? Yes, but that is not how God decided to convey that message. Instead, God gave us this beautiful book filled with symbols, and God gave us brains so we could understand them.

How much comfort is there in these verses if we take 144,000 literally, as so many do today? Can we really imagine God turning to the poor, persecuted Christian wearing the number 144,001 on his chest and saying “Sorry, but

you're out of luck. You're a day late, and a dollar short! Better luck next time ... if there were going to be a next time!" **How ridiculous!** The so-called rigid literalism of the premillennialist strips all of the beauty and meaning out of the text! **God's message to the 144,001st Christian is the same as his message to the 144,000th Christian!** "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

So, how many of God's people were sealed? We would expect the answer to be that **all** of God's people were sealed. We would expect to hear that not one of God's children was left out. We would expect to hear that he was marking **all** of his possessions. **And that is exactly what we are told here!** The number 144,000 is a beautiful symbol for **all** of God's people. The number 144,000 is God's way of emphasizing that **all** of his people are under his care and protection — which is just what we would expect him to say!

The 144,000 are mentioned again in 14:1-5, where they are described as virgins and are said to be those redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb. Does that later description from Chapter 14 help us here with the 144,000 in Chapter 7? Yes. It confirms what we are saying here.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul said he wanted to present the Corinthian church as a chaste virgin to Christ. James 1:18 says that we are "a kind of first fruits of his creatures." The church consists of those who have been redeemed from mankind. The church is sealed with the name of God and the Lamb.

***Revelation 3:12** — Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*

The descriptions of the 144,000 in both Chapter 7 and Chapter 14 confirm that the number 144,000 depicts the church.

But why are they called **Israelites** in these verses? That's simple. Israel is an established name for God's people. The name Israel literally means "he who prevailed with God." Could there be a better description for those in the church, and particularly for the persecuted first century Christians? As we discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the church is the true Israel. The church is the new Jerusalem.

But what about the names of the tribes listed here. Why include all of these names in the text? Is there a reason? Is there anything unusual about this list?

Yes, there is a reason, and yes, there is something unusual about the list. **In fact, this list of names reaffirms a central theme of the book: Caesar or Christ.** How?

We know that Jacob had twelve sons, but we also know that only eleven sons received a tribal inheritance. The tribe of Levi instead received 48 cities that were scattered among the other tribes. The tribe of Joseph was split into two tribes named for his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. So, when the tribes are listed in the Bible the list generally **omits** Levi and Joseph and **includes** Ephraim and Manasseh instead. But that is **not** the case here.

In fact, the list is unusual in several respects. First, Judah rather than Reuben (the oldest son) heads the list. Why? That's easy. Christ is the Lion of Judah. Christ came from the tribe of Judah. This book is all about Jesus, and so Judah rather than Reuben starts off this list.

But, second, Manasseh and Joseph are **both** included even though Manasseh was Joseph's son. And Levi is included on the list. And who is left off the list? Joseph's other son, Ephraim, and Dan are left off the list. **For some reason the inspired text has very deliberately omitted Ephraim and Dan.** Why? One word: **idolatry.**

The tribe of Dan was very early connected with idolatry in the Bible:

***Judges 18:30** — And the children of Dan set up the graven image.*

***1 Kings 12:28-29** — Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.*

***Genesis 49:17** — Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*

Rome was full of idolatry, and so was Dan. Dan was the classic example of a tribe that compromised with the world. Dan chose Caesar over Christ. And so Dan was not used here in this beautiful description of the church.

And why was Ephraim left out? For the same reason:

***Hosea 4:17** — Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.*

Hosea 12:1 — Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

Ephraim had forsaken God and had instead tried to make deals with the world. Ephraim made a covenant with Assyria, and at the same time was making deals with Egypt. They were joined to idols. Just like Dan, Ephraim was guilty of compromise, and just like Dan, Ephraim was left out of this beautiful description of the church.

So why are the tribes listed here by name? We just answered that question. The names of the tribes are listed here so that God could give us a lesson about compromise with the world. These names were listed so that we would notice the absence of Dan and Ephraim, and ask ourselves why.

This description teaches us several things about how we must approach this book if we hope to properly understand it. **First**, it shows us that numbers are symbolic in this book. **Second**, it shows us that we can't understand this book apart from the Old Testament. And **third**, it shows us that we can't understand this book just by skimming the surface of the text, picking out a few verses here and there. We need to dive deeply into God's word — and when we do, what wonderful treasures we will find!

Psalm 119:162 — I rejoice at your word as one who finds great treasure.

Lesson 18

Last week we started Chapter 7, which is an interlude between the sixth seal and the seventh seal.

Chapter 7 is here to provide comfort to the church and to reassure the church that they will be victorious over Rome if they remain faithful unto death.

Last week we looked at the 144,000 who were sealed in verse 4, and we discussed who they were and what it meant for them to be sealed.

When we ended we were looking at the twelve tribes in verses 4-8, and we discussed how the 12 names of those tribes reinforces the central theme of this book: Caesar or Christ?

Verse 9 will show us a great multitude dressed in white robes and standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb.

Revelation 7:9-12

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Verses 9-12 are modeled after the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles (called the feast of booths in the KJV). We can read about that feast in Leviticus.

Leviticus 23:39-43 — Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

We can immediately see some similarities between that feast from Leviticus 23 and what we see here in verses 9-12 — the rejoicing, the palm trees, the number seven, and the celebration of a great deliverance.

In John 7:37 the Feast of the Tabernacles is referred to simply as “**the** feast.” The Rabbis said that “he who has not seen Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means.”

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites dwelt in tents and tabernacles. The people would build booths or tabernacles with walls made of branches and thatched roofs and then live in them for seven days as a way of remembering that great deliverance by God.

One of the most important rituals during this feast was the pouring of water in the temple. A specially appointed priest was sent to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This water was then poured by the High Priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113-118).

It was at the end of such a celebration that Jesus told the people that he was the real source of living water.

John 7:37-38 — In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

The original feast from Leviticus 23 looked **forward** to the Messiah. Those at this great celebration in Revelation 7 are shown as **figuratively** looking at the Messiah, just as those celebrating the feast in John 7 were **literally** looking at the Messiah.

And this celebration is not limited to the Jews. Instead, we see in verse 9 a great multitude “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” As before, that is a reminder that the eternal kingdom is open to all who will obey the gospel. There are no national or racial boundaries in the church.

Is there anywhere else in the Bible where the Feast of Tabernacles is figuratively applied to the church? Yes, and that’s a review question because we saw this same feast in our study of Zechariah 14 (and those lessons are available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com).

Zechariah 14:16 — And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

As we recall from that earlier study, the “nations” that came against Jerusalem is Rome, which came against spiritual Jerusalem, the church. That Rome is called “nations” rather than “nation” simply reflects the historical reality — Rome was an amalgam of all the nations it had conquered. When Rome came against you it was as if all the nations of the world had come against you. That verse from Zechariah 14 was a prophecy of the very persecution by Rome that we are seeing here in Revelation.

Zechariah 14:16 is directed to those in the Roman empire who did **not** experience the terrible judgments of the previous verses in Zechariah 14 (judgments prophesied by Zechariah and by John). **Who are those Romans?** There can be only one answer to that question — they are the Romans who came through that judgment because they switched sides! They are those Romans who heard and obeyed the gospel. They are the Romans who chose Christ over Caesar!

How do we know that? Zechariah 14:16 tells us that — it says that they “shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.” They are worshiping God, and not just once, but regularly! These Romans are the Romans who saw the errors of their ways and obeyed the gospel. We know there were such people from the many examples we see in the New Testament. Some of them were very close to Caesar himself.

Philippians 4:22 — All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household.

We see the same thing here in verse 9 — this group of worshippers includes those “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” All nations includes Rome!

Yes, some of the Christians proved to be faithless and fell away. We saw examples of that in Revelation 2-3. But some of the Romans proved faithful and fell away from Rome! Some of the Romans became followers of Christ rather than followers of Caesar!

What we see here is a wonderful testimony about the early church. In the midst of the most terrible persecution, the church continued its mission of evangelizing the world! Rome was not able to derail the church from its great mission. The church was proclaiming the gospel to those who sought to kill them. And how many were converted by the example of those early Christians who were willing to face death and terrible hardships for Christ? The early church is an example to the modern church — and particularly the modern church that is not having to facing great persecution or terrible hardship for the sake of Christ.

But why are the Christians in verses 9-12 keeping the Jewish feast of the tabernacles? Does that mean that the entire old covenant law will be brought back into force in the end times as the premillennialists teach? **Of course not.** **How could anyone believe such a thing?** We know that the old law cannot be in force with Jesus as our King and High Priest (Hebrews 7:12). And we know that the old law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and has been replaced with the new law of Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Galatians 6:2). What need do we have for the old law now that Christ has come?

So what is meant in Zechariah 14 and here in Revelation 7? The language used is highly figurative, so we need to ask what is meant by the **symbol** of the feast of the tabernacles. **Why would the converted Romans be shown keeping that particular feast?** At least three reasons.

First, the feast we intended to remember and celebrate the deliverance of God's people from terrible bondage.

Second, on the first day of the feast 13 bulls were offered, 12 on the next day, 11 on the third, and so on until 7 were offered on the seventh day — making a total of 70 offerings. The rabbis taught that the number 70 depicted the number of nations in the world, which meant that this feast looked forward to a time when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

Third, the pouring of water that we described a moment ago looked forward toward the outpouring of God's spirit upon all nations as mentioned in Joel 2:28 (I will pour out my spirit on all flesh) and which Peter in Acts 2 says was fulfilled during the first century.

So what then does this particular feast figuratively depict? It depicts the escape from bondage, the union of Jew and Gentile, and the outpouring of God's spirit upon the first century church. **Each of those is shown in the conversion to Christ of a Roman citizen.** They have escaped bondage and death, they have joined with Jewish believers in the church, and they are now enjoying the wonderful blessings provided to those in the church.

Zechariah 14:16 tells us that some Romans would be converted, would escape the judgment of Rome, and would enjoy the blessings of those in the church. I think Revelation 7:9-12 is showing us the same thing, and I think the next few verses will confirm that for us.

Revelation 7:13-17

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sit-

teth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

In verse 13, one of the elders asks the same question that we just asked: “**Who are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?**” He then answers his own question and tells John that they are those “which came out of great tribulation.” They “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” — and that is why they are before the throne of God. That is why they are rejoicing.

What is the “**great tribulation**” in verse 14? That is certainly a key question here, and many would say that it is a key question for the entirety of the book. But most commentaries answer that question without really thinking about it — but let’s not make that mistake!

Let’s first determine what the great tribulation is **not**. There are some **big misconceptions** about the great tribulation.

First, it is a misconception to believe that there is **only one** great tribulation in the Bible. God’s enemies always undergo a great tribulation at one time or another, and the Bible is filled with enemies of God and filled with great tribulations experienced by those enemies of God. As examples, we could list Sodom, Gomorrah, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Tyre, Media, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Damascus, Ethiopia, Phoenicia, Arabia, and sometimes even Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

In fact, Jerusalem underwent a great tribulation in AD 70 when it was judged by God using Roman hands. Was that event really a “great tribulation”? Yes — just listen to how Jesus described it.

***Matthew 24:21** — For then shall be **great tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

That great tribulation was fulfilled in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Some people read Matthew 24:21 and conclude that it must be speaking about the end of the world. After all, it says that there has never been and will never be another tribulation like that one. But we know that Matthew 24:21 was **not** talking about the end of the world. Why? Because of Matthew 24:34 — “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” Whatever Matthew 24:21 was talking about, it happened in the first century. (And we know from the context that it was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which had already happened by the time Revelation 7 was written.)

The language in Matthew 24 is apocalyptic, and so we should expect to see vivid, frightening images — and that is exactly what we find in verse 21 of Matthew 24. We have already seen similar vivid hyperbolic language from the Old Testament, where it was also **not** describing the end of the world.

Yes, **another** great tribulation will happen on the last day when the ungodly are judged and the world is destroyed. Paul tells us about it.

***Romans 2:5-10** — But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.*

That last day will certainly be a great tribulation for those who have rejected the gospel, but that is **not** the great tribulation in Matthew 24:21, and I don't think it is the great tribulation we see here in Revelation 7:14.

Let's attack this question from another angle. If you had started reading the Bible in Genesis and if you had now read all the way to Revelation, wouldn't you **expect** there to be a great tribulation in Rome's future? Hasn't that always been God's way of dealing with the enemies of his people? How many times

would you have seen that process repeated between the book of Genesis and this book of Revelation?

Chapter 6 told us that a great tribulation was coming for Rome. The saints were sealed earlier in Chapter 7 in anticipation of that great tribulation. So, Chapter 7 has already told us the church was about to go through a great tribulation. Now we see the church after it has come out of the great tribulation! Isn't that exactly what we would expect to see? Isn't that exactly what verse 14 tells us? "These are they which came out of great tribulation."

Most of the descriptions of what God has in store for Rome appear in later chapters in this book, but the outcome for the church is so certain that God is showing it to us here in Chapter 7 — and God will show it to us again at the end of the book. **It is as if God did not want the first century readers to worry one bit about the outcome as they read or listened to this book.** God tells them right from the start that they will be victorious if their robes remain white. That fact is never in doubt.

Here is the image that God is painting: Rome is persecuting the church. The church cries out for vindication. God says that Rome will experience his wrath. The church is sealed by God before the tribulation of Rome. After the tribulation of Rome, the church is shown rejoicing in heaven. Later we will see the church figuratively returned to a world made new by God's judgment and removal of Rome.

Was the church also affected by this great tribulation? Yes and no. Yes, they were **physically** affected because they were in it. They were living in Rome. But no they were not **spiritually** affected because they came out of it (verse 14), which means they spiritually escaped. Their robes were white, and that great tribulation was not a judgment against them.

Does the **past tense** ("which came out") in verse 14 mean that this judgment had already happened by the time the book was written? No. What it means is that the outcome of God's battle with Rome was never in doubt. The outcome was so certain that God spoke of it in past tense before it even happened. We see that so frequently in the Bible that it has a name — the prophetic past tense.

Was the church literally in heaven at this time? No, not all of them, although those who had died in Christ were literally there. We have already seen the martyrs shown under the altar. So why are they all shown in heaven here? Doesn't that mean the world has ended? No.

God depicts the Christians in this book as already being in heaven even while they still lived on earth. As for the ungodly Romans, this book consistently refers to them as “those that dwell upon the earth.” Later, when the Romans are cleared out of the way, we will figuratively see the church return to an earth made new (Revelation 21:2).

What Revelation 21:2 tells us is that even if we were to take all of this literally, we could still not say that the earth had been destroyed prior to Chapter 7. But, of course, this is not literal; it is all figurative. In reality the church never left the earth in the first century. The departure of the church will not occur in reality until the last great day (1 Corinthians 15:24). God’s shows the church in heaven to show that they are secure and safe in God’s hands. The church does not need to take care of Rome; God will do that. All the church needs to do is watch and cheer and remain faithful while God answers their prayers for vindication.

Who are “those before the throne” in verse 15? Those before the throne are the 144,000 (*all* of God’s people) looked at from a different perspective. They are the people who were marked looked at from a different perspective.

This group before the throne is the **church**. Who else can stand before the throne of God? Who else serves God as priests? With whom else does God dwell? Who else does God shelter? Who else has the Lamb in their midst? Who else can celebrate this great deliverance?

If you ever find yourself taking a multiple choice test on the book of Revelation — I suspect you will make a pretty good grade if you just choose the church as the answer each time it is an option! **God wants us to see the church as He sees the church, and so God is showing us over and over and in many different ways how He sees the church!**

Many things in Revelation are symbolized by different symbols at different points in the book. Jesus is seen as a Lion, as a Lamb, and as a rider on a white horse. Rome is seen as a beast from the earth, as a beast from the sea, and as a blood thirsty harlot. Remember that dissimilarity of speech does not imply distinctness of subjects. Different images can be used to depict the same object.

But how do we know that this group and the 144,000 are the same? Just read their descriptions, both here and later in Chapter 14. The 144,000 were sealed to preserve them through the great tribulation, and this group consists of those who came out of the great tribulation. Both groups are before the throne

(7:15 and 14:3). Both groups are led by the Lamb and redeemed from the earth (7:17 and 14:3). The symbol 144,000 is used to denote all of God's people with not one left out, and here we see "a great multitude, which no man could number."

This group is the church. But the real question for us is not **who is this group** but rather is **when is this group**. Is this group the church at the end of **Rome**, or is this group the church at the end of **time**? Most commentaries would say the end of time, but we already know that most commentaries are completely wrong about this book — so we should definitely not proceed by headcount!

We do see some symbols here in these verses that we very commonly apply to our future home in heaven — no hunger (verse 16), no thirst (verse 16), and no tears (verse 17). And yet, once again we see symbols here that are used elsewhere in the Bible to refer, not to the end of the world, but to the state of God's people under his care and under his protection while still on this earth. **Yes, we will experience these blessings once we arrive in heaven, but we can also spiritually experience those blessings here on earth.**

Think about **Psalm 23**, for example. We generally do not think of that Psalm as something reserved for only the future, and yet what do we find there?

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

No hunger? No thirst? The picture in Psalm 23 is that of a well cared for flock.

Psalm 121:5-6 — The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

Doesn't that look like what we see here in Revelation 7:16? "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

If Psalm 23 and Psalm 121 are not describing the end of the world, then why must Revelation 7 be describing the end of the world?

But are we really saying that a child of God today in the church can experience a life without hunger, thirst, and tears? **Yes**. Certainly not physically, but spiritually. Yes, we will cry physical tears (as Jesus himself did), but spiritually we will have no tears. **Those spiritual blessings are not just blessings for God's people at some future time; they are blessings for God's people here and now.**

What did Isaiah prophecy?

Isaiah 49:8-10 — *Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. **They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them:** for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

That sounds a lot like Revelation 7:16, doesn't it? In fact, it is almost a word for word quote. When was that promise from Isaiah 49 fulfilled? Paul tells us.

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 — *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

What Paul is telling us there is that the prophecy from Isaiah 49 (which he quotes) was pointing to the salvation that came through Jesus Christ. **Now is the day!**

John 6:35 — *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

Did Jesus' followers in the first century literally cease to feel physical hunger and thirst. Of course not! And I think we all know that the promise here is not a physical one — even if we took it to be the end of the world, it would not be a physical promise. This promise is a spiritual promise.

Remember the context here. Remember the setting. This is modeled after the Feast of the Tabernacles. And what did Jesus say after that great feast?

John 7:37-38 — *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Was that promise physical or spiritual? Was that promise for the here and now or just for the end of the world? We know that it was a spiritual promise for the here and now.

Does the Bible use these same symbols elsewhere for events that are **not** the end of the world? Absolutely.

Listen to what God's people were told by Isaiah when they were being persecuted by Assyria.

Isaiah 25:8 — He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.

*Isaiah 30:19 — For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: **thou shalt weep no more**: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.*

God's people were weeping because of persecution, and they cried out for deliverance. God promised them deliverance and told them he would wipe away those tears. It happened in the Old Testament with regard to Assyria. It is happening here with regard to Rome.

The verse we just read from Isaiah 25:8 is particularly interesting. We know it applied initially to Assyria. Why? Because of the surrounding verses, and especially Isaiah 25:7. **But we also know that Isaiah 25:8 had a dual fulfillment.** How? Because Paul quotes the same verse in 1 Corinthians 15:54 and applies it to the end of time.

We **may** have some dual fulfillments in Revelation just as we do in Isaiah — some pointing to Rome and also to the end of the world. The problem is that we can never know for sure that a dual fulfillment is in view unless the inspired text tells us, as it does with Isaiah 25. But that also means that we can't rule out a dual fulfillment. We may be seeing one here for example — the persecuted Christians will receive these blessings when Rome is judged, but they will also receive these blessings at the end of time. All we know for certain is that the context and the time frame and the usage elsewhere in the Bible tell us that Rome is in view here.

So then what is the message here to the church? It is this: Rome is going to be judged, but good things are going to happen to you! You are going to be victorious! Rome will weep, but you will not. Rome will be burned by fire, but

you will not. Rome will face hunger and thirst, but not you. Jesus loves and cares for his church! You have been sealed, and you will come out of this victorious if you remain faithful unto death.

***Matthew 16:25** — For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

Doesn't that fit the context of this book? Doesn't that fit the time frame of this book? Yes, it does. If I treated this book like a cafeteria line and if all I saw was verses 16-17, then I might think we are talking about the end of the world, but those are not the only two verses in this book. We need to study those two verses in the context of the four hundred or so verses that surround it, not to mention the other thirty thousand or so verses in the Bible.

Was this a **physical** deliverance? No. We know that all who follow Christ will face persecution, and that was especially true for these early Christians. Our deliverance is a **spiritual** deliverance, **both then and now**. We must see things as God sees them, and God's view is from all eternity. By God's view, our lives on this earth are just vapors that appear for a short while and then vanish away. God is much more concerned about our spiritual life, and of course we should be as well.

Yes, the church overcame mighty Rome just as Daniel prophesied in Daniel 2:44. How? By following the example of Christ, who overcame the world through his perfect sacrifice. The inspired text will tell us later exactly how the church overcame Rome.

***Revelation 12:11** — And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

We are not looking at a **physical** deliverance here — but we are looking at a deliverance, and this deliverance does not **avoid** death but rather **embraces** death. When Jesus calls a man, he bids him to come and die. Death is not the end for a Christian; it is the beginning.

So far we have seen Jesus' power and worthiness to judge, we have heard a demand for judgment from the martyrs, we have had a taste of the terror of an approaching judgment, and we have seen that God's people will be safe and victorious.

The next events that we will see will be scenes of tremendous action, but before that happens Chapter 8 will begin with a short period of awed and breathless silence and anticipation.

Lesson 19

Chapter 8

Revelation 8:1-2

1 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

After much anticipation, we finally reach the opening of the seventh seal. The removal of this final seal reveals seven trumpets that warn of impending judgment. Remember that these judgments are coming in waves of sevens — first the seven seals, and now the seven trumpets. Later we will see the seven bowls of wrath.

Verse 1 tells us that when this final seal is opened there is silence in heaven for one half hour. **Why the silence?** This short moment of silence dramatically heightens the anticipation of what is about to happen. The time for talking is over; the time for judgment has begun. The scene reminds us of Habakkuk 2:20 — “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” But the silence here is in heaven rather than on earth.

Why half an hour? The word “hour” is often used in the Bible to indicate a time of critical importance or activity.

John 12:23 — The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

John 12:27 — Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

1 John 2:18 — *Little children, it is the last hour.*
[ASV]

Most likely the symbol of a **half hour** just means that the time of critical importance is near, but has not yet come. Yes, there is a delay, but it is a very short delay. **The hour is coming!** Once again, we are reminded of the time frame for this book — a time frame that we are seeing over and over again as we study the text. **The time is near!**

In verse 2, we meet seven angels with seven trumpets. Each of these trumpets will soon sound, just as each of the seven seals we saw earlier has now been uncovered, and just as each of the seven bowls we will see later will be poured out.

What is the purpose of the trumpets? The trumpets serve the same purpose that the plagues did against Egypt, at least the early ones. The ungodly may yet be able to heed the trumpets' warnings and repent. But Rome will almost certainly not repent. Instead, Rome will harden its heart against God just as Pharaoh did, and Rome will suffer a similar fate.

Much of this book is intended for us to think about prior deliverances of God's people — most notably the deliverance from Egypt and the deliverance from Babylon. Once again, the more we know about the Old Testament, the better our ability to understand this final book in the New Testament.

As we saw with the first six seals, we will see that these trumpets are not yet final judgments against Rome. They will strike fractions rather than the whole of their targets. God's final word as to Rome is coming, but this is not yet it.

Why is Rome being warned? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is "longsuffering" and "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." That verse applies just as much to Rome as it does to anyone else, and we see that on display here in the text.

God could have hit Rome with a lightning bolt in Chapter 1, but he did not. God does not want anyone to perish, and God offers an opportunity for repentance up until that last opportunity — but make no doubt about it: there will be a final opportunity after which repentance is no longer an option. Rome will soon reach that point, but it has not happened yet. Yes, 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that God is longsuffering — but Galatians 6:7 reminds us that God is not mocked!

Revelation 8:3-6

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4** And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. **5** And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. **6** And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The altar in verse 3 reminds us of the **golden altar of incense** in Exodus 30 that stood before the curtain leading to the holy of holies in the temple. In a sense that altar also stood before the throne of God because God was often pictured as sitting enthroned upon the cherubim that were on the ark in the holy of holies.

But the altar in verse 5 reminds us the **brazen altar of burnt offering** from which the coals were taken in Leviticus 16:12 for the incense offering. The judges of Israel marched from this altar in Ezekiel 9:1-2.

So which altar do we see here? Both and neither. Neither because what we are seeing here is a symbol rather than an actual altar. But both because, as we saw with the altar in 6:9, the symbolic altar in these verses is likely intended to be a combination of those two altars from the Old Testament.

Incense is sometimes used to represent prayers, as in Psalm 141:2 — “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.” We have already seen this same image use this way earlier in the book.

*Revelation 5:8 — And when he had taken the book,
the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down*

before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

When we studied that verse we noted that the harps are symbols for praise. Likewise, the incense in 5:8 is a symbol for prayer — that is precisely what the text tells us. The harps are symbols, just as the incense is a symbol. Neither is authorized by this verse (or by any other verse) as proper in the worship of God by the church.

But we do see a difference here in verse 4 with what we saw earlier in 5:8. Here we see incense that is offered **with** prayers. **What does that mean?**

One commentary suggests that the incense in this context denotes the intercession of Christ on our behalf as we pray to God in his name.

Romans 8:34 — Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Also, notice that here we see the prayers of **all** the saints, as opposed to the prayers of just the martyrs that we saw earlier in Chapter 6.

What do these verses show us? These verses reveal the heavenly response to the prayers of these suffering Christians as those prayers came up from the earth to God like incense. Many other verses about prayer come to mind as we read this description:

James 5:16 — The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Luke 18:7-8 — And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Note that last word in Luke 18:8 — **speedily!** **That is how God responds when his children cry out to him. Speedily!** It seems that everywhere we turn we are reminded of our time frame!

Why does the angel fill the censor with fire and throw it on the earth in verse 5? That scene depicts for us the heavenly response to these prayers from all the saints. Their prayers will be answered, and judgment is coming for the enemies of God who dwell on the earth.

We see a similar image in Ezekiel 10, where it precedes an approaching judgment by God against Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 10:2 — And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city.

Here we have the same picture: God's people are pictured as being safe in heaven. God's enemies are shown as still on the earth, and the judgment on earth is about to begin. As before, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes are used to depict the impending judgment of God. The seven angels prepare to sound the seven trumpets. These verses are showing us the divine drumroll preceding those trumpets!

If you have ever shopped for audio copies of the Bible, you know that some of the available choices are the so-called **dramatized** audio Bibles. Here is how one such audio Bible is described: "Multiple-voice dramatization brings the Bible to life with world-class narration and colorful, engaging character renderings. Fully orchestrated background with sound effects provides **maximum enhancement** of the text reading."

I'm not being critical if you have such an audio Bible, but the whole idea always makes me laugh, and especially when I read verses like the ones we just read and are about to read in this book of Revelation. The Bible has all of the drama it needs; it does not need to have any drama added to it by man. The Bible is the word of God; it cannot be enhanced by man.

If (God forbid) we find the Bible boring, the problem is not with the Bible — it is with us. And the problem will not be fixed by trying to enhance the Bible; if we find the Bible boring, then we are the ones who need to be enhanced!

Revelation 8:7

7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

We talked earlier about the purpose of these trumpets, and we saw that one purpose of a trumpet is to sound a **warning**. Viewed more broadly, the purpose of a trumpet is to get people's attention, **to alert them**, perhaps as a warning, but possibly to alert them for some other reason. In the Bible, trumpets are most often used to alert people to an intervention by God into the affairs of men.

We saw such an alert when God intervened at Mount Sinai.

***Exodus 19:19** — And when the voice of the **trumpet** sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.*

We saw such an alert when God intervened specifically against Assyria and generally against all of the enemies of his people.

***Isaiah 27:13** — And it shall come to pass in that day, that **the great trumpet** shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.*

We saw such an alert when God intervened in the affairs of Jerusalem by bringing an invasion against them from the north.

***Joel 2:1** — Blow ye the **trumpet** in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.*

We saw such an alert in Zechariah's prophecy of God's intervention against Greece at the time of the Maccabean revolt.

***Zechariah 9:14** — And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the **trumpet**, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.*

We saw such an alert with God's intervention in the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70.

***Matthew 24:31** — And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a **trumpet**, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

We will see such an alert (or more accurately, **hear** it!) in the great intervention by God into the affairs of men that will occur at the end of time.

1 Corinthians 15:52 — In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 — For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

And we see such an alert here in Revelation with God's intervention into the affairs of Rome.

Why a trumpet? The reason God uses a trumpet is the same reason I chose to play the trumpet when I was a sixth grader at Katy Junior High School — **trumpets are very loud!** They get people's attention! That is what happens when God intervenes into the affairs of mankind! Interventions by God *generally* get noticed!

Why do I say *generally*? Because not all of God's interventions come with the blast of a trumpet. The greatest intervention of all came with the sound of a baby in a manger. But what began with the sound of a baby will end with the sound of a trumpet, at which time every knee shall bow to the occupant of that manger. We are not hearing that last trumpet here in Revelation 8, but we are hearing trumpets.

We are living today in a time in which God is **not** intervening in the affairs of mankind as he has done in the past. In these current days, God is speaking to the earth by his Son (Hebrews 1:2), which means that God is speaking to this earth by his word and by his church proclaiming that word.

What that means is that if a trumpet is to sound today, we must be the ones to sound it. God will blow the last trumpet, but we must blow the warnings that precede that last trumpet. We must proclaim the word of God, because if we don't, who will? If we don't sound the trumpet, who will? **It will be an indictment against the church if the first trumpet of God that some men hear turns out to be the last trumpet of God at the end of the world.** We should be sounding God's trumpet now.

And what should we proclaim with that trumpet? We must proclaim the good news — but no one will ever believe the good news unless they first be-

lieve the bad news. And the bad news is that judgment is coming for all who are opposed to God — the day of wrath is coming for all such men, just as it came from Rome and for the many other enemies of God that we read about in the Bible.

Most people today have the same attitude that Peter described:

2 Peter 3:4 — Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

The first thing such people need to know is that all things will **not** continue on forever as they are today. **First**, because we all have appointment with death unless we are alive at his coming, and **second**, because some day Christ will return to **judge** this world and then **destroy** this world. **A big change is coming!** No one will fail to notice that final intervention into the affairs of mankind! No one will be able to sit on the sidelines and just watch the show. That day is coming for all!

But, based on the context and the time frame, I do **not** believe that final day is the day we see here. Instead, what we see here is the coming intervention into the affairs of **Rome**.

The hail and fire remind us of the plagues against Egypt, which are the origin of many of the symbols used in these verses.

Exodus 9:24-25 — So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.

As with the plague of hail and fire, this casting of hail and fire in verse 7 destroys trees and vegetation. Although man and beast are not mentioned in verse 7, the image of hail and fire falling to earth certainly suggests that man and beast would be harmed if they were out in it. Of course, this is all figurative — this is not a literal trumpet, and this is not literal hail and fire. It was literal in Exodus, but that literal event is being used here as a figure for the coming judgment against Rome.

Why are only a **third** of the trees affected? As we discussed before, these trumpets are intended to warn. This trumpet is not a bowl. Bowls, as we will see,

pour out God's final judgments against Rome. As with the earlier seals, these trumpets depict partial judgments that warn of the impending doom to come but that leave an opportunity for repentance.

But why a third and not a half or a fourth? There may be no particular reason why a third was chosen over some other fraction. It may simply be that a third represents a large portion but a portion that is still less than half. We may also be seeing **thirds** because we have **three** waves of sevens — seals, trumpets, and bowls — each of which takes away a third until nothing is left.

It is also possible that the use of a third here comes from its use in Zechariah, which we studied earlier.

***Zechariah 13:8-9** — And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the **third** shall be left therein. And I will bring the **third** part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.*

Those verses describe God's deliverance of his people from the destruction of Jerusalem and from the persecution by Rome. Perhaps a third part is used here as a reminder of that earlier deliverance of God's people from the judgment of Jerusalem and a promise of their coming deliverance from the judgment of Rome.

As with the seals, we should not try to attach a specific chronology to the trumpets. They are part of the overall picture. We have already discussed how Revelation is in some ways like a painting from God. You do not look at a painting as you would a timeline. A painting is spatial rather than temporal.

We know we are not seeing a strict timeline here. Why? Because God started by telling us the ending! We already know how this will end for Rome, and we already know how this will end for the church. Remember that we have already seen the saints emerge victorious from the events that are now being described.

Revelation 8:8-9

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

With the second trumpet, we see a great burning mountain thrown into the sea. Once again, this trumpet affects only a third of what it touches. This judgment is not final or complete. We have not yet reached the bowls of God's wrath.

God's power is often described in the Bible with images involving mountains — either by leveling them or by creating them.

Zechariah 4:7** — Who art thou, O great **mountain**? before Zerubbabel **thou shalt become a plain.

***Amos 4:13** — For, lo, he that formeth the **mountains**, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name.*

***Micah 1:4** — And the **mountains** shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.*

Mountains are also sometimes used in the Bible to depict kingdoms. Jeremiah, for example, describes Babylon as a destroying mountain that will become a burnt mountain, and Isaiah describes the Lord's kingdom as the highest of the mountains.

***Jeremiah 51:25** — Behold, I am against thee, O **destroying mountain**, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon*

*thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt **mountain**.*

***Isaiah 2:2** — It shall come to pass in the latter days that the **mountain** of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the **mountains**.*

The mountain here in verse 8 also represent a kingdom, but rather than Babylon, this mountain represents Rome. As with the mountain in Jeremiah 51, this mountain also becomes a burnt mountain, but this mountain in verse 8 is also cast into the sea.

Where else in the Bible do we find a mountain being cast into the sea?

***Matthew 21:21-22** — Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and **be thou cast into the sea**; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

We often speak of a faith that is able to move mountains. **The book of Revelation is evidence that the early Christians had that faith!** They prayed to God that the mountain of Rome would be cast into the sea, and it was. One of the recurring themes in this book is the power of prayer, and perhaps nowhere is that power better illustrated than here in verse 8.

Verse 9 tells us what happened to the **sea** after that great burning mountain was cast into it.

What does the sea represent? We have already looked at the recurring image of the sea, and we saw before that the restless sea is often used to depict the wicked and the ungodly. I think that is what the sea represents here in verses 8-9.

If the mountain is Rome, then the sea is the mass of humanity that made up Rome. Rome's judgment would affect not only Rome, but it would affect all who depended on Rome. Here we see commerce affected as ocean life is destroyed and ships are destroyed.

Again, we see the image of a third here, which we discussed before. And again we see images from the plagues of Egypt that we also discussed before.

Although these images are not literal, Rome at this time did have some recent familiarity with a literal mountain burning with fire. The famous eruption of

the Mount Vesuvius volcano that buried the city of Pompeii in ash occurred in AD 79, which is about the same time that this book was written. That history makes these images even more vivid to those who initially read about them.

Revelation 8:10-11

10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

With the third trumpet, a great star falls and strikes the drinking water. Again, we are reminded of the Egyptian plagues when the water of the Nile became blood.

A star is often used in the Bible to indicate a **divine visitation**. The great visitation in Matthew 2:2 was accompanied by a “star in the east.” In Matthew 24:29, God’s coming in judgment against Jerusalem in AD 70 was described as a time when “the stars shall fall from heaven.”

We have also seen this same image used before in Revelation. The sixth seal in 6:13 was described as the stars of heaven falling unto the earth. A falling star often depicts the judgment of God upon the earth.

But falling stars don’t just remind us of divine visitations and divine judgments. **They also remind us of Satan**, about whom Jesus said in Luke 10:18, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” We are also reminded of Isaiah 14:12 — “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”

We will soon see that although Satan plays a role in these events, Satan plays a role that has been defined by God. Satan is a defeated enemy, and God will use Satan in the judgment against Rome — just as God used Rome in the judgment against Jerusalem.

Satan and Rome had much in common. Both were consumed by their hatred for God's people, and both were filled with arrogance and pride. And both had the same fate in their future.

Why is the star named **Wormwood**? Better yet, **what is wormwood**?

Wormwood is a plant whose juice is very bitter. It was offered to the false prophets in Jeremiah 23.

Jeremiah 23:15 — Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.

Barclay tells us that “wormwood always stood for the bitterness of the judgment of God on the disobedient.”

Hailey: “When men prefer the bitter waters of idolatry to the fountains of the living water, they will receive these bitter waters with the fatal consequences that follow.”

I think what we see here is something we have seen before in this book and will see again: **Men makes choices, and sometimes the worst punishment is simply to receive that which you have chosen!** I am reminded of one of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.”

Did you know that hell has a theme song? Sinatra recorded it. “**I did it my way!**” Yes, we are free to choose our actions — but we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions!

Revelation 8:12

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the

day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

The fourth trumpet, as did the sixth seal, affects the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with each, only a third is affected for the same reasons we discussed earlier. These judgments are not yet final when it comes to Rome. There is still time for repentance. These trumpets are providing a warning of what is yet to come.

But if the sun, the moon, and the stars are affected, then surely we must be looking here at the end of the world, right? **No.**

First, the time frame of the book, which is stated at least seven times from the first chapter to the last chapter, tells us we are not looking at the end of the world.

And, **second**, we have already seen language such as this use to describe events that were **not** the end of the world.

Listen to how Jesus described the judgment of Jerusalem that occurred in AD 70.

***Matthew 24:29** — Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.*

Listen to how Peter described the establishment of the church that also occurred in the first century (quoting Joel 2:31).

***Acts 2:20** — The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.*

Listen to how Isaiah described an earlier judgment against Edom.

***Isaiah 34:4** — And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.*

Listen to how Isaiah described an earlier judgment against Babylon.

Isaiah 13:10 — *For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.*

Listen to how Joel described an earlier judgment against Judah.

Joel 2:10 — *The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.*

If none of those five examples is describing the end of the world, then who can argue that the language here in Revelation 8 must be describing the end of the world? We are not looking at the end of the world here any more than that last great day was in view in Matthew 24, Acts 2, Isaiah 34, Isaiah 13, or Joel 2.

But what is the source of this imagery? Why are the sun, moon, and stars affected in this way? What does the darkening of the sun, the moon, and the stars symbolize?

To answer that question, let's first turn it around — **what does the light from the sun, the moon, and the stars depict in the Bible?** That question is easy — that shining light depicts the greatness of God, the power of God, and the goodness of God.

Psalms 19:1 — *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

Psalms 8:3-4 — *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

Psalms 148:3 — *Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.*

Isaiah 9:2 — *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*

Romans 1:20 — *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*

2 Corinthians 4:6 — *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

That's what it means when the sun, the moon, and the stars are **shining** — so then what does it mean when the sun, the moon, and the stars are **darkened**?

What it means is that these symbols of joy are ashamed at the wickedness of men, and they refuse to shine their light on those who are rebelling against God. Their darkening is a symbolic picture of the total darkness that engulfs any society that turns its back on God and casts the word of God behind its back.

John 3:19-21 — *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

History tells us that before total darkness descends on a society, there will always be the sound of warning trumpets. Can we hear those trumpets today? We had better be able to hear them! Why? Because we should be the ones blowing those trumpets!

Ezekiel 3:17 — *I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*

Much like Rome, our own society is in free fall. The only thing that can slow down that descent into darkness are the warnings in the book that we hold in our hands. If we don't sound those warnings — who will?

The cure for darkness is brightness, and the world needs to know that. We sing about it:

There's a bright day coming,
A bright day coming,
There's a bright day coming by and by;
But its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord,
Are you ready for that day to come?

But let's make sure we do more than just sing about it. We need to be blowing the trumpet of God's word!

Lesson 20

Last week we looked at the opening of the seventh seal in Chapter 8. We saw that inside the seventh seal were seven trumpets, which began to be blown after a half hour of silence in heaven and after an angel scattered fire from the altar onto the earth. We also saw (again) that these judgments against Rome were coming in response to the prayers of the saints.

If we are ever tempted to doubt the tremendous power of the praying church, then we need to study Revelation. The early church had the faith to move mountains, and last week verse 8 showed us that their prayers moved the mountain of Rome right into the sea!

In verses 7-12, the first four trumpets were blown. The fifth trumpet will sound in 9:1, and the sixth trumpet will sound in 9:13. The seventh trumpet won't be sounded until 11:15. Verse 13 of Chapter 8 previews those final three trumpets.

Revelation 8:13

13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

Where the KJV has “angel” in verse 13, most translations have “eagle,” which seems to have better textual support.

Barclay: “Here we have a dramatic and eerie picture of an empty sky and a solitary eagle winging its way across its zenith, forewarning of the doom to come.”

Phillips: “A solitary eagle flying in midheaven, crying out in pity for the inhabitants of the earth, is out of its context bizarre but set as it is it is almost unbearably poignant.”

But the Greek word translated “eagle” can also mean “vulture.” For example, the same Greek word is found in Matthew 24:28, where in the KJV we read, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the **eagles** be gathered together,” but in the ESV we read, “Wherever the corpse is, there the **vultures** will gather.”

Why do many translations use “eagle” here in verse 13 but use “vulture” in Matthew 24 for the same Greek word? Because it is not *exactly* the same Greek word — one is singular and the other is plural. Eagles typically fly alone, while vultures typically do not. (By the way, a group of vultures is called a kettle, a committee or a wake.) One rarely hears of a lone vulture, but if a lone vulture is what was intended here then the image in verse 13 moves from being eerie to being **incredibly** eerie! John may have seen a lone flying vulture crying, “Woe! Woe! Woe!”

This imagery may be pointing us back to a prophecy from Hosea directed at Israel.

***Hosea 8:1** — Set the **trumpet** to thy mouth. He shall come as an **eagle** against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.*

Although Rome rather than Israel is the target here, very similar imagery is used to show God’s judgment against those who are opposed to him.

What is the purpose of this lone eagle or this lone vulture? The same purpose as the trumpets — it is providing a warning of what is yet to come. Specifically, this flying bird is warning of the final three trumpets that are about to sound, which are themselves also warnings. **When you are getting a warning about the coming warnings, then you should really know that something terrible is about to happen!** These warnings are layered on top of each other!

Why all of these warnings? We have already talked about one reason — they provide a final opportunity for Rome to repent. Another reason for the trumpets is so that no one can ever say to God, “I did not know.” And that is a message for us as well.

We also have been given many warnings about the judgment to come. With so many people in this world starving for the truth, I shudder to think about those who sit in worship assemblies of the Lord’s church week after week and yet stubbornly refuse to obey the gospel. **How many trumpets have they**

heard? How many warnings have they failed to heed? What will they say to Jesus?

Notice the phrase in verse 13 — “the inhabitants of the earth.” That is the group to whom these warnings are directed. As we have already discussed, that is how the ungodly Romans are pictured in this book — as dwelling on the earth — while the faithful Christians are pictured in this book as dwelling safely in heaven even while still literally present on the earth.

When used in this way, heaven and earth depict **states** rather than **locations**. Isn't that exactly what Paul described?

Colossians 3:1-3 — If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

In that sense, God's people “dwell in heaven” even while still on this earth! Our minds and our hearts are set on things above. Yes, some day we will dwell in heaven **literally**, but for now, we dwell in heaven **spiritually**. That's how Revelation depicts the early church, and that's what the Bible tells us is true of all Christians: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Chapter 9

Revelation 9:1-2

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

With the fifth trumpet, we see the first of the three woes proclaimed by the eagle or vulture in 8:13. The previous trumpets included terrors from nature, but we now begin to see terrors from **beyond** nature. This trumpet is also the first trumpet that **directly** affects man. The first four trumpets affected man only **indirectly** through his environment.

The star fallen from heaven in verse 1 is described as someone who has been given the key of the bottomless pit. We have already discussed what it means to have a key to something. It means that this fallen star has been given authority over the bottomless pit. Clearly the authority is just a delegated authority because he has been **given** the key.

What does he do with this authority? He opens the bottomless pit, releasing smoke that causes darkness to cover the sun and the sky.

Who is this fallen star? Sometimes in this book, the obvious answer turns out to be the correct answer, and I think that is the case here. Most likely this fallen star is Satan. In Luke 10:18, Jesus said, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”

Lenski disagrees, arguing instead that the star is simply the personification of the judgment that is coming from God. But, in my opinion, this fallen star is Satan — who was the power behind Rome.

We see something similar in Isaiah 14. Verse 4 tells us that that chapter is a “proverb against the king of Babylon.” And yet what follows seems to be a description of Satan.

*Isaiah 14:12-15 — How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down
to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For
thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into
heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:
I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in
the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights
of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou
shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*

So who is being described in Isaiah 14 — the king of Babylon or Satan? I think the answer is both. Why? Because Satan was the power behind the throne. God was addressing the king in Babylon in Isaiah 14 by looking past him to who was really pulling Babylon’s strings.

We see something similar in Ezekiel 28, which verse 12 tells us is directed toward the king of Tyre, but that, like Isaiah 14, seems to be describing someone else.

Ezekiel 28:14-15 — *Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*

Again, I think that Ezekiel 28 is directed at both the king of Tyre and Satan, who was the power behind the throne.

I think we see something similar here in Revelation. Sometimes God will address Rome by looking at the power behind the throne — Satan, who was using Rome against the church. But, of course, this book will show Satan for what he is — a defeated enemy.

The bottomless pit or the abyss is where the demons and the ungodly are consigned.

Isaiah 24:21-22 — *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the **pit**, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.*

Luke 8:30-31 — *And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the **deep**.*

What do we know about Satan?

First, we know that Satan has been judged and cast out.

John 12:31 — *Now is the judgment of this world: **now** shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

John 16:11 — *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

Second, we know that Satan is called the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air.

John 12:31 — Now is the judgment of this world: now shall **the prince of this world** be cast out.

John 14:30 — Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for **the prince of this world** cometh, and hath nothing in me.

John 16:11 — Of judgment, because **the prince of this world** is judged.

Ephesians 2:2 — Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Third, we are told that Satan has (or, at least, had) the power of death.

Hebrews 2:14 — Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy **him that had the power of death, that is, the devil**.

Fourth, we are told that Satan is actively at work in this world.

1 Peter 5:8 — Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, **walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**.

So what can we conclude from those scriptures? We can conclude that although Satan **has** (past tense) been defeated, Satan still retains some power, and Satan remains active in using that power to pursue objectives that are opposed to God — such as, for example, trying to use the Roman empire to destroy the church while it was still in its infancy during the first century.

Some people leave the book of Revelation with a very misguided view of Satan, so let's make one thing very clear right from the start: **Nothing we read about Satan in Revelation is going to contradict anything we know about Satan from the rest of the Bible.** If the Bible tells us that Satan is **active** (as it does), then this book will not tell us that Satan is **inactive**. If we think it does, then we have made a wrong turn somewhere.

Yes, Satan has some power, but Satan has that power only because God allows it. But, why? **Why does God allow Satan to operate in this world?** Because Satan has a role to play in God's plan to undo the damage that Satan caused in the Garden. And I think another reason Satan is allowed to operate is so that men can more clearly see who is and who is not on God's side.

***1 Corinthians 11:19** — For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

And perhaps Satan is allowed to operate so that God's people can be strengthened by overcoming Satan's temptations.

***James 1:12** — Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

But do you mean that God has power over Satan? Absolutely! In fact, look at what we see right here in verses 1-2. Satan is given a key, and Satan then uses that key to carry out God's instructions for the fifth trumpet. God is using Satan to carry out His (God's) plans.

Just as God used Babylon in his judgment of Judah, just as God used Assyria in his judgment of Israel, just as God used Babylon in his judgment of Assyria, just as God used Persia in his judgment of Babylon, just as God used Greece in his judgment of Persia, just as God used Rome in his judgment of Greece, and just as God used Rome in his judgment of Jerusalem, God is here using Satan in his judgment of Rome. Satan is a defeated enemy! Satan is doing what God commands! If Satan has any power, it is power granted him by God. **Yes, Satan is active, and yes Satan is a roaring lion, but Satan is a roaring lion on a leash!**

Satan is not omnipotent; he has never had that power, and he certainly does not have that power today after the cross. In fact, we saw in our study of Zechariah that one of the things that would occur in the first century was a diminishment of Satan's powers.

***Zechariah 13:2** — And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets **and the unclean spirit** to pass out of the land.*

Isn't that diminishment what we see here as well? Look at verse 1 here in Chapter 9. It says that Satan "was **given** the key of the bottomless pit." Satan was permitted to open that pit, but he could not have done so absent that permission from God. **Satan does not even have the key to his own house unless God gives it to him!** Satan cannot unleash unclean spirits onto the world — he can open that door only with permission.

Yes, these images are figurative, but I think those figures are teaching us some important lessons about Satan and his forces of darkness that are arrayed against the church.

The world often views God and Satan as equals who are locked in a cosmic battle between good and evil. **That view is completely false.** Satan in his pride may have aspired equality with God, but Satan is a creature; Satan is not the creator. God is as far above Satan as God is above the rest of his creation.

This book of Revelation is not describing a battle between God and Satan in which the outcome somehow remains uncertain. **There are no cliffhangers in this book!** Satan had already been defeated when this book of Revelation opened. Satan and his evil minions were defeated at the cross.

*Colossians 2:14-15 — Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, **triumphing over them** in it [the cross].*

Jesus' death judged the world — not Jesus. Jesus' death defeated Satan — not Jesus. Satan was defeated by an event that he probably, at least for a moment, thought was going to be his greatest triumph. We know that Jesus was not what the Jews expected. **I don't think Jesus was what Satan expected either!** Things are not what they seem!

One of the biggest misconceptions about Satan involves how Satan works in this world today. For example, does Satan supernaturally cause people to act one way or another, as in the old saying "the devil made me do it?" No.

Satan does not supernaturally override the will of the ungodly any more than the Holy Spirit supernaturally overrides the will of the godly. Man has free will — and that goes for both the righteous and the unrighteous. Isn't that what James told us?

James 1:14 — *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of **his own lust**, and enticed.*

The fish retains free will — bite the worm or don't bite the worm. But once that fish clamps down on the hook, while the free will remains, **the choices do not**. And that is how it is with all temptation, and that is why sin is so dangerous.

So how does Satan operate in the world? One way that Satan operates in the world today is through his children in the world, just as one way that God operates in the world today is through his children in the church. You mean Satan has children? Yes.

Ephesians 2:2 — *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**.*

John 8:44 — *Ye are of **your father** the devil, and the lusts of **your father** ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

And that verse from John 8 shows us another way that Satan works today — he keeps people from hearing the truth.

Mark 4:15 — *And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, **and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts**.*

How does Satan do that? How does Satan take away the word sown in someone's heart? We know how that happens. That happens when Satan creates confusion and presents temptations and distractions to that person that replace the word that was sown in that person's heart. That process is **not** a supernatural operation — it is something we see all around us and that we ourselves struggle against daily.

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has a television set and an Internet connection?

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when our Bibles are covered with dust?

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has a legion of false teachers who are “handling the word of God deceitfully” and who are twisting the Scriptures “unto their own destruction”? (2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Peter 3:16). Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has tinpot dictators in Asia and the Middle East who ban Bibles and evangelism on penalty of death? Why does Satan need supernatural powers when Planned Parenthood performs over 300,000 abortions every year?

Some people read this book of Revelation and conclude that Satan is bound up and no longer active in the world today. They base that false view on a misinterpretation of Revelation 20:2, which we will study later. **But do we really need to wait until we reach Revelation 20 to know that Satan is active in the world?** How can anyone look around today and conclude that Satan is not active? There are not many false doctrines that can be disproved just by watching the evening news, but surely that is one of them! The spirit that was **now working** in the children of disobedience in Ephesians 2:2 is **still working** in the children of disobedience, and we can see evidence of that all around us.

It is true that Satan is not operating today as he did in times past (through demon possession, as we discussed, for example), but it is false to say that Satan is not operating at all today. The evidence of Satan’s operation is all around us, and the Scriptures confirm that Satan is active.

We see one way in which Satan operates today right here in verse 2 of Chapter 9. There we see Satan release smoke that darkens the sun and the sky.

*2 Corinthians 4:3-4 — But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

*Ephesians 4:18 — Having the understanding **darkened**, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the **blindness** of their heart.*

Satan blinds people’s minds to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel. How does Satan do that? By operating directly on that person? No. By operating on the gospel? No. **Satan blinds that person’s mind by placing a blinding**

smoke between that person and the gospel. Our mission is to cut through that smoke!

I think the smoke in verse 2 represents the spiritual and moral blindness that Satan creates in this world. But notice something very important about this blinding smoke in verse 2 — this blinding smoke is a punishment from God!

When we studied Zechariah 12:4, we saw that God sometimes uses blindness and confusion to punish the enemies of his people. I think we are seeing something similar here.

And doesn't the darkness in our own society show us the terrible effect of such a punishment? Moral and spiritual blindness is a disease that destroys the heart of a person or of a nation. But just as the prodigal son was allowed to sink into that pig pen, sometimes God allows an entire nation to sink into a pig pen with the hope that perhaps, having at last struck bottom, they will wake up, come to themselves, and repent.

Romans 1:24–28 — *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.*

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 — *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

What we see in verses 1-2 of Revelation 9 is a vivid picture of moral and spiritual decay. Does that picture fit with what happened to Rome? According to Gibbon one of the four primary reasons behind the eventual collapse of the Roman empire was **inner decadence**.

Here is how Francis Schaeffer described it:

As the Empire ground down, the decadent Romans were given to a thirst for violence and a gratification of the senses... Apathy was the chief mark of the late Empire... As the Roman economy slumped lower and lower, burdened with an aggravated inflation and a costly government, authoritarianism increased to counter the apathy. Since work was no longer done voluntarily, it was brought increasingly under the authority of the state, and freedoms were lost. For example, laws were passed binding small farmers to their land. So, because of the general apathy and its results, and because of oppressive control, few thought the old civilization worth saving. Rome did not fall because of external forces such as the invasion by the barbarians. Rome had no sufficient inward base; the barbarians only completed the breakdown—and Rome gradually became a ruin.

The lowering of moral standards contributed directly to the decline and fall of the Roman empire. Schaeffer says that Rome fell because it did not have a sufficient inner base. Daniel told us the same thing six hundred years earlier when he described the inner weakness of the yet future Roman empire:

***Daniel 2:41-42** — And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.*

What does this all say to us today? Is the moral base of our country growing stronger or is it weakening?

***Proverbs 14:34** — Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

Are we being exalted by righteousness? Or are we suffering under the reproach of sin?

As we study the judgment of Rome, we should pause to notice the growing similarities between Rome and our own country, from the sexual promiscuity to the glorification of violence and greed. Rome began as an instrument for God to use in the proclamation of the gospel, as did our own country. We had a similar beginning in the plan of God. Will we face a similar end? Perhaps our study of warning trumpets is more relevant than we care to think!

Revelation 9:3-4

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

From out of the bottomless pit comes a terrible invasion of locusts. Here is how Barclay describes it:

The devastation locusts can inflict and the terror they can cause is well-nigh incredible. All through the Old Testament the locust is the symbol of destruction; and the most vivid and terrible description of them and of their destructiveness is in the first two chapters of Joel... Those two chapters of Joel should be read in full and set beside the description in Revelation.

Barclay also tells us some important facts about locusts and locust invasions:

The locusts breed in desert places and invade the cultivated lands for food. They may be about two inches in length, with a wing span of four to five inches... They will travel in a column a hundred feet deep and as much as four miles long. When such a cloud of locusts appears, it is as if there had been an eclipse of the sun and even great buildings less than two hundred feet away cannot be seen. The destruction they cause is beyond belief. When they have left an area, not a blade of grass is to be

seen; the trees are stripped of their bark. Land where the locusts have settled looks as if it had been scorched with a bush fire; not one single living thing is left. When they move, they move inexorably on like an army with leaders. People have dug trenches, lit fires, and even fired cannon in an attempt to stop them but without success; they come on in a steady column which climbs hills, enters houses and leaves scorched earth behind.

But these locusts in Chapter 9 are not ordinary locusts. Ordinary locusts attack **vegetation**, but these locusts are specifically told to attack **men** instead. In fact, in verse 4 they are instructed **not** to attack vegetation, but rather to attack only those men who have not received the seal on their foreheads.

Who are these people without the seal on their foreheads? These are the people who did **not** receive the seal from God in Chapter 7. These are the people who are **not** part of the 144,000. **And who are the 144,000?** They are **ALL** of God's people — that is what the beautiful symbol 144,000 means. So then who are these without the seal and outside the 144,000? They are the people outside the church, and particularly, in this context, the people of Rome who were outside the church. They do **not** have God's protection. They do **not** enjoy the blessings of Revelation 7:13-17. They will **not** come out of the great tribulation. They have **not** washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They will **not** be sheltered from hunger, thirst, and tears with the Lamb in their midst.

One big problem with those who say that 144,000 are not the entirety of God's people is that they end up with **three groups** of people! They have the 144,000, they have the ungodly, and then they have the godly who are not in the 144,000 (which I suppose would be 144,001 and up!). That doesn't make any sense at all. Revelation is telling us the same thing the rest of the Bible is telling us — ultimately there are **only two groups** of people in the world: those on God's side and those who are not on God's side. Those in the faithful remnant and those not in the faithful remnant. Those in Christ and those out of Christ. Those in the church and those not in the church. **There is no third group!**

But what about all of the **neutral** people? Aren't they a third group? Where are all of the Romans who didn't choose sides?

***Luke 11:23** — He that is not with me is against me:
and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*

The reason the text here does not describe the neutral people is because there are no neutral people. Everyone is either on God's side or on the side of Satan. Now certainly not everyone is **actively engaged** in the battle, but being less evil than others is not an excuse! If that were an excuse then I suppose only Hitler and Stalin would end up in hell, as I suspect many people believe. **No one is neutral in this war.** There is no church of Switzerland! Either our robes are white in the blood of the Lamb, or they are not — there is no middle ground.

Notice that these locusts are not operating on their own. Verse 3 tells us that they are **given** power, and verse 4 shows them being **commanded** what to do and what not to do. These locusts are fulfilling God's judgments.

But verse 11, which we'll get to shortly, tells us that the angel of the bottomless pit (almost certainly, Satan) is the king of these locusts. **So who is in charge of these locusts — God or Satan?** God is in charge. These locusts are coming out of the pit in response to a trumpet call from heaven. Yes, Satan is involved, but God is using Satan to punish Rome, just as God will one day use Satan to punish everyone who is ungodly. Satan is being used here as God's instrument of punishment and judgment.

So do these verses mean that Satan and his minions can do whatever they want? That is not what we see here. These locusts are not allowed to harm those who were sealed by God. **In fact, verse 5 tells us that Satan and his agents do not have unlimited power even over evil men! They can torment them, but they cannot kill them.** As bad as this situation now is for Rome, it could still be much much worse.

The day may come when Satan is given free reign over evil men, but that day has not yet come — **and is there any better description of hell than the place where God at last turns his back completely on the ungodly and allows Satan free reign to do with them whatsoever Satan wills?** What a horrible thought!

Lesson 21

Last week we started Chapter 9, and we saw the sounding of the fifth trumpet in verse 1. When that trumpet sounded, a star (most likely, Satan) fell from heaven and was given the key to the bottomless pit. When that pit was opened, smoke and locusts came out of it. The locusts were commanded in verse 4 to hurt “only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” The description of these terrible locusts continues in verse 5.

Revelation 9:5-6

5 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. 6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

This fifth trumpet brings torment but not death. But the torment it brings is so extreme that those afflicted seek death. Gallus said, “Worse than any wound is to wish to die and yet not be able to do so.” And recall what Job said:

Job 3:20-22 — Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?

Not only do these Romans seek death, but they are unable to find it — verse 6 tells us that **death flees from them!** That is a remarkable image — death on the run from those who seek it! When they don’t want death, death runs toward them; when they seek death, death runs away from them!

And God's people? They are not harmed by these scorpion locusts. But again, we must remember that what we are seeing here is a **spiritual** deliverance. Physically, the Christians were suffering, and the Romans were prospering — **but things were not what they seemed!** Daniel had prophesied six hundred years earlier that the church would destroy Rome, and that is what is happening here as the Christians remain faithful unto death. **Faith is the victory!**

And did Jesus perhaps have that earlier prophecy from Daniel and this later prophecy from John in view when he promised his followers that they would not be hurt by the enemy?

***Luke 10:18-20** — I beheld **Satan** as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and **scorpions**, and over all the power of the enemy: **and nothing shall by any means hurt you**. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because **your names are written in heaven**.*

Satan? Scorpions? Victory? No harm? Names written in heaven? The similarities with Revelation 9 are striking. And was the promise from harm a promise from spiritual harm or physical harm? We know that many died **physically** at the hands of the Roman oppressors. Jesus knew what was coming for his people and what was coming for Rome. It is very interesting to study Revelation and then go back and reread the gospel narratives. All sorts of connections come to light!

What do the five months in verse 5 depict?

It's possible that the five months are tied to the locusts and are just intended to make the image of the locust invasion more vivid and more immediate. Apparently, five months is the usual duration of a locust plague or the length of the dry season when the locusts generally come. We are also told that five months is the average lifespan of a locust so that what we have here is one generation of locusts.

Bullinger says that the number five depicts the grace of God in the Bible, in which case it may symbolize those who are marked during this time and are not the target of this judgment. (His case for the link between grace and the number five is not very good, however.) Swete thinks the number is used simply to give definiteness to the picture.

I agree that the number five here is symbolic, but I don't think it depicts grace. Instead, I think the number five depicts **incompleteness**, being half of ten (a broken ten), which is the symbol for completeness. Elsewhere we will see half of seven (a broken seven, where seven is the number for perfection) being used to depict imperfection.

If the number five depicts incompleteness, then the period of five months here is showing us something that we already know about these trumpets — they are not God's final and complete word when it comes to Rome. This judgment is not yet complete. More is yet to come.

Revelation 9:7-12

7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. 8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. 10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. 11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. 12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

Verses 7-10 describe the locusts in terms that are both beautiful and terrifying. They wear crowns like gold, they have faces like men, they have hair like

women, and they have teeth like lions. They have breastplates of iron, and their wings create a great noise.

Charles Manson read that description and concluded that these locusts were the Beatles — men with long hair playing noisy guitars that looked like breastplates of iron! That view is certainly ludicrous, but no more so than many other views of these verses that you can find printed in seemingly respectable commentaries. Once you toss the context and the time frame out the window, there is no end to what you can find in this book — some find the Beatles, while others find nuclear bombs, Cobra helicopters, and smart missiles.

The crowns on the locusts in verse 7 are from the same Greek word (*stephanos*) that was used to describe the crown of victory worn by the rider on the white horse in Chapter 6. As before, this victory crown denotes the defeat of Rome by a conquering invader.

The hair like a woman's in verse 8 is an intriguing addition to the picture that has led to much speculation in the commentaries. Some say having both male and female features means that the judgments would affect both genders. Others say that the long hair indicates that they are in subjection to their king, Satan.

John reminds us often in these descriptions that what we are reading are symbolic and figurative. We are told that they have tails **like unto** scorpions. Notice how often the word “as” is used in their description: “and on their heads were **as it were** crowns like gold, and their faces were **as** the faces of men. 8 And they had hair **as** the hair of women, and their teeth were **as** the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, **as it were** breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was **as** the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.” The text itself is telling us that we must look beneath the surface if we are to understand what is being described.

Verse 11 tells us that the king of the locusts is called in Hebrew *Abaddon* and in Greek *Apollyon*. **What does that mean?**

Abaddon is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for destruction, found for example in Job 28:22 — “Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.” Apollyon in Greek means “the destroyer.” This is the only place in the New Testament where either name is found. They are certainly accurate names for Satan, who is almost certainly the angel of the bottomless pit identified in verse 11.

Satan's objective is to destroy everything that God builds — and especially the eternal kingdom built without hands. Satan would like nothing better to destroy the church; that was true in the first century, and it remains true in this century. But there is great irony in using the title “Destroyer” for Satan. Why? Because this Destroyer will himself be destroyed, along with his works.

1 John 3:8 — For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Hebrews 2:14 — That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Why does verse 11 specifically tell us that Apollyon is in the Greek tongue if the entire book is in the Greek tongue?

I think the text is drawing attention to the Greek tongue as to Apollyon so that we will see in that name a reference to the false Greek god Apollo, the archer god. One of the emblems of Apollo was the locust, which has been prominent in this chapter.

Two questions: First, why is there a reference to Apollo? And second, what is the reference intended to convey?

In an earlier lesson, we talked about how the Romans adopted many of the Greek gods both as a way to unify the Roman empire and as part of the Greek's cultural conquest of Rome. (Remember the old saying — Rome conquered Greece, but Greek culture conquered Rome!) The Roman emperor Domitian (who was not yet emperor when this book was written, but who would reign very soon) claimed that we divine because he was the incarnation of the Greek god Apollo. Nero likewise connected himself with Apollo, and Domitian was thought by many Romans to be a resurrected Nero. Ancient coins show Apollo with both Nero and Domitian. So a reference to the Greek god Apollo strikes at both of the evil villains in this book — Nero (who had reigned and died by the time this book was written) and Domitian (who would reign very shortly after his father Vespasian and his brother Titus). Also, a reference to Apollo fits our context well for another reason — Apollo was the patron deity of Thyatira, one of the initial recipients of this book. That answers our first question — why is there a reference to Apollo?

Now back to the second question — what is the reference intended to convey? In a word — **ridicule**. Domitian thought he was the reincarnation of the god Apollo — but Apollo was the king of the underworld. Using that name for the king of the bottomless pit is likely intended to say both that Nero is there now

and Domitian will follow soon thereafter. Perhaps that is why this king is given **two** names in verse 11. As one commentator summed it up: “The last word about the fifth trumpet was a master stroke of irony: the destructive host of hell had as its king the emperor of Rome!”

Of the three woes announced by the eagle (or vulture) in 8:13, the first has now come to an end — and verse 12 tells us that the final two woes are yet to come.

Revelation 9:13-15

13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. 15 And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

The sixth trumpet has been a source of much speculation, much of it wild speculation. Commentators have gone far afield in their discussions of these verses, and some have just given up in trying to understand them.

Barclay: “This is a passage whose imagery is mysterious and whose details no one has ever been able fully to explain.”

But the reason most commentaries have a problem with these verses is that by the time those commentators have reached Chapter 9, they have forgotten all about Chapters 1-3. They have forgotten the time frame in verses 1 and 3 of Chapter 1, and they have forgotten the context in Chapters 2-3. **This book concerns things about Rome that were to shortly come to pass!** The inspired text could not be any more clear on that point,. And if we ever forget it, then we too might go astray in our study of the text or have to just throw up our hands in despair as Barclay did.

So how do we tackle difficult verses such as these? First, we keep the time frame and context in mind, but second, we start by looking at the symbols that are used. **What symbols do we see in these verses?**

In verses 13-15, we see four horns, we see four angels, we see the great river Euphrates, we see an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, and we see the third part of men slain.

Let's start with the number four because we have seen that symbol many times already. The number four denotes the creation in general and the earth in particular — the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements.

So then what does it mean that these four angels are loosed? It means something else we have seen before — that God would judge Rome by bringing foreign armies against them. These four angels represent the armies that God would use against Rome.

And the number four may also be used here for another symbolic purpose — four may specifically depict the four primary compass directions. If so, then the use of the number four may be intended to show that God will come at Rome from every direction. We have already seen that Rome feared an invasion from the east, but the message here may be that Rome should fear invasions from every direction!

These four angels are released by a voice from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. What does that tell us?

First, it tells us that these armies are under God's control and direction. God will use foreign armies against Rome just as God used the armies of Rome against Jerusalem. What goes around, comes around! It has been said that war made Rome. God is saying here that war will also **unmake** Rome. Gibbon reminds us that two of the primary reasons for the fall of Rome were external invasion and inner strife, which included civil war.

Second, the four horns on the altar remind us of the sovereignty of God. Horns denote kingdoms, both in Daniel and in Revelation, so the four horns on the altar are a reminder that the kingdoms of this earth are all under God's sovereign rule. These four horns are a reminder of what King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way!

Daniel 4:28-32 — All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built

*for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, **until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.***

As McGuiggan said, the king was bragging one second and munching the next! Why? So that he would learn the lesson in verse 32 — “that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” That is what is being shown here in verses 13-15. That is what the four horns are telling us.

Why are the four angels pictured as crossing the Euphrates river? Again, we see an example where our knowledge of the Old Testament will help us understand this final book in the New Testament.

The Euphrates was the ideal boundary for the territory of Israel.

Genesis 15:18 — *In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*

Crossing the Euphrates river is a vivid picture from the Old Testament depicting the threat of military power. The Assyrians and the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. Isaiah used this river to depict military invasion.

Isaiah 8:7-8 — *Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.*

But if the Euphrates river in the Old Testament depicted an invasion of Jerusalem, then doesn't that mean that Jerusalem is also in view here in Revelation? No, not at all.

First, the symbol is the threat of military invasion, not the threat of military invasion against Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not the only city that feared what was on the other side of the Euphrates. We have already talked about Rome's most feared enemy — the Parthian army. That army was located on the other side of the Euphrates river.

But second, we know that this book is about Rome, and not about Jerusalem. How do we know that? We discussed that issue at length in our introduction, but briefly we know that because of when the book itself tells us it was written — late in the reign of Vespasian, which occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem. (In fact, he and his son Titus were the ones who destroyed Jerusalem.) Jerusalem was already in ruins when this book was written.

Also, we know that this book is about Rome because of the all-important context given to us in Chapters 2-3. If this book is about Jerusalem, then why does it begin with seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor? We'll have more to say on this point when we get to Chapter 11.

What does it mean in verse 15 that the four angels “were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year for to slay the third part of men”?

That phrase is telling us something we already know. In fact, that phrase is telling us something that the prophet Daniel knew and that the prophet Zechariah knew — or at least they wrote about it. What that phrase is telling us is that these events are not happening due to random events and unknown historical forces. These events are happening as part of God's preordained and prophesied plan for the church. Daniel had foretold the conflict between Rome and the church, and Daniel had foretold who would prevail in that conflict. Likewise, Zechariah had foretold the conflict between Rome and the church, and Zechariah had foretold who would prevail in that conflict. This was all part of God's plan, and everything is going and will go according to God's schedule — down to the day and hour. That is the message of verse 15.

So where are we at the end of verse 15? The sixth trumpet unleashes foreign armies that come against Rome from every direction, killing many, but not all, of the Romans. Again, although this trumpet hits the Romans very hard, it is not yet a final judgment. It is a warning of what is yet to come, and there is still time for repentance.

Verses 16-19 will show us what is let loose when the four angels bound in the great Euphrates river are let loose in verse 15. And what is let loose is described using some of the most fearsome imagery found anywhere in the Bible.

Revelation 9:16-19

16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

The first thing we see let loose against Rome is a huge army of horsemen — “two hundred thousand thousand” is 200 million invaders!

Is this a literal army? Is this number intended to be understood literally? **No, it is not literal, and it cannot be literal.** What we are seeing here must be figurative. Why?

The so-called “rigid literalism” of the premillennialist really breaks down in this description of the invading army from the east. Someone had estimated that in regular formation 200 million soldiers would make a column one mile wide and 85 miles long! Can anyone even begin to imagine a literal army consisting of more people than the combined populations of England, France, and Italy? Can we really image a single army consisting of every person living in

the nation of Brazil? Or two thirds of the population of the United States? And worse yet — the premillennialists believe this gigantic army will fight a battle at Armageddon in the Holy Land! They would all have to be stacked up a mile high! And who would they fight? Presumably we would need another 200 million or so opponents to make it a fair fight!

Does anyone really believe that this description is literal? Well, yes and no. They try to take it literally, but not even the most rigid literalist is able to do so. Hal Lindsey, says this army depicts a literal army of 200 million Chinese invaders, but he says that the horses represent mobilized ballistic missile launchers! But that is still a problem for him, isn't it — verse 16 tells us we have 200 million horsemen, which means we would need 200 million missile launchers!

Why am I making such a point about this? Because if the 200 million in verse 16 is figurative (as it must be), then on what basis can anyone conclude that the thousand years we will see later in this book is literal? And if the thousand years is also figurative, then premillennialism collapses.

So, back to the text. What do we see in verse 16? We see a terrifying invasion of 200 million horsemen riding from the Euphrates in the east, the very direction from which the Romans had an irrational fear of a Parthian invasion. Of all the verses in Revelation, few of them would have struck more terror in the heart of a Roman than verse 16. It would be as if someone with an irrational fear of snakes was told that 200 million snakes were on their way! (In fact, snakes are mentioned in verse 19!) The language in these verses is vivid; it is figurative; it is symbolic; it is apocalyptic; it is intended to create an emotional reaction — and it does!

Why 200 million? Is there a symbolic significance to that number? Possibly no. 200 million may be intended here to be just what it is — an impossibly huge number of soldiers that is intended to frighten and overwhelm.

If there is a symbolic significance to the number, it comes from the number 2 — a symbolic thread that we have seen running throughout this entire book. We have already discussed that number, and we will see it used several times more in this book. In my opinion, the number two is being used in this book as a reference to Rome, which was, according to Roman mythology, founded by the twins Romulus and Remus. In the first century, we see another set of Roman twins — not physical twins, but twins according to their demonic nature: Nero and Domitian. Later in this book we will see Rome represented as two beasts. Whenever we see the number two, we should think of Rome.

Verses 17-19 continue that vivid description of these terrible horsemen. They have breastplates of fire; their horses have heads of lions and breathe fire; and their tails were like snakes. I would not like to have even one such creature headed my way — Rome is looking at 200 million of them coming over the hill!

What is the message to the church here? The church (or at least some in the church) likely thought they had been forgotten. The church thought that God did not know what all was happening to them. The church thought they would be destroyed after the mighty Roman empire ran over them. And God's response in these verses? In short, God turns to the church as says, "You think I have forgotten you? You think I don't know what Rome is doing? **Here, have a look at my sledgehammer!** This is what I have planned for Rome!"

Language very similar to what we see here is used in Ezekiel 38-39 with regard to Gog and Magog. We will have much to say about those two chapters from Ezekiel later in our study of Revelation.

As before, only a third is killed; that is, this judgment is only partial and allows for repentance. We will be told in verse 21 whether anyone heeds the warning and repents.

And think for just a moment about what this says. **What must be coming for Rome if these 200 million horsemen are just the preview!**

Revelation 9:20-21

20 And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Verses 20-21 confirm what we have been saying about the seals and the trumpets we have seen so far — they were not intended to be God's final word re-

garding Rome, but rather were intended to encourage the Romans to repent. These verses confirm what we have been saying about the earlier judgments that have been partial, striking just a third of whatever they were directed at. The “rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues” are those who were not killed by the earlier seals and trumpets. But let’s not forget that what we are seeing here and what we were seeing earlier is figurative language. There are not literally piles of dead bodies in Rome — at least not piles of dead **physical** bodies. What we have been seeing, and what we are seeing here, is a **spiritual** struggle. This will be confirmed later by a verse we haven’t gotten to yet:

***Revelation 12:11** — And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

How did they overcome? By, not one, but two deaths! By the death of Christ (the blood of the Lamb) and by their own death (they loved not their lives unto death). And one other thing — by the word of their testimony. Where is the atomic bomb? Where is the cobra helicopter? Where is the ballistic missile? While you’ll find those things in a book by Hal Lindsey, you will not find those things anywhere in the Bible. This is a **spiritual** battle, and 12:11 confirms it. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

We are seeing the church’s victory over Rome — and that victory came through faithfulness unto death. From a physical perspective, the dead bodies belonged to the Christians! But from a spiritual perspective, the dead bodies were Roman bodies. Remember our central theme — things are not what they seem! I am reminded of something Paul wrote:

***1 Timothy 5:6** — But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*

That was the Roman condition — physically alive, but spiritually dead. That is why they needed to repent. Much of the confusion about Revelation would clear up if people would see this conflict for what it is — a spiritual battle rather than a physical battle.

Verses 20-21 tell us that Rome did not repent. Yes, we have seen a few that repented, something Zechariah had prophesied centuries earlier. But the vast majority of the Romans remained entrenched in their sin and in their opposition to God and his church.

What were the sins of the Romans? Before we answer that, notice what these sins are called in verse 20 — “the works of their hands.” That stands in stark contrast to the eternal kingdom made without hands (Daniel 2:44-45) and to our God who is not worshipped with men’s hands (Acts 17:25).

What were those sins? They worshipped devils. They worshipped idols. They were murderers. They were sorcerers. They were fornicators. And they were thieves.

A horrible list of sins — but God still loved them (John 3:16). God wanted them to repent (2 Peter 3:9). God did not want them to perish (2 Peter 3:9). God wanted to be able to say to them, “And such were some of you!” (past tense, as in 1 Corinthians 6:11) — but they would not have it. They refused to repent. Later we will see them when they no longer have that opportunity to repent.

Lesson 22

Last week when we ended we were looking at the final two verses of Chapter 9. The trumpets and the seals that we have seen so far have all been partial judgments — most just affecting a third of what they touch. Why partial? So that the Romans would have an opportunity to repent of their wickedness and turn to God. In 2 Peter 3:9, God tells us that he does not want anyone to perish — and that includes the Roman persecutors of his church.

Did they repent? Or did they instead harden their hearts as Pharaoh did in response to the plagues of Egypt? We know from other New Testament books that a few Romans repented, but it seems to have been a very few. Most remained hardened in their sin and refused to repent. That is what verses 20-21 tell us.

What were the sins of the Romans? That question is where we left off last week.

First, verse 20 tells us that they worshipped devils.

Did Rome really worship devils? Absolutely they did. Last week we saw how Nero and Domitian were, through their association with Apollo, shown as rulers, not of Rome, but of the underworld. The suggestion there is clear — when the Romans worshipped Caesar, they were at least in that sense worshipping devils.

But there is a very interesting way in which Rome may have been **literally** worshipping devils. How?

Did you ever wonder where Greek mythology came from? What was the origin of all of those false Greek gods? There is a fascinating book called *The Parthenon Code* that suggests the Greek gods were based on a false view of the historical characters in the Bible. While the Bible presents the true history of mankind before the flood, this book argues that some men after the flood told a different story about the same historical figures but from a reversed perspective, and that this different story became the Greek mythology that we know today. A fascinating book, which if true, offers a remarkable historical confirmation of the truthfulness of the Bible.

But what does that book have to say about Rome **literally** worshipping devils? According to the theory in that book, the Greek goddess Athena arose from a

false view of Eve. When you see an image or a statue of Athena, she is very often shown with a snake or an owl. Owls then, as today, denoted wisdom. Athena may have arisen as a corrupted view of Eve, who obtained the knowledge of good and evil after listening to a snake. So when the Romans and the Greeks bowed down before Athena and her snake, they were literally worshipping Satan! It is an interesting theory, and it could be one explanation for why the worship of devils and the worship of idols are listed separately in verse 20.

Verse 20 is not unique in that description. The worship of false idols is often linked with the worship of demons in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 32:17 — *They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.*

1 Corinthians 10:20 — *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

And that leads us to the second sin listed in verse 20 — they worshipped false idols.

There is a paradox when it comes to idol worship. On one hand, idols are lifeless things made “of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood.” They “neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.” This description of idols occurs frequently in the Bible.

Psalms 115:4-7 — *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*

And one of the funniest descriptions is found in Isaiah:

Isaiah 44:15-17 — *Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast,*

and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.

So, on the one hand, idols are powerless.

But on the other hand, the Bible tells us that behind those lifeless idols are cosmic forces of terrifying power. Idols have the power to shipwreck our faith and place a blinding smoke between man and God. And that is the paradox — how can something so powerless be so powerful and so harmful?

We see the answer to that question in verse 20 — yes, the idols are powerless pieces of wood or metal, but the power behind those idols is anything but powerless. There is a roaring lion behind those idols that is trying to devour us!

But idolatry is just a problem of the past, right? We don't have to worry about idolatry today, right? Christians today aren't tempted to fall down and worship a false idol of Caesar while that very Caesar is trying to kill and torture them, right? Wrong.

I think a good case could be made that idolatry is more of a problem today than it has ever been in the past. The world is full of idols: money, possessions, power, popularity, pleasure, sex, success, fame, drugs, and we could go on and on. All of these things threaten to replace God in our lives, all of these things can be tools of Satan, and all of these things have tortured and killed those who pursue them and worship them.

What must our attitude be when it comes to such things? What must our attitude be with regard to idolatry. Let's let John tell us, but not from the book of Revelation. Let's listen to how John closed his first epistle.

1 John 5:21 — Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

And listen to Paul.

1 Corinthians 10:14 — Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

The love of John and Paul for God's people is so clear in those two verses — "little children" and "dearly beloved." The inspired writers knew the terrible danger of idolatry. **Do we?**

If we don't think idolatry is a problem for us today, then we have done half of Satan's work for him. Idolatry was a problem in the first century — and it remains a problem in the twenty-first century.

Before we move to the next sin on the list, let's look at one final point about the two first sins on the list — worships of devils and worship of idols. We could also add one of the sins we will get to in a moment from verse 21 — sorceries. Were these sins committed by the **Jews**? Are these sins we associate with the Jews? The answer, of course, is no. In fact, riots and insurrections were the result when the Romans attempted to place idols in or near the Jewish temple. What does this mean? It means that this list of sins in verses 20-21 is a big problem for those who believe the focus of this book is Jerusalem rather than Rome. This book is describing Rome!

Third, the Romans were murderers.

We know from history that Rome was a culture of death. In fact, Tertullian records that he attended a play in which he saw a person (almost certainly a slave) being burned to death in the role of Hercules as part of the entertainment. We know about the terrible atrocities that occurred in the Roman Colosseum.

The Romans were certainly guilty of murdering Christians — we have already seen the martyrs beneath the altar in heaven. History tells us that Peter and Paul were murdered by order of the Emperor Nero. Rome had a lust for blood, and God will soon remind Rome of something God told his own people long before.

Numbers 35:33 — So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

Rome had a thirst for blood? Yes, and very soon in this book Rome will have more blood than it can handle. In Revelation 14:20, we will see enough blood pouring out of a winepress to create a river of blood two hundred miles long that comes up to a horse's bridle! Here's the message for Rome: be careful what you ask for!

Fourth, the Romans were sorcerers.

The word translated "sorceries" occurs only here and in Galatians 5:20, where it is translated "witchcraft" in the KJV. The Greek word used here is pharmakon, from which we get the word pharmacy. The word indicates the use of

drugs and incantations during an appeal to occult powers. Such magical practices were frequently linked to idolatry. In 18:23, this book will tell us that magic was one way in which Rome deceived the nations. In 22:15, we will see sorcerers in the list of those who are outside the beautiful city of God.

Sorcery was a major issue for early Christianity, and particularly in the Roman provinces to which the seven letters of Chapters 2-3 were directed. We recall what happened in Ephesus:

Acts 19:19 — Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Is magic still a problem today? Sadly, it is alive and well. Horoscopes, superstition, nature worship, witchcraft, new age beliefs — those practices are all around us. Some of the modern day witchcraft may even seem innocent — but nothing connected with demons is innocent.

Fifth, the Romans were fornicators.

What is fornication? Let's listen as Jesus answers that question.

Matthew 19:4-6 — Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

So what is fornication? **IT IS EVERYTHING ELSE!** Jesus defined fornication by telling us what it is not. Just because the adults are consenting does not mean that God is consenting!

I have heard people say that Jesus never condemned homosexuality, to which I say NONSENSE! And I point them to Matthew 19 where Jesus condemned everything that is not a part of God's plan for his creation — and that certainly includes homosexuality. (Not to mention the many verses elsewhere in the Bible condemning homosexuality that, while not printed in red ink, are just as much the words of Christ as those verses that do appear in red ink!)

I don't think the problem that men have with fornication is an inability to define it! We know exactly what it is. And we know its consequences:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 — *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: **neither fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

And our attitude? What must a Christian do when it comes to the sin of fornication? Two words:

1 Corinthians 6:18 — *Flee fornication.*

Or more than two words, if you prefer:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 — *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.*

“Oh, but...” Stop. Stop right there. Whatever excuse or hypothetical we might raise is answered by the two words we just read: **Flee fornication**. The will of God is that we abstain from fornication.

Rome was steeped in fornication, as is our modern world today. But that must never be true of a Christian.

Ephesians 5:3 — *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.*

Fornication must not even once be named among us. That’s how far away we must stay from it.

Sixth, the Romans were thieves.

Money ruled the ancient world, just as it does the modern world, and the love of money was the same root of all evil then as it is today. We have already talked about idolaters. In Ephesians 5:5, the Bible tells us that covetous man is an idolator. Money is his god.

The love of money leads to covetousness and theft. But worse, the Rome’s theft was often directed at Christians. We read about the economic persecution of the church in Chapters 2-3. Also, some Christians had their homes plundered.

Hebrews 10:34 — *For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully **the spoiling of your goods**,*

knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Much of the persecution experienced in the Roman provinces came from those who sought to rid themselves of business competition by informing on Christians to the authorities. That made the informers guilty of theft along with their other crimes.

One last comment about this list of sins — notice that we have interpreted this list **literally** rather than figuratively. These sins — idolatry, theft, murder, sorcery, fornication — serve to explain and justify some of the vivid symbols we have seen, but the sins themselves are not symbolic; they are actual sins. This list is a rare example in this book where symbols are not being used. We will see examples later when an angel acts as a divine commentator to explain something John has seen — and, of course, we will take those divine explanations literally.

And the early church? Did any of these sins affect them?

Sadly, we know from Chapter 2-3 that at least several of these sins had infected the church. Notice the similarity between verses 20-21 of Chapter 9 and verses 20-21 of Chapter 2.

***Revelation 2:20-21** — Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.*

Idolatry was a major focus of the seven letters. The Nicolaitan cult, for example, involved participation in idolatry (2:14-15).

The pathway to victory for the church was to remain faithful unto death, but sadly some in the church were falling away. Why? **Because rather than seeking to change the world, they were being changed by the world.** That is the constant struggle for every child of God. How do we prevail in that struggle?

***Romans 12:2** — And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

That verse gives us the pathway to victory in Christ! That verse tells us how to remain faithful unto death! That verse presents the two paths — one path in which we are **conformed** to the **world**, and another path in which we are **transformed** by the **word**. There is not a third path.

So where are we at the end of Chapter 9?

The question at this point is how will this unrelenting, powerful enemy ever be stopped? These judgments had an effect on Rome that was similar to the effect the plagues had on Pharaoh, who hardened his heart and increased his persecutions of God's people. Even 200 million horsemen it seems are not enough to derail Rome. When will Rome be stopped?

God's people need assurance and comfort, and the interlude that follows next will provide that for them.

Chapter 10

Between the opening of the **sixth and seventh seals**, John was shown two visions that were intended to give comfort and assurance to the suffering Christians. First, John was shown the sealing of the saints **prior to** the judgment of Rome, and, second, he was shown the rejoicing of the victorious saints **following** the judgment of Rome. The church was going to be protected, and the church was going to be victorious. Not physical protection and not a physical victory — but spiritual protection and a spiritual victory. The sort of victory that comes from remaining faithful unto death.

Now between the sounding of the **sixth and seventh trumpets**, there is once again an interlude that is intended to provide comfort and assurance to the suffering Christians. This interlude starts in 10:1 and continues through 11:14. The seventh trumpet will then sound in 11:15.

Why do we see all of these interludes? What is their purpose? Their purpose can be summarized in three words — three words that were often spoken by Jesus while on earth, and that we are hearing from Jesus in this book as well: **Be not afraid!** How often Jesus said that!

*Matthew 14:27 — But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; **be not afraid.***

*Matthew 17:7 — And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and **be not afraid.***

Matthew 28:10 — *Then said Jesus unto them, **Be not afraid:** go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

John 14:27 — *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, **neither let it be afraid.***

That is the message of these interludes as well. God is telling his children, “Be not afraid!” Terrible things are in store for Rome, but wonderful things are in store for you! What we see in these interludes is a message of comfort from the God of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 — *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and **the God of all comfort;** Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

One thing these interludes tell us is something that seems to have been overlooked by many of the modern day prophets of doom — **the book of Revelation was not intended to frighten Christians!** It was intended to do the exact opposite — the book of Revelation was intended to **comfort** Christians. Remember Jesus’ message to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:24 — “I will put upon you none other burden.” These poor Christians were suffering enough — this book was not written to add to their suffering!

Does the book of Revelation scare us? Does it frighten us? It shouldn’t. Yes, if we look at some of the countless modern sensationalistic commentaries or popular books or films about the book of Revelation, we might think we should be scared by this book. But that is not what the book of Revelation itself is telling us. This book is telling us, “Be not afraid!”

That’s what the book is telling us. What is the book telling Rome? Just the opposite — be very afraid!

Revelation 10:1-3

1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rain-

bow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: 2 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, 3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

Who is the mighty angel from heaven in verse 1?

Some say that this mighty angel is Jesus. Of course, we know that Jesus is not an angel as that term is generally used. Angels are created beings, while Jesus is not created but is rather the creator all things (Colossians 1:16-17). “He is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

That fact about Jesus is a theme of this entire book. The choice between Caesar and Christ is a choice between the creature and the Creator! The Romans were among those who “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Only God is worthy of our worship. That is a central theme of this book.

So if that is a central theme of this book, and if angels are created, then why do some say that this angel in verse 1 is Jesus? Because the word “angel” has another broader meaning — it can just mean a messenger. We see that broader meaning in the word “*evangelism*,” which means good news or good message. While Jesus is not a created angel from heaven, Jesus is a messenger from heaven.

We saw this broader usage of the word “angel” frequently in our study of Zechariah. In that book we concluded that numerous references to the Angel of the Lord were in fact references to Jesus, God the Son, the messenger sent by God the Father. Zechariah 3 was just one of the many examples we studied.

Zechariah 3:3-4** — Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and **stood before the angel**. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, **I have caused thine iniq-

uity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

But is that who we see here in Revelation 10:1? Is this Jesus? I think the answer is no. This angel in verse 1 is not the angel of the Lord we saw in Zechariah; this angel is not Jesus. Instead, I think this angel is an actual angel in the narrow sense.

Why? The primary reason is the fourth word in verse 1 — “**another**.” Yes, this angel is mighty; yes, this angel is clothed with a cloud; yes, this angel has rainbow on his head; yes, this angel has a face like the sun; and yes, this angel has feet as pillars of fire. But this angel is “another” angel — and “another” is not a word that could ever be applied to the only begotten Son of God! This angel is not Christ; this angel is just another angel (although certainly a very impressive one!).

The **uniqueness** of Christ is something we see throughout this book. We saw that in Revelation 5.

Revelation 5:4-5 — And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

We will see that uniqueness in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:12 — His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

Christ is unique. The Roman emperors? They were a dime a dozen! In fact, between 235 and 284, a period of forty-nine years, the Roman Empire had twenty different emperors! In the single year AD 69, just a decade or so before the book was written, Rome had four different emperors. Not so with the eternal kingdom — we have one king and only one king, and we will never have another king until the day the kingdom is delivered up to God the Father and God is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The eternal kingdom is nothing like Rome, and that fact is something that the **Roman** Catholic church should pause to consider. They are undeniably modeled, not after the church of New Testament, but after the old Roman empire!

Back to the angel in verses 1-2. What do these descriptions tell us about this particular angel? They tell us that this mighty angel represents great authority and great power and that this mighty angel has been sent on a mission of unusual importance. How do we know that? Eight reasons.

First, this angel is come down from heaven. Angels act as messengers for God, and this angel has come from the very presence of God to relay a message.

Second, this angel is clothed with a cloud. Of the twenty-five times the word “cloud” occurs in the New Testament, in all but three it is used in relation to deity or a divine appearance, often in judgment. This angel is clothed with a divine mission.

Third, this angel has a rainbow upon his head. Only here and in Revelation 4:3 does the word “rainbow” (Greek *iris*) occur in the Bible. The word “bow” occurs in the Old Testament in Genesis 9 with the establishment of the covenant following the flood, and in Ezekiel 1:28 when the prophet saw the throne of God. The rainbow recalls both events and further confirms that this angel is on a divine mission of special importance.

Fourth, this angel has a face like the sun. This reminds us of Exodus 34:29-30 in which we read that the face of Moses shone after meeting with God on Mount Sinai. Again, we see that this angel has come from the very presence of God to relay a message from God.

Fifth, this angel has feet like pillars of fire. This image recalls the pillar of fire that protected and guided God’s people in the wilderness during their exodus from Egypt. This speaks to the content of the angel’s message — that message will speak of protection for God’s people and judgment of God’s enemies.

Sixth, this angel is carrying a book. Verse 2 tells us two important things about this book — it is small and it is open. That it is **small** most likely indicates that it contains only one aspect of God’s plan, and that it is **open** means that John can read it and understand it and that what it contains has already been put into action. This book is not sealed. It is open!

Seventh, this angel has one foot on the land and one foot on the sea. That this angel stands on both sea and land indicates that he represents one who has total authority and great power. Yet again, we see that this angel has a very special mission from God of unusual importance, and that this message has behind it the full authority and power of God.

Eighth, this angel cries out with a loud voice like that of a lion, causing seven thunders to utter their voices as well. When God warned the wicked in Jere-

miah 25:30, he did so with a great roar. When God called his children in Hosea 11:10, he did so with the roar of a lion. In Joel 3:16, God roared so that the heavens and the earth shook. This angel wants everyone's attention! He has a message from God! That message must be heard and heeded by everyone.

What is this important message from God? We will find out soon, but first we need to ask another question: **What are the seven thunders in verse 3?**

Thunder and earthquakes often accompany God's judgments. Thunder was heard during the plague of hail in Egypt (Exodus 9:23), and thunder accompanied the appearance of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 20:18). God used thunder as a weapon against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7:10. Perhaps Job put it best in Job 26:14 — "but the thunder of his power who can understand?"

But why are there **seven** thunders? Some suggest it may be an allusion back to Psalm 29, in which David describes seven voices of God. One of those voices is described this way in Psalm 29:3 — "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory **thundereth**: the Lord is upon many waters."

Others suggest that the seven thunders are the seven bowls that we will soon see poured out after the seventh trumpet sounds.

We will say more about the seven thunders in just a moment. But we know now what the seven thunders depict at least in a **general** sense because we understand what the symbols mean — the seven thunders depict God's **perfect** (seven) **judgment** (thunder)!

Revelation 10:4-7

4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. 5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, 6 And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and

the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: 7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

Verses 4-7 are both difficult and very important in our understanding of this book, so we need to proceed carefully.

At the end of verse 3, the powerful angel from God cried out with a loud voice, and the seven thunders uttered their voices. What did they say?

John was about to tell us, but in verse 4 he is told instead to “seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” In verse 6, John tells us what the angel said, but he does not tell us what the seven thunders said.

Do we ever find out in this book what the seven thunders said? We can't say for sure. The details concealed here may have been revealed later in the book but we can't say for sure either way, and, as you can imagine, there has been **much** speculation.

If in fact the judgment of the seven thunders was never revealed to us, then the situation reminds us of 2 Corinthians 12:4 where Paul said that during his trip to heaven he heard things that it was not lawful for a man to utter.

Perhaps the purpose of the seven thunders is to assure Christians that God has unrevealed weapons in his arsenal that will be used when and if needed to take care of **future enemies** of his people, but that are not needed to take care of Rome. God can, so to speak, take care of mighty Rome with one hand tied behind his back!

This view would also explain why John was told to seal up this part of what he saw and heard. That is, it was to be sealed up for the same reason that Daniel was given in Daniel 8:26 — “seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence.” It is also possible that the seven thunders depict the final judgment of the world that is still yet to come, which again would explain why it was sealed up at this time.

With each of these possibilities, we are reminded of the **time frame** for this book — it concerns things that were shortly to come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Perhaps the voices of these seven thunders were not revealed in this book because these seven voices concern things that were **not** shortly to come to pass.

Lesson 23

Last week when we ended we had just started looking at verses 4-7 of Chapter 10. These difficult verses are important verses to our understanding of the rest of the book, so we will need to take our time and proceed carefully.

The handout for today's lesson (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) is a slightly revised version of a handout that I used last year for two of our special Wednesday night classes on current issues. For a detailed look at this handout, please listen to those two lessons available at ThyWordIsTruth.com. We will have a few things to say about the handout in today's lesson as well — a particularly with how Revelation 10:7 fits into the handout.

At the end of verse 3, the powerful angel from God cried out with a loud voice, and the seven thunders uttered their voices. What did the seven thunders say?

John was about to tell us, but in verse 4 he was told instead to “seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” In verse 6, John tells us what the angel said, but he does not tell us what the seven thunders said.

Last week we looked at several possibilities for why we were not told what the seven thunders said. With each of those possibilities, we were reminded of the **time frame** for this book — it concerns things that were shortly to come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Perhaps the voices of these seven thunders were not revealed in this book because these seven voices concerned things that were **not** shortly to come to pass. That theory fits nicely with what Daniel was told in Daniel 8:26 (“shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days”).

We'll have more to say about the seven thunders in a moment, but let's look first at what the angel said. That was the cliff hanger we ended with last week. The angel's message comes in several parts, including from the little book that he is carrying.

This angel was the mighty angel we saw in verses 1-3 who was on a special mission from God. In fact, we listed eight reasons why we know that this angel was on a mission of utmost importance from God. What did the angel say? What was that all-important message from God?

We see that message in verses 6-7, but first in verse 5 the angel lifts his hand to heaven. This raised hand signifies that what is being done or said is taking

place in full view of heaven, and it emphasizes the solemn and momentous nature of what is being said.

Hailey: “A more solemn oath could not be imagined as the angel swears by the eternity and omnipotence of God.”

Few statements in the Bible have as much of an advance build-up as does the statement in verses 6-7. No one can possibly have any misgivings about the importance and gravity of what this angel is about to say. So what is the message? What does the angel say?

As we read in the KJV, in verse 6 the angel swears before God “that there should be **time** no longer.” **What does that mean?**

The Greek word translated as “time” in that verse by the KJV is the word **chronos**. It *might* mean that there will be no more time (as the KJV suggests), but it much more likely means that there will be no more delay (as most newer translations suggest, and as most Greek scholars such as Vine, Arndt, Gingrich, and Vincent affirm). The Greek word **chronos** means a space of time, so to say there will be no more **chronos** is to say that there will be no more **delay**. Here are some other translations of the phrase.

- **ASV:** “There shall be **delay** no longer.”
- **ESV:** “That there would be no more **delay.**”
- **NAS:** “That there shall be **delay** no longer.”
- **RSV:** “That there should be no more **delay.**”
- **NKJ:** “That there should be **delay** no longer.”

In addition to being supported by Greek scholars, that interpretation fits perfectly with the context and the time frame given elsewhere in this book. It also fits perfectly with what the angel says in verse 7, and it fits perfectly with the description of the seventh trumpet in 11:14 — “behold, the third woe cometh **quickly.**”

So what then do we see in verse 6? We see a mighty angel, having come straight from the presence of God, standing on earth and on sea, raising his hand, and swearing before God that there will be no more delay!

On what basis do so many today insert a delay of two thousand years and counting? And having **added** that delay to the text, how do they avoid then avoid the prophecy of Revelation 22:18 — “If any man shall **add** unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book”? And

what would such a man-made delay say about this solemn oath appealing to the eternity and power of God and proclaiming that there will be no more delay?

Was there a delay or wasn't there a delay? Countless commentators tell us there was a delay. The mighty angel from God swears there is no delay. **I know whom I believe!** I'm with the mighty angel!

What else does the angel say? Look at verse 7. After swearing there will be no more delay, the angel then says, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." **What is this mystery of God that was declared to the prophets?**

A **mystery** in the Bible is usually something that was **previously** not understood but that has **now** been revealed. A mystery in the Bible is something unexpected and unknown to men unless it is revealed to man by God. God's plan of redemption, for example, is called a mystery in Ephesians 1:9-12, Ephesians 3:8-12, 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, and Colossians 1:25-27.

What mystery is in view here?

Before we answer that question, let's ask another question. This book was written late in the reign of the Roman emperor Vespasian. Could God have at that time sent fire down from heaven to completely destroy the Roman empire as he had completely destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? **No — God could not have destroyed Rome during the reign of Vespasian.** Why? Two reasons:

John 10:35 — The scripture cannot be broken.

Hebrews 6:18 — It was impossible for God to lie.

But how do those two verses tell us that God could not have wiped Rome off the map during the reign of Vespasian? Because Daniel and Paul had both written about the emperor Domitian — **and Domitian had not yet come to power.**

Daniel 7:25-26 — And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

Those prophecies about Domitian had not yet come to pass when this book was being written. If God had destroyed Rome prior to the reign of Domitian, then both Daniel and Paul would have been proven a false prophet. The Roman empire had to last at least through the reign of Domitian or else the scripture would have been broken. God could not have wiped Rome off the map at the time this book was written and been true to his word through the prophet Daniel and through the Apostle Paul.

So what is the mystery in verse 7?

Once again, before we answer that question, let's consider another question: we know that Jesus will someday return to judge and then destroy this world. Can that last great day occur at any time? Yes, which is why we must always be watchful and ready for his appearance. **But has that always been the case?** Has it always been true that Jesus could return at any time? Could Jesus, for example, have returned to judge the world on the very next day after his ascension? **No.** How do we know that? Two reasons:

John 10:35 — *The scripture cannot be broken.*

Hebrews 6:18 — *It was impossible for God to lie.*

Jesus himself told his followers in Acts 1 about things that had not yet happened but that were going to happen, and so Jesus could not return before those things happened. Jesus had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in Matthew 24, and so Jesus could not return until that event happened. The Old Testament contained prophecies about Rome that had not yet come to pass, and so Christ could not return until those things happened.

So when could it be said that Jesus could return at any moment? It could not yet be said when Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, because in that book Paul wrote the **opposite**: “for that day shall not come, **except** there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2:2-4). **So what was the dividing line?** At what point could it no longer be said that that “that day shall not come, **except**”?

In my opinion, the answer to that question is the same as the answer to our other question: what is the mystery in verse 7 that should be finished?

Whatever that mystery is, we know that it is something we can read about elsewhere in the Bible. Whatever that mystery is, we know it is not something new that has never been revealed to us before. **How do we know that?** Because of verse 7 — God had declared this mystery “to his servants the prophets.” Whatever this mystery is, it must be something we can find in the prophets.

And we know something else about this mystery — **we know that this mystery is finished.** When verse 7 was written, the mystery was not yet finished, but verse 6 tells us there would be no delay. And verse 7 says that the mystery would be finished when the seventh trumpet began to sound — something that Revelation 11:14 was in John’s day coming quickly! And the time frame of the book — repeated twice in Chapter 1 and twice in Chapter 22 — confirms that this mystery was finished shortly after the vision was received.

So what mystery did the prophets declare that was just about to be finished when this vision was received? I think the mystery must include the scheme of redemption and the coming of Christ to bless the entire world and establish his eternal kingdom. The real question for us is when was that mystery finished? What we see in verse 7 is the **ending point** of the mystery. What was that ending point — keeping in mind that whatever it is, it must be something declared by the prophets and something that was soon to occur.

We have three candidates:

1. God’s judgment of Rome.
2. The church’s triumph over Rome.
3. The judgment and death of Domitian.

And those three candidates are, of course, all related. Each was declared by the prophets — Daniel and Zechariah, in particular, as well as by the Apostle Paul. And each had already occurred or was about to occur without delay as proclaimed by the angel in Chapter 10 and by the time frame given repeatedly in the book of Revelation. **In my opinion, the end of the mystery was the death of Domitian in AD 96.**

But wait, someone might say, Rome was very much alive and well at the end of the first century. Domitian’s death in AD 96 was not the end of Rome. The Roman empire in the West continued until AD 476 with the sacking of the

city of Rome, and the Roman empire in the East continued until 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. And what about Constantine who became emperor in AD 324? Didn't Constantine convert to Christianity? Wasn't that really the church's triumph over Rome?

Let's deal with each of those objections in turn.

First, one thing this book tells us about Rome is that **God was finished with Rome** by the end of the first century. What do I mean by finished? I mean that by the death of Domitian in AD 96, the following events had occurred:

- Rome had conquered Greece, according to prophecy.
- Rome had grown to become a great military power, according to prophecy.
- The Roman peace had provided the perfect cradle for Christ to come into the world and for his gospel to spread across the known world, according to prophecy.
- The Jews had, by Roman hands, killed the Son of God, according to prophecy.
- Rome had destroyed Jerusalem, according to prophecy.
- Rome had persecuted the church, according to prophecy.
- Nero and Domitian, and their dynasties, had been completely destroyed, according to prophecy.

In short, the prophecies about Rome had run out! And that meant that Rome was suddenly disposable!

Yes — to the world it appeared that Rome was alive and well at the end of the first century — **but all is not what it seems!** By the end of the first century, Rome had been weighed in the scales and found wanting. Rome had been sentenced to death! God had given them up and given them over. Rome's role in God's plan was finished. We will have much more to say about the end of Rome as we proceed through the remainder of the book.

So what then is the end of the mystery in verse 7?

It is the end of Rome. It is the judgment of Rome. It is the triumph of the church over Rome. It is the end of Domitian, the terrible man of sin who called himself a god and tried to destroy God's church. All of these events were prophesied, and all of those events happened shortly after this book was written — just as verses 6 and 7 tell us.

And the fulfillment of those prophecies about Rome meant something else as well. Those were the only prophecies left to be fulfilled prior to the return of Christ. Once those events had occurred, Christ could then return at any time. Prior to their fulfillment, Paul would say “that day shall not come **expect**,” but after their fulfillment that day could come at any time.

But what about Constantine? What about the supposed conversion of the entire Roman empire to Christianity? Are we really saying that was **not** part of God’s plan for Rome and the church? **Yes, that is what we are saying.** Those events tell us the history of the Catholic church; they do **not** tell us the history of the Lord’s church. Those events tell us why, to this very day, the Roman Catholic church is modeled after the old Roman empire. The **diocese** for example — that was how the Romans divided their provinces. That concept came from Rome, not from the Bible. A **pontiff** referred first to a priest in the ancient Roman cults. That term came from Rome, not from the Bible. And we could go on and on.

It certainly appears to some that Christianity conquered Rome under the emperor Constantine, and many historians argue that is what happened, but is that really what happened?

To answer this question, it will be helpful first to consider the life and supposed conversion of Constantine the Great. History books portray Constantine as a great champion of Christianity and a friend of the church, but was he?

Constantine was born in about AD 285 and came to power through a complex series of civil wars. At this point, his primary concern was how to unify the empire under his authority. With this aim, Constantine embraced Christianity as a unifying force, staked everything he had on its support, and began to use it for his own purposes.

Was Constantine’s conversion genuine? This question has long been a subject of debate and speculation. Michael Grant has the following to say regarding Constantine’s motivations:

The emperor’s motives have been endlessly analyzed and discussed. But it appears that he and his advisors experienced a growing conviction that, however uninfluential the Christians might be at present, the course of events was working, or could be made to work, in their favor — since they alone possessed the universal aims and efficient, coherent organization that, in the long run, could unite the various conflicting peoples and

classes of the empire in a single, all-embracing harmony which was “Catholic,” that is to say, universal.

A politician exploiting Christians for his own personal power and benefit — where have we ever seen that before?

Constantine not only ended the persecution of Christianity but he began to treat Christianity as though it were a state religion which, in fact, it later became. He authorized state money to be used for the construction of elaborate church buildings.

His own personal lack of conviction is shown by the fact that he had his son, Crispus, put to death, his wife, Fausta, put to death, and he retained his position as the chief priest of the pagan state religion of Rome.

Ramsay Macmullen wrote the following with regard to Constantine’s view of Christianity:

Few of the essential elements of Christian belief interested Constantine very much — neither God’s mercy nor man’s sinfulness, neither damnation nor salvation, neither brotherly love nor, needless to say, humility. Ardent in his convictions, he remained nevertheless oblivious to their moral implications.

As the old saying goes, some peoples’ religion is so private they don’t even impose it on themselves!

Alistair Kee in his excellent book *Constantine Versus Christ* described the situation very well (keeping in mind that he is using the word “church” very broadly):

Because of his relationship to the church, Constantine was able to influence it and Christianity at a profound level. We must now consider how Constantine’s values infiltrated the church: not how he was converted to Christianity, but how through his religious policy he succeeded in converting Christianity to his position.

Kee states later that “the values of Constantine replaced the values of Christ within Christianity” and that “Christianity was enlisted in his own personal crusade to gain control of the Empire and in the process Christianity was transformed.”

The Roman empire's **embrace** of Christianity did more to damage the Church than did the earlier persecutions. Persecution, in a sense, allowed the Church to remain "pure" by effectively excluding anyone not willing to face death for his or her beliefs.

Remember what Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 12:10 — *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Alistair Kee mirrors these thoughts when he states:

Only a sadist would wish that persecution continue in the church, only a masochist welcome it, and yet suffering seemed an inescapable experience for early Christians. ... [T]he history of the church till the fourth century was of random and often intensive persecution. Whenever the Emperor or the traditions of the Empire seemed threatened, it was open season on persecuting Christians. **And yet this tiny minority, insignificant, weak and defenseless, not only survived but grew.** ... To Christians ... it was not at all incredible that persecution could actually strengthen the church: it brought precisely the experience in which God was made known to them in strength. **The later Roman influence effectively weakened the Church from within.**

Under Imperial favor the Church experienced a rapid growth. Many who thronged into it did so from expediency, rather than deep religious conviction, and the moral and spiritual quality of the Christian community suffered.

That is always the effect that society has on the church. When we let the world into the church and start letting the world change us rather than seeking to change the world, we weaken the church from within. That sort of compromise with the world is precisely what was already happening to some of the churches in chapters 2-3.

The "church" of Constantine's day, in embracing Rome, rejected Christ. As a result, the "church" grew to look much more like Rome and much less like the pattern revealed in Scripture.

Dr. Kee's book provides a sobering lesson in the dangers of compromise:

[I]t is therefore all the more tragic that Christians should, in the moment of victory, forsake the Revelation in Jesus, for its opposite in Constantine. The church did not need the protection of Constantine; it had already taken on the Empire, century after century, and had in the end been victorious. ... If Constantine had in turn persecuted the church, he too would have failed to conquer it. How was it then that he was able to succeed where his predecessors had failed? How was it that by a little kindness, a word of praise here, a grant to build a new church there, he was able to induce the church to forsake what they could not be made to forsake under threat of torture or death? The Emperor offered so much, beyond the dreams of Christians recently under constant threat. He offered in effect at least a share in the kingdoms of the world. When Satan is seen to offer such rewards, the temptation is rejected. When one comes professing to be a follower of the One God, then his offer is accepted. ... And once again the Son of Man was betrayed with a kiss. Not that the betrayal took place in a moment. It was a gradual process. Gradually the church came to have faith in the Emperor, to trust him and to see in him and in his ways the hand of God.

So, no, Constantine was not a great champion of the church. He was the opposite. And he provides a valuable lesson today for any in the church who would seek the embrace of the state.

So where are we at the end of verse 7?

Let's not forget what we said about Chapter 10. That chapter is here to provide comfort to the persecuted Christians. Is that what we see here? Absolutely! Talk about a message of comfort! Talk about a message of victory! This mighty angel is swearing that the mystery of God declared by the prophets is about to be finished without delay!

Yes, Rome had played an important role in God's plan to redeem the world — but that role was over. The final prophetic puzzle pieces about Rome would soon be put in place. Rome had had its day, but that day was at an end. God was finished with Rome!

And what about the church?

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be*

destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Matthew 21:44 — *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Hebrews 12:27-29 — *And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.*

The kingdoms of this world are temporary; the church is eternal. The kingdoms of this world will be destroyed; the church is what will destroy them. The kingdoms of this world are made with hands; the church is made without hands. The kingdoms of this world can be shaken; the church cannot be moved. Why? Because our God is a consuming fire! Rome learned that lesson the hard way!

Lesson 24

Last week we looked verses 4-7 of Chapter 10, and we looked in detail at the mystery of God in verse 7.

Chapter 10 is here to provide comfort to the persecuted Christians, and that is exactly what we have seen so far in this chapter. A mighty angel has sworn that the mystery of God declared by the prophets is about to be finished without delay!

Yes, Rome had played an important role in God's plan to redeem the world — but that role was over. The final prophetic puzzle pieces about Rome would soon be put in place. Rome had had its day, but that day was at an end. God would very soon be finished with Rome!

Revelation 10:8-11

8 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. 9 And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. 10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. 11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

In verse 4, a voice from heaven told John to seal up what he had heard uttered by the seven thunders. In verse 8, that same voice tells John to go and take the little book that was being held by the mighty angel.

That mighty angel had come from the presence of God to announce that there would be no more delay, but that the mystery of God would be finished when the seventh trumpet began to sound. This angel also brought a small open book, and part of the angel's message was in that book.

The first thing we should notice in verse 8 is that John was not **given** the book. Instead, John was told to **go and take** the book. Why is that distinction important? Because it emphasizes John's personal commitment to undertake the responsibility of faithfully recording and faithfully proclaiming God's message.

Remember, John was at this moment suffering exile because of his testimony about Jesus (1:9). Once he was finally released, did God really expect him to start proclaiming the word once again and risk being exiled once again, or worse? Yes. And John's actions in these verses show us that John readily accepted that charge from God.

This part of the scene is intended to remind us of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both were willing to suffer for proclaiming God's word — and both indicated that willingness by eating God's word, Jeremiah figuratively and Ezekiel literally.

***Jeremiah 15:16-17** — Thy words were found, **and I did eat them**; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation.*

***Ezekiel 2:8-3:3** — But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: **open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee**. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, **eat that thou findest; eat this roll**, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and **he caused me to eat that roll**. And he*

said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

As did Jeremiah and Ezekiel, John eats the book to show his acceptance of this responsibility. He makes God's message a part of himself.

There's a lesson here that we shouldn't miss. **No one will ever listen to us proclaim a message that we ourselves are not living.** The first step I must take if I want to be an effective proclaimer of God's word is to make God's word a part of myself — just as if I had eaten it. The word must be inside me and be a part of me, so that when the world hears me and sees me, they will hear and see God's word. I must be inseparable from the word of God. Yes, I must **know** it, but I must also **show** it.

Colossians 3:16 — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

John 15:7 — If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

In verse 9, John is told what he should expect when he eats the book — “it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.” Verse 10 tells us that John experienced just what he had been promised when he ate the book — “it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.”

Bitter and sweet — what does that mean? It means that whatever is in that scroll, it contains some bad news and some good news.

What was the bad news? We know what that was. The church would continue to suffer great persecution at the hands of Rome. That persecution did not suddenly end when Rome was judged. In fact, it never ended. The persecutors come and go, and the level of persecution increases and decreases, but there is never a time when there is no persecution. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). And at this time the persecution was severe. John would continue to suffer, as would those faithful Christians who heard his message.

John 15:19 — If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but

*I have chosen you out of the world, therefore **the world hateth you.***

But there was also good news in the little book. The scroll was also sweet. What was the good news? The church would triumph over Rome. Those Christians who were faithful unto death would receive a crown of life. Just as Daniel had foretold centuries earlier, the eternal kingdom of God would sweep away all the kingdoms of this world — including Rome.

Don't we see both the bitter and the sweet in Revelation 2?

Revelation 2:10 — *Fear none of those things which **thou shalt suffer**: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee **a crown of life.***

Yes, victory was promised. But that victory involved suffering, tribulation, and death. Both bitter and sweet.

There's another lesson here that we shouldn't miss. The bitter and the sweet go together — and we should not expect to have one without the other. Some of us want just the sweet, but we are not willing to suffer the bitter. Others trudge through the Christian life as if the bitter was all there is, not recognizing the wonderful sweetness that God's provides.

Why was the **sweetness** in the **mouth**, while the **bitterness** was in the **stomach**? Perhaps we are intended to recall the Psalmist.

Psalm 119:103 — *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

Or perhaps we are intended to recall the stern message of Hebrews 6 to those who would fall away from Christ.

Hebrews 6:4-6 — *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have **tasted of the heavenly gift**, and were **made partakers of the Holy Ghost**, And have **tasted the good word of God**, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

Verse 11 tells us something else about John's message — it would be prophesied “again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” **What does that mean?**

First, the word “**before**” that I read from the KJV is better translated “**about.**” That is, instead of being told that he would prophecy **before** many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings, John is being told that he will prophecy **about** many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. That is how the ESV translates the verse: “You must again prophesy **about** many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

Second, this statement reminds us of something we have already seen back in Chapter 5.

***Revelation 5:9-10** — And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of **every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

Except for “kings” in place of “kindred,” the categories in Revelation 10:11 are the same as the categories in Revelation 5:9. Who were the tongues, the peoples, and the nations in Revelation 5:9? If we are talking about the first century church that God had redeemed by the blood of Christ, then the tongues, the peoples, and the nations in Revelation 5:9 were tongues, peoples, and nations in Rome. Isn't that what we saw in Acts 2?

***Acts 2:9-11** — Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians.*

Those were all part of Rome or, at least for the Parthians, close enough that some of their citizens found themselves in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Yes, the population that heard John and the other apostles were almost entirely Roman, but they were also of many peoples and nations and tongues.

So what does that tell us about Revelation 10:11? It tells us that we need not look outside of Rome to find many peoples and nations and tongues. Acts 2

proves that with absolute certainty. The Roman empire was composed of many peoples and many nations and many tongues. Remember how Luke described Rome.

*Luke 2:1 — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.*

What about the **many kings** in verse 11? They are the first eleven emperors of Rome, and we are about to study all about them later in this book. But it is not the first time we have met them — we also read about them in our study of Daniel.

But couldn't verse 11 mean that John's message in this book is all about the many peoples and nations and tongues and kings that would rise and fall in the centuries between when the book was written and the world comes to an end? **No.**

It can't mean that. Why? Because this book is telling us over and over again that it concerns things that were to shortly come to pass. Verse 11 can't concern things that have not yet come to pass even two thousand years later unless we are willing to ignore the numerous verses to the contrary. Verse 11 is not the only verse in this book! We must study verse 11 in its context.

And another thing — the little book that has this message for the many peoples and nations and tongues and kings came from the mighty angel. And what had that mighty angel just done in verses 5-6? He had raised his hand before God and proclaimed that there would be **no more delay!** Are we really going to add 2000 years and counting worth of delay in verse 11? Let's believe what the angel said — the time for delay was over!

Chapter 11

Revelation 11:1-2

1 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that

worship therein. 2 But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Here is how Barclay describes this chapter:

It has been said that Chapter 11 is at one and the same time the most difficult and the most important chapter in Revelation.

I'm not certain I agree with either assessment, although this is a difficult chapter. Perhaps we should begin just by listing the symbols that we see in the first four verses (two of which we just read, and two verses we will read shortly):

- A reed like unto a rod used to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshippers.
- The court outside not measured but given unto the Gentiles.
- The holy city.
- 42 months.
- Two witnesses.
- 1260 days.
- Two olive trees.
- Two candlesticks.

That's eight symbols in just the first four verses! Before we dive in, let's note a few helpful guidelines.

There is no reason to expect a **change in context** as we move into Chapter 11. If we have been looking at the conflict between Rome and the church in the first ten chapters, then we are likely still looking at that conflict here.

The **time frame** of the book applies to Chapter 11 as it does to all of the other chapters. This chapter describes things that were to shortly come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Remember what the mighty angel said in verse 6 — the time for delay was over!

This book is **not** about Jerusalem. For starters, the book itself tells us that it was written **after** the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And if the book is about Jerusalem (as some suggest), then why does it begin the letters to seven churches of Asia Minor? We noticed in our discussion of 10:7 that God was very **soon** to be finished with Rome — by the time of this book, God was **already** finished with Jerusalem.

This book is all about the **new Jerusalem** — the church. So if we see symbols here that make us think of Jerusalem, we should immediately check to see whether they apply instead to the new Jerusalem, the church.

This book is intended to provide **comfort** to the church during a time of intense persecution by Rome. As we enter Chapter 11, we are still in the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets — and that interlude is specifically intended to assure the Christians of their position, their spiritual safety, their spiritual deliverance, and their spiritual victory.

And with that, let's fasten our seatbelts and get started with Chapter 11!

Many terrible things are in store for Rome. The seventh trumpet, which is the third woe announced by the eagle, is about to sound, and we will soon see the seven bowls of God's wrath poured out on Rome. Chapter 11 begins by considering the question of what was to become of God's faithful servants during these great trials and tribulations. **Would they be protected? Would they be safe?**

One of the themes of this book is that **God knows**. In each of the seven letters in Chapters 2-3, Jesus said, "I know." Earlier we saw God's people being sealed in advance of the tribulation — which we compared to God writing his name on his people. God knows who his faithful people are, and God knows who they are not.

*2 Timothy 2:19 — Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **The Lord knoweth them that are his.***

The opening verses of Chapter 11 show us this fact using the symbol of a **measuring rod**. When a surveyor measures an area, that measurement creates a **separation** into two parts — the part inside the measured area and the part outside the measured area. And after the surveyor's measurement is made, there is no longer any doubt about what is inside the area and what is outside the area. The image here is of a surveyor being sent to measure the house of God.

Where else have we seen this imagery?

In Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple, a measuring rod was used to make a separation between what is holy and what is common.

***Ezekiel 42:19-20** — He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.*

We also saw this symbol in our study of Zechariah.

***Zechariah 2:1-5** — I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.*

Where the measurement in Ezekiel was intended to show the **division** between the holy and the profane, the measurement in Zechariah (as we discussed when we studied that chapter) was intended to show God's **protection** of his people. Both of those concepts are involved here in Revelation 11 — the **separation** between the church and those outside the church, and God's **protection** of his church.

What is John told to measure? The temple, the altar, and those who worship in the temple. The Greek word for temple used here indicates the inner sanctuary where only priests were allowed. It is not the Greek word denoting the entire temple with all of its buildings, courts, and porches.

Which temple is John told to measure? Is it the old Jewish temple in Jerusalem? We know that isn't the temple in view here. Why? Because by the time of this vision, that temple had already been weighed in the balances, found want-

ing, and destroyed! **To measure the old Jewish temple at this time you would need a *backhoe* rather than a measuring rod!**

This temple is not the *old* dwelling place of God in the old Jewish temple — this temple is instead the *new* dwelling place of God in the church. What we are seeing here is yet another beautiful description of the church — this time as a **measured temple** of worshipers, **separated** from the world and under God's **protection**.

And isn't that exactly what we would **expect** to see? Would it make any sense at all in the context of the first 10 chapters for John to suddenly be told to measure the old (now destroyed) Jewish temple in the old (now destroyed) city of Jerusalem? How would that provide any comfort to the poor persecuted Christians in Asia Minor?

Let's let Paul describe the temple that is being measured here:

***Ephesians 2:18-22** — For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **an holy temple** in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Let's let Peter tell us what it is:

***1 Peter 2:5-6** — Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*

The **altar** in verse 1 is a reminder of what prompted this judgement against Rome.

***Revelation 6:9-10** — And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the **altar** the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, say-*

ing, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The church was **sealed** in Revelation 7:3, the church was **numbered** in Revelation 7:4, and now the church is **measured** in Revelation 11:1.

Does God care what happens to the church? Absolutely! These images show God taking great interest in and care of his church. He marks them, he numbers them, he measures them. **Does Jesus care?** “Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief; When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.” That’s the message of verse 1!

And let’s make one point perfectly clear — **God’s measurement is the only measurement that matters.** It does not matter how the world measures us, and it does not matter how we measure ourselves. What matters is how God measures us. If we fall short on God’s scale, it matters not how we fall on the scales of men.

*1 Corinthians 4:3-4 — But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but **he that judgeth me is the Lord.***

The only judgment that matters is the judgment of Christ. And the only judgment of Christ that we ever want to hear applied to us is “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” If we can just hear those words from our Savior, then it matters not what the world has thought of us.

What is the court in verse 2?

The ancient tabernacle had one court (Exodus 27:9). Solomon’s temple had an inner court (1 Kings 6:36), an outer court (1 Kings 7:12), a court for the priests (2 Chronicles 4:9), and an upper court (Jeremiah 36:10). Herod’s temple also had multiple courts, with the great court eventually being called the court of the Gentiles because it was open to everyone.

The temple in John’s vision has only one court as far as we are told, and John is told **not** to measure that court. In fact, the Greek word translated “leave out” in verse 2 can literally mean to **cast out** by force.

Why is this court not measured? If measuring something means that God is protecting that thing and separating that thing from what is common, then

not measuring something means that thing not measured is left unprotected and unseparated. **Why is this court left unprotected and unseparated?**

To answer that question, we need to first ask another question: **what is represented by this court?** We have a big clue to help us answer that question — whatever this court is, we know it is **not measured**.

God is measuring his people so that they will know they are known by God, are important to God, and are protected by God. God is measuring his people to show that they are holy and that they are separate from what is not holy. **Those who are measured have chosen Christ over Caesar; those who are not measured have chosen Caesar over Christ.**

So what does the court in verse 2 represent? It represents those **outside** the church. Once again, we see the **two paths** — the path to life and the path to death. We see **two groups** — those in Christ, and those out of Christ.

This view is confirmed by what we read next in verse 2 — “for it [the court] is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”

Who are the Gentiles in verse 2? This question is easy. If the church is the new Jerusalem, then who are the true Jews today? Paul answered that question for us:

Romans 2:29 — But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Galatians 3:7 — Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Figuratively, the church is the new Jerusalem, and Christians are the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). So then who, figuratively, are the **Gentiles**? Those **outside** of the church. Those **outside** of Christ. And that is just what we would expect to see because verse 2 tells us that the unmeasured court has been given unto the Gentiles — they are outside the church.

What does it mean that the Gentiles will tread the holy city? What is the holy city? Let's start with second question first.

The holy city in verse 2 is, once again, the church. It is the new Jerusalem, the new dwelling place of God's people under the new covenant.

Revelation 21:2 — *And I John saw **the holy city**, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

But I thought the **temple** in verse 1 was the church. How can the **entire city** now also be the church in verse 2? Because God is using symbol after symbol to show us how he sees the church. This book uses many different symbols to depict the church — we have already seen many of them in the first 10 chapters, and we will see many more. We have two of those beautiful symbols in these two verses — the church is the **temple** (Ephesians 2:21) and the church is the **holy city**, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). In this book, it is **never** a proper objection to say that we are being shown too many different symbols representing the church!

But what about the second question — what does it mean that **the Gentiles will tread the holy city**? What that means is that the church was having and was going to continue to have a very rough time. Yes, the church enjoyed all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), but **physically** the church was suffering, and that suffering would soon get worse under Domitian. The church was being run over by the Romans. **Would it last forever?** Verse 2 says no. It would not last forever — it would last for only 42 months.

What does it mean that the holy city will be tread by the Gentiles for 42 months? We know that numbers are used figuratively in this book. (How else can we explain any army of 200 million soldiers?) So the real question is what does 42 represent? What does that symbol mean?

The first thing we should note about this symbol is that it is one we will see again in this book, although sometimes it will be shown in different terms.

Here in verse 2 we see **42 months**. In the very next verse we will see **1260 days**. In Revelation 12:14, we will see “**a time, and times, and half a time.**” How are all of those the same symbol? Because 42 months, at thirty days per month, is 1260 days. And because 42 months is three and a half years, which is what is meant by “a time, and times, and half a time” — a year, two years, and half a year.

We also saw this symbol in our study of Daniel. In Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, **three and a half years** was the period of time during which the little horn (Domitian) and Rome would persecute God’s people.

So what do we know so far about the 42 months in verse 2? We know that is it being used figuratively, we know this same figure is used elsewhere in the book, and we know that it is the same as three and a half years.

What does this symbol depict? Remember how we answered that question when we were looking at the 144,000. We **unravelled** 144,000 to see how it is related to symbols that we know — such as twelve and ten. Here we will do the same thing. Is three and a half related to some symbol that we already know? Yes — three and a half is a **broken seven**. It is half of seven — and seven is a symbol for perfection that runs all throughout the book of Revelation.

God is hitting Rome in waves of seven — seven seals, seven trumpets, and soon seven bowls. And Rome? **Rome is hitting the church with a broken seven!**

Rome can never inflict damage on the church in anyway that is similar to the damage that God can inflict on Rome. Rome may think it has a giant club with which to pummel the church — but that club is just a broken seven. God's club is a true seven — and **no one gets up when God swings that club!** Rome can't pour seven bowls of wrath on the church! Rome doesn't have seven of anything to use as a weapon against the church!

The symbol of a persecution lasting three and half years is a beautiful image for a persecution that is just **temporary** — a persecution that cannot destroy the church, unlike how God is about to destroy Rome. Yes, God's people will be persecuted, but that persecution will **not** last forever, and God will **sustain** his people throughout that persecution.

And doesn't that interpretation fit the context perfectly? Does it make any sense at all to read verse 2 and then get our calendar out and count off a literal 42 months? The so-called "rigid literalism" of the premillennialist strips all of the beauty and meaning from the text.

But why do we see the **variations** in how this symbol is used? Why do we see 42 **months** here, 1260 **days** in the next verse, and three and half **years** elsewhere? Why not just always used the same symbol?

My **first answer** to that question is to ask why Van Gogh used so many different colors. Why so many shades of green? Why not just use the same tube of green paint every time? God is painting us some beautiful pictures in this book — maybe we shouldn't question his color choices!

A **second answer** to that question is that the switch from years to months to days may be intended to cast a slightly different shade on **how temporary** the

persecution will be or will seem. Maybe a switch from years to months makes the persecution seem even more temporary.

Lesson 25

Last week when we ended we were looking at verses 1-2 of Chapter 11. In those two verses, we saw two beautiful symbols for the church.

In verse 1, we saw the church as the measured temple of God, which shows us figuratively what Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:19 — “The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

In verse 2, we saw the church as the holy city that would be trodden under foot by Rome for 42 months. We talked about the symbol of the 42 months, and how that symbol is a broken seven (three and a half years). God is hitting Rome with waves of sevens, but all Rome can do in response is hit the church with a broken seven.

God is giving the church a very important message in verse 2. It’s the same message we see in Romans 8.

***Romans 8:31** — If God be for us, who can be against us?*

God is telling the church that he will not permit the church to be annihilated — something that must have been a **real fear** for Christians at this time. How could the church withstand mighty Rome when so many powerful nations had fallen under the Roman military onslaught? Did the church stand a chance against Rome? God is answering that question here.

Do we have similar fears today? It is easy to become discouraged when we look at the state of the Lord’s church today in a culture that seems to be in free fall, and sometimes seems to be carrying the church down with it. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). The answer to that question can be yes, and should be yes — but only if we are faithful and only if we pass that faith on to future generations through our faithful proclamation of the gospel. We must have a **great desire** for the word of God — and we must pass that great desire on to our children and on to others. **We should not be discouraged.** If we are faithful to Christ, then the encouraging promises of Revelation are our promises as well. But if we ever stop proclaiming the word of God to a lost and hostile world, then we have good reason to be discouraged, and the answer to Jesus’ question in Luke 18:8 may be “no.”

Revelation 4-22 tells us that God will not permit anyone to conquer the church from without. But when it comes to the church crumbling from within, that's Revelation 2-3, and those chapters tell us that we are responsible to prevent that from happening.

One last point about verse 2 — it sounds very similar to Luke 21:24.

Luke 21:24 — Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

Is that verse from Luke 21 describing the same thing as Revelation 11:2? No, but there is a relation between the two verses. Remember one of our key interpretive principles: similarity of language does not prove identity of subject.

Luke 21 is describing Rome's attack on *old* Jerusalem, which occurred in AD 70, about a decade before John received this vision. Revelation 11 is describing Rome's attack on *new* Jerusalem. The "Gentiles" in Luke 21 and Revelation 11 are the same — the Romans — but the target of the Romans has shifted from Jerusalem to the church. In our study of Zechariah we saw where he had prophesied about *both* assaults — Rome's assault against Jerusalem and Rome's assault against the church. Those are the same two assaults we see in Luke 21 and Revelation 11.

Revelation 11:3-4

3 And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

4 These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

Remember that the number two is something we have been on the lookout for in our study of this book. So far we have seen that number running through the text like a thread, usually as a symbol for Rome. Rome had been founded by Romulus and Remus, twins raised by a beast, and Rome is represented in this book as two beasts, one from the earth and one from the sea. In the first century, Rome was led by two dynasties, each capped off by an evil persecutor of the church — Nero and Domitian.

What can God send against the Roman twins? Verses 3 and 4 answer that question. And notice that the number two appears three times in these two verses. (This is my fourth time to teach this book, and I completely missed the significance of the number two the first three times I taught the book!)

In verse 3, the angel (speaking as a messenger of God) says, “I will give power to my two witnesses.” **Who are these two witnesses?** Before we answer that question, let’s look at the four clues to their identity given in the text.

- They shall prophecy 1260 days.
- They are clothed in sackcloth.
- They are the two olive trees.
- They are the two candlesticks standing before God.

So, now with that on the table, **who are the two witnesses?**

Many different answers have been proposed to that question, including Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah. Some say the two witnesses denote the Old Testament and the New Testament, while others say they denote the prophets and the apostles. Others say that the two witnesses are the apostles and the Holy Spirit, pointing for support to John 15:26. Some of those proposals have merit, but, in my opinion, the two witnesses here in verse 3 are **the church**.

But you sound like a broken record! Can this symbol really be yet another symbol for the church? It is starting to seem like nearly every symbol we come to somehow describes the church! **Exactly!** And that is how it seemed to its first century readers and listeners as well. They were left with precisely the impression that God wanted them to have — **the church is so important to God and so loved by God that he is constantly looking at it and caring for it and thinking about it! Jesus is in love with his church! If you ever doubt that, read Revelation!**

But on what basis can we say that the two witnesses in verse 3 denote the church? Because, in verse 4, they are called **two olive trees** and **two candlesticks**.

The word “candlestick” should immediately make us think of the church.

***Revelation 1:20** — And the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

And we previously discussed why a candlestick is a perfect image for the church. But we also have two olive trees. Where have we seen that before? We saw that image in our study of Zechariah.

In Zechariah 4:14, two olive trees were used to denote two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth. They are Zerubbabel of the royal line and Joshua, the High Priest. What is it that combines both the priesthood and royalty? The church. We are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) and a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). In Zechariah 4, the two olive trees represented Christ, the perfect King and High Priest. Here in Revelation 11, the two olive trees represent the witnesses for Christ, the church of Christ, which is the royal priesthood with Christ as our King and Christ as our High Priest.

But why are there **two** witnesses? Some suggest it is because we have witnesses, and, as John 8:17 tell us, in the law, “the testimony of two men is true.” So perhaps the number two just denotes the confirmed testimony of the church. Perhaps, but I don’t think that’s the answer. I think we need to dig a little deeper.

So, if that’s not the answer, then what is the answer? Why are there **two** witnesses? Remember how we started this discussion — what could God send against the evil Roman twins? The answer is that God could send the royal priesthood — another combination of two, but one infinitely more powerful than the Roman two. Christ combines royalty with priesthood, and so does the church of Christ. In that sense, the one church is a two, and that is why we see the church here depicted by two witnesses, two candlesticks, and two olive trees.

And think about Rome for a moment. Wasn’t it also two in this sense? Yes. Rome was a kingdom, and Rome was a priesthood. Rome combined military power with false Caesar worship. Later we will see this division shown to us as a beast from the earth and a beast from the sea. So what great power could overcome Rome? The royal priesthood established by God had been prophesied centuries earlier in Daniel 2:44 to one day overthrow the royal priesthood created by man. That is what we are seeing here, and that explains why we see the number two used so often in these verses.

Why do the two witnesses prophecy in sackcloth?

Sackcloth was a coarse fabric woven from goat or camel hair, and it was worn at times of mourning or penitence. It was also the characteristic attire of the Old Testament prophets. Here it is a reminder of the mission of the church to

proclaim God's word, but it is also a reminder of the plight of the church suffering under Roman persecution. Rome may have been trampling the church, but Rome was not able to stop the church. The proclamation of the gospel continued despite Rome's best efforts to stamp it out.

Once again, we have a lesson for the church today. God is depending on his church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. He has given us that great commission, and he expects us to do it. If we do not do it, then it will not be done. Even in the darkest hours of persecution, God expected the church to continue its mission — and it did. What excuse will we have if we are ever found to have failed in that mission? If they preached Christ in the face of death, then how will God respond if we fail to preach Christ in the face of ridicule?

Finally, why do the two witnesses prophesy for 1260 days?

We have already looked at this question. Remember in our discussion of the 42 months in verse 2 we noted that 42 months is 1260 days — and both are three and a half years, a broken seven.

God was about to hit Rome with a seven. All Rome could do against the church is hit it with a broken seven — and during that temporary period of persecution, these verses tell us that God would continue to provide power to the church, and the church would continue its mission to proclaim God's word. That is the message of verses 3-4.

Revelation 11:5-7

5 And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. 6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. 7 And when they shall have finished their tes-

timony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

At first, in verses 5-6, we see the two witnesses looking more like unstoppable super heroes with super powers. Anyone who harms them is doomed to be killed by fire proceeding from their mouths. They, like Elijah and Elisha, have the power to shut the sky that no rain may fall. They, like Moses and Aaron, have the power to smite the earth with plagues.

But then in verse 7 it looks like everything changes. It seems that this pair was not unstoppable after all. The beast from the pit wages war against them and kills them. I guess that means that verse 7 is the end of the story for the two witnesses, right? We know that's not right! Verses 5-7 show the two witnesses following the footsteps of their Master by being faithful unto death — and that is something about Jesus that we will be reminded of in the very next verse, verse 8.

We know that verse 7 is not a permanent defeat for the church. How do we know that? Many reasons. First, God started this vision off by telling us the ending — we have already seen the church rejoicing in its victory. Second, Daniel had told us centuries earlier that Rome, not the church, would be destroyed, and that the church, not Rome, would be the eternal kingdom. Third, Jesus has already told us in this book that, for the faithful, death is the pathway to victory, not the pathway to defeat. And we could go on and on. We know that verse 7 is not the end of the story for the church.

Rome may have believed it would be victorious. Rome may have appeared to all the world to be victorious. The church may have even thought that Rome was going to be victorious. And so, for now at least, Rome is pictured as being victorious. But, as we will soon see, that victory is only an illusion. As terrible as the beast from the bottomless pit was, it could not stop the church.

Why show their defeat at all if it's not a real defeat? One word — **drama!** These verses are the part of the show where it looks like the hero is dead for sure! How will he ever get out of this one?

But there's another reason — these verses drive home the central theme of this book: **things are not what they seem!**

To the outside world, the church seemed powerless. Does the church look powerless to you in verses 5 and 6? Hardly! The church is destroying its enemies, creating droughts, and bringing forth plagues — all things that were done by God's people in the Old Testament.

But how do God's people accomplish these things? Through their own power? No. Through carnal weapons? No. They accomplish these things through prayer and the power of God and the power of God's word. That's how it worked in the Old Testament, and that's how it works now.

***James 5:17** — Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and **he prayed earnestly** that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

The church is the most powerful kingdom there has ever been and ever will be. If we don't feel powerful, then we are not viewing the church as God views the church, which means that we are not viewing the church correctly. Listen to Jesus, and ask yourself whether the church is powerful.

***Matthew 16:18** — Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

You mean that the beast from the bottomless pit in verse 7 won't be able to destroy the church? Yes — not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it!

And the Bible — is it powerful?

***Hebrews 4:12** — For the word of God is quick, and **powerful**, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

And the gospel — is that powerful?

***Romans 1:16** — For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

And prayer?

James 5:16 — *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

We are members of the most powerful kingdom in history; our Lord and King is King of kings and Lord of lords; and we have been given tools and weapons that are infinitely more powerful than anything this world could ever bring against them. That's how powerful the church is! **That's how powerful we are!**

But the witnesses are dead in verse 7 — how could that be powerful? Let's let Paul answer that question for us.

Romans 8:36-39 — *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We are more than conquerors! If we remain faithful to Christ, then nothing can harm us! That's the message of Romans 8, and that's the message of Revelation.

Revelation 11:8

8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

In verse 2, we saw the holy city, which we concluded was the church. Here in verse 8, we the great city. **What is the great city?**

Before we read the description given in the verse, let's ask this question: what would we **expect** the great city to be? So far, this book has been focused on the conflict between the church and Rome, and in verse 2 we saw the church. Wouldn't we expect to see Rome here in verse 8? If we have two cities (the holy

city and the great city), wouldn't we expect them to depict the church and Rome?

Our **expectation**, of course, is not evidence, and our expectations could lead us astray if we rely on them and ignore the text — but conversely, if our identification of the great city in verse 8 does not make sense in the context and the time frame of the remainder of the book, then perhaps we should look more closely at the text. In short, our answer should make sense.

How do we know the holy city in verse 2 and the great city in verse 8 are not the same city? After all, the church is called both the “holy city” and the “great city” elsewhere in the book.

***Revelation 21:2** — And I John saw **the holy city**, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

***Revelation 21:10** — And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me **that great city**, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.*

Yes, but Rome is also called a great city elsewhere in the book.

***Revelation 14:8** — And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, **that great city**, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*

***Revelation 17:18** — And the woman which thou sawest is **that great city**, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

So is the great city here in verse 8 the holy city of Revelation 21:2, 10, or is it the great city of Revelation 14:8, 17:18. Here is where the rest of verse 8 is crucial. As we read the description of the great city in verse 8, the first comparison we see is **Sodom** — that alone let's us know we are not looking at the church. This great city in verse 8 is not the holy city of verse 2. In this book, that leaves only one other choice — **the great city in verse 8 is Rome**.

But, wait, some will say. Verse 8 doesn't end with the word Sodom. The verse describes the great city as a city “which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” Jerusalem was where Jesus was crucified.

Doesn't that mean this great city is Jerusalem rather than Rome? No, for several reasons.

First, the second half of verse 8 is a **description** of the great city rather than an **identification** of the great city. How do we know that? Because if it were an identification, we would have a big problem — which of the three locations (two cities and one nation) would we use to identify the great city? It is Sodom? Is it Egypt? Is it Jerusalem?

Second, note the word translated “**spiritually**” in the KJV translation of verse 8 — “which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” The ESV says, “the great city that **symbolically** is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.” The RSV says, “the great city which is **allegorically** called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.” The Greek word is *pneumatikos*, which has the root word *pneuma*, which means “spirit.” The KJV translation of “spiritually” is the better translation; that is what the word means. The text is not saying that it is giving us a symbol for the first time in verse 8; we know that is not the case. We have seen many, many symbols so far in our study of this book, and we are expecting to see symbols here in verse 8, so there is no need for the text to wave a sign saying that we are seeing a symbol here. In fact, we must be seeing symbols here. Why? Because the great city cannot **literally** be Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. So what does the word “spiritually” mean in verse 8? Let's look at the one other place in the Bible where the word appears.

*1 Corinthians 2:14 — But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are **spiritually** discerned.*

The word really just means “not physically.” The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God because they are not physically discerned — and that is all the natural man is focused on, the physical things. I think that is all the text is saying here in verse 8 — the great city is not physically like Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem — but it is spiritually like these cities.

Those who identify the great city with Jerusalem say that only Sodom and Egypt are being compared “spiritually” to the great city. They say those two cities are the descriptions, but they say Jerusalem is the identification. But there's a little word in verse 8 that causes a big problem for that theory. Do you see it? “Where **also** our Lord was crucified.” The text does not say “where

our Lord was crucified,” but it says, “where **also** our Lord was crucified.” As I read verse 8, that word “also” suggests that the final phrase should also fall under the umbrella of the word “spiritually.”

But let’s assume for a moment that the word “spiritually” in verse 8 applies **only** to Sodom and Egypt, and let’s assume that the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” at the end of the verse was intended to be taken literally. (I don’t think that is the case, but let’s assume it is for a moment.) Does it follow even then that the great city is Jerusalem? **No**. Sodom was a city, but what about Egypt? Was Egypt a city? No. Egypt was a nation. In what nation was the Lord crucified? The Roman empire. Jerusalem was a part of the Roman empire when Jesus was crucified. If Egypt is a nation in verse 8, then why couldn’t the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” also be pointing to a nation?

Is there any other support for the view that the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” is pointing to the Roman empire rather than to Jerusalem? Yes. Jesus was not crucified **in** Jerusalem but was crucified **near** Jerusalem.

*John 19:20 — This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was **nigh** to the city.*

*Hebrews 12:12 — Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered **without the gate**.*

That’s not to say that it would necessarily be wrong to say that Jesus was crucified **in** Jerusalem, because loosely that is correct. But for those who insist that verse 8 is **literally** describing Jerusalem, I have to ask why their rigid literalism seems to end just short of John 19:20 and Hebrews 12:12!

The third reason we know that the great city in verse 8 is not Jerusalem is that the description in verse 8 does not make sense for Jerusalem. How was Jerusalem like Sodom? How was Jerusalem like Egypt?

Those who say this book is all about Jerusalem rather than Rome almost always start their argument here in verse 8 — and in my experience they usually end their argument here as well. I might be tempted to say they would have a point if verse 8 were the only verse in the book — but that is not true. Why? Because **even if taken alone**, verse 8 is enough to know that the great city is not literally Jerusalem. Sodom and Egypt are descriptions of Rome, not of Jerusalem. Rome, like Sodom, was a center of iniquity and sexual sin. Rome, like Egypt, oppressed and enslaved God’s people.

The fourth reason we know that the great city in verse 8 is not Jerusalem is that when this book was written Jerusalem was not a great city. Instead, Jerusalem was a destroyed city. (In fact, Jerusalem had not been a great city for quite some time prior to its destruction in AD 70!) When we get to Revelation 17:10, we will see that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Vespasian, and the descriptions in Chapters 2-3 suggest it was late in the reign of Vespasian. That means that Jerusalem was destroyed about a decade before John received this vision on Patmos.

The fifth reason we know that the great city is not Jerusalem is that the word “Jerusalem” is not found in verse 8. Yes, Jerusalem was where (or, more precisely, *near* where) Jesus was crucified — but verse 8 does not name Jerusalem. Why? Why does verse 8 not just say, “which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem”? Why does the text use the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” instead of just naming Jerusalem as it does with Sodom and Egypt”? Why? Because the city in focus here is Rome, not Jerusalem — and (unlike with Sodom and Egypt) the text needs to explain how Rome is spiritually like old Jerusalem. The phrase at the end of the verse 8 does that. How? In at least two ways.

First, the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” is a reminder of the wicked hands that crucified Christ — those hands were not Jewish hands, they were Roman hands.

Acts 2:23 — Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

But second, for the first century Christians facing persecution, the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” is a reminder of something Jesus had said.

*Matthew 10:24-28 — The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. **And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the***

soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus knew all about Roman persecution! Jesus was crucified by the Romans, and the followers of Jesus should expect no better from Roman hands. “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.” The phrase at the end of verse 8 is a reminder of that fact.

One more point about the reference to Jerusalem in verse 8 — the appearance of Jerusalem in verse 8 may be yet another instance of the symbolic “two” that we have been seeing all throughout the text. How? **Because Jerusalem was two cities** — the old Jerusalem we see here in verse 8, and the new Jerusalem we will see in Revelation 21:2 — the “heavenly Jerusalem” of Hebrews 12:22.

I will admit that many commentaries disagree with me on this verse, but that has been true about almost every verse we have studied so far! And, I should add, not all commentators disagree with me here.

Lenski: Here Jerusalem is to be taken ideally, as the headquarters of all anti-Christianity. The actual city became such a symbol when it crucified Christ and never repented and was then razed to the ground.

Hailey: John sees this great city as a spiritual Sodom in its moral depravity, as an Egypt holding all people in bondage to lust and sin, and as a Jerusalem that rejected truth and put to death the author of truth.

There are many who identify the great city with Jerusalem, but in my opinion that identification just doesn't fit with the context of this book. If the villain in this book is Rome, then why would God include a discourse about the judgment of Jerusalem at the hands of that great villain? And why would those seven churches in Asia be all that concerned about the judgment of Jerusalem at the hands of Rome, the very power who was persecuting them? How would Rome's destruction of Jerusalem provide any comfort to Christians being persecuted by Rome? It might even have the opposite effect — “You're worried about Rome? You should be. Look at what it did to Jerusalem! You're worried that you've been forgotten by God? You should be. He may be punishing you at the hands of Rome just like he's punishing Jerusalem at the hands of Rome.”

Yes, when you focus on a verse here and a verse there, some of them could fit the destruction of Jerusalem. But when you step back and look at those verses

in their context, I think you will discover that from that perspective they fit Rome much better. Every description of the villain in this book fits Rome perfectly, and this description is no exception. The great city pictured here is Rome.

We have been focused for quite awhile just on verse 8. Let's move the camera back a bit and look at verse 8 in the context of the entire chapter.

God measured his people in verse 1 so that he would know who was and who was not on his side. In verse 2, we saw that those outside the church would, for a temporary period, be allowed to trample the church. But in verses 3-6, we see that God would protect and sustain the church so that the church could carry out its mission to proclaim the gospel. History tells us that the church continued to grow even under fierce persecution. And the persecution was fierce — verse 7 shows the two witnesses, representing the church, being killed by the beast from the pit. And that is where we are when verse 8 begins — the dead bodies of the two witnesses, the church, are lying dead in the street of the great city, Rome. Things look pretty bad for the church — but things are not what they seem! Verse 11 is coming! But first we need to look at verses 9-10.

Lesson 26

When we ended last week, we were discussing verse 8 of Chapter 11. As we discussed at length last week, the great city in verse 8 is, as we would have expected, the great city of Rome. Yes, Rome was a great city, but Rome was also a wicked city. And what we see next in verses 9-10 is Rome's reaction when she thinks that she has at last destroyed the church, which is what **seems** to have happened in verse 7. But, as we will see very soon, all is not what it seems!

Revelation 11:9-10

9 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. 10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Verses 9 and 10 paint a vivid portrait of the wicked world celebrating the death of the two witnesses, refusing to bury the bodies but rather rejoicing over them.

Evil men had once celebrated the death of Jesus, no doubt thinking that they had at last overcome him, and that they had finally enjoyed the last word — and yet look at what happened just a few days later — Jesus rose from the dead. The evil celebrants here in verses 9-10 are about to relive that history. Things are not what they seem! What looked like a great defeat in verse 7 turns out not to have been a defeat at all!

As we have seen before, “the people and kindreds and tongues and nations” in verse 9 are the Romans. How long does Rome gloat over the dead bodies of the two witnesses? **Three and a half days.**

What does that mean? We know what that means! We have seen that symbol before. It's a broken seven! It means the world's celebration is premature and temporary. It means their celebration will not last long. Why? Because this apparent defeat is not a defeat of the church at all, just as Jesus' apparent defeat on that cross was not a defeat of Jesus at all, but rather was the defeat of the world and of Satan, the prince of this world. **Things are not what they seem!**

Why three and a half **days** rather than three and a half **years**? The main reason is that the use of "days" stresses how temporary this apparent defeat will be and how quickly God will rescue and vindicate his people. But another reason may be to remind us of a similar time period — not a **symbolic** three and a half days, but a **literal** three days.

***Matthew 12:40** — For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Chapter 11 is a reminder to the church that a servant is not above his master. If Christ experienced death to gain the victory, then the church should also expect to follow that same path. That is the path of every Christian. When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.

***Luke 9:23-24** — If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

In verse 10, we see those who hate the church celebrating and rejoicing at the church's apparent demise. They treat the death of the church like a holiday — rejoicing, making merry, and even exchanging gifts! **Why?**

Why was the world so happy when it thought it was rid of the church? Verse 10 tells us: "because these two prophets **tormented** them that dwelt on the earth."

You mean the church had been tormenting people? **How? The church had been tormenting people by telling them the truth!**

***John 3:19-20** — And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For*

every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

The truth is a torment to those who live in darkness, and that certainly included the Romans. The Roman historian Tacitus called Christianity a disease!

The church will always be a torment to this world while the church is fulfilling its great commission to proclaim the truth. Yes, for those who hear and obey, the truth will set them free. But for many others, the truth will just be a continual torment — a continual reminder that, while they may be right with the world, they are not right with God. Remember the reaction to Stephen's proclamation of truth in Acts 7?

Acts 7:54 — When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

We should expect no better. The world is full of the same sort of people Isaiah described:

Isaiah 5:20-21 — Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

And such people do not want to be told that everything they believe is wrong. They do not want to hear that what they think is good is in fact evil, and that what they think is light is in fact darkness. **In short, they do not want to be told that all is not what it seems!** That message is a torment to them, and they will strike out against those who cause that torment.

Are we a torment to those living in sin today? Do we set before them an example of righteous living that is a torment to them?

Causing torment for someone is certainly not our goal — we would prefer that all repent. **But torment to some is the inevitable result of preaching the truth.** There will always be some who do not repent, and they are very likely to strike back at us. Remember that Stephen caused people to gnash their teeth on him! When was the last time we did that?

Remember — the church is not only the **light** of the world, the church is also the **salt** of the world — and salt can cause torment when it meets an open

wound. People living in sin have an open wound, unless they have become so hardened that they have no recognition at all of their condition.

We need to pause for a moment and ask a sobering question: **If the events of verse 7 happened today, would the world even know we were gone?** Remember Jesus' message to the church at Sardis.

***Revelation 3:1** — I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

Would the world have cared one way or the other if the church at Sardis had ceased to exist? We don't ever want to be in that condition. Our goal should be to live in such a way that the world's reaction to our apparent demise would be the same reaction we see in verse 10! **I want the wicked to throw a party when I take my exit!**

The situation looks bleak in verse 10 — but that's all about to change. Those who are celebrating and exchanging gifts in verse 10 will be in great fear in verse 11! Why? **Because things are not what they seem!**

Revelation 11:11-14

11 And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. 12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. 13 And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

The situation looked very bad for the church back in verse 7. In that verse, the beast from the bottomless pit had killed the two witnesses, who depicted the royal priesthood, which is the church. In verse 8, their dead bodies had lain in the street of the great city, which is Rome. In verse 9-10, the people of the earth had rejoiced over the dead bodies of the two witnesses.

But then we get to verse 11. And you know what? **For the people of God there is always a verse 11!** No matter how bleak the situation may seem, for the faithful people of God there is always a verse 11!

It looked like the church was finished. It looked like God's plan had gone off the rails just after it got started. It looked like Satan had won, and Rome, Satan's powerful tool, had triumphed. It looked like the eternal kingdom had lasted only a few decades. But you know what? **Things are not what they seem!**

What we see in verse 11 is that after three and a half days God raises the church from the dead. The two witnesses start breathing again, and they get back on their feet. **Where is the world's celebration now?** Just one verse ago, the world was making merry and exchanging gifts! What are they doing now? Verse 11 tells us — they are in great fear. My how the situation has changed!

And that's not all that has changed. Notice how the verb tenses have changed in verse 11. In verses 9-10, we read, "And they ... **shall** see their dead bodies ... and **shall** not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth **shall** rejoice over them." But in verse 11, we read, "They **stood** upon their feet." So certain is this course of events that John speaks of near future events as though they were past events.

The persecution of the church by Rome was temporary — we saw that depicted earlier by a symbolic three and a half years (a broken seven). The apparent defeat of the church is even more temporary — it is depicted here, not by three and half **years**, but by three and a half **days**.

In verse 12 and in the sight of their enemies, the two witnesses ascend into heaven at the command of a great voice from heaven. Verse 12 shows us the complete vindication of the church.

Few people saw Christ ascend into heaven, but this figurative ascension of the church occurs in full view of God's enemies. All the world now knows that the church is under God's protection.

And God is moving them to safety — which must have caused the greatest fear of all. **Just like in an old Western movie, God is looking at Rome and**

telling the church to step out of the way! Why did the church need to be moved to safety? What was about to happen? Rome was about to find out!

We should pause for a moment and talk about the **vindication** of the church. We see that happening here **figuratively** with regard to the church and Rome, but one day that will happen **literally**. One day those on God's side will **literally** ascend into the heavens to meet Christ in the air, while those opposed to God will remain on earth to see it **literally** destroyed.

That last great day will be many things — but one thing it will be is a **great day of vindication**. We live in a day in which faithful Christians are portrayed as the enemy of all that is good and loving.

- We oppose abortion, and so we are told we hate women.
- We oppose gay “marriage,” and so we are told we are unloving.
- We oppose fornication, and so we are told we are judgmental and hypocritical.
- We oppose evolution, and so we are told we are anti-intellectual and anti-science.

The world is full of people who say that darkness is light and who say that good is evil. **Will they remain forever in that condition? Will they never recognize their error?** No. One day, unless they repent and obey the gospel, they will watch as the church leaves this planet and leaves them behind to face what is coming next. On that day, when they bend their knee to Christ, they will at last understand that that which they called evil was in fact good and that which they called darkness was in fact light. **On that day the church will be vindicated!**

Now back to our text, and back to the first century: What happens in verse 13? At the same **hour** (again, we see our time frame; things are happening quickly), there is a great earthquake. Earthquakes are a common figure for judgment in the Bible, and this earthquake is no exception. A judgment is coming for those who rejoiced at the apparent defeat of the church.

Verse 13 tells us that a tenth of the city falls and seven thousand men are killed by the earthquake. As we have seen with the prior judgments in this book, only a fraction is affected. Even this judgment is not yet final. More is still on the way.

Why a tenth and why seven thousand? The destruction of a tenth is an image of decimation (which literally means to take one in ten). The use of seven thou-

sand likely foreshadows the perfect and complete judgment that is coming and that will not allow for repentance.

What about those who are not killed? Verse 13 tells us they were terrified and gave glory to God. Does this mean that finally someone was led to repentance? Did God's message finally get through to them? Can the judgment of Rome be called off as the judgment of Nineveh was called off in the days of Jonah? No.

This apparent repentance is not a real repentance. Things are not what they seem. How do we know that? Perhaps the best way is that we can just keep reading — the judgment of Rome is not called off! We are about to read all about it! Yes, we know that a few repented, but the great majority of Romans did not.

So what are we seeing in verse 13? **What we see here is not repentance, but rather is rationality!** Verse 13 doesn't tell us that they are Christians — rather what verse 13 tells us is that they are not fools! In verse 13, we see people who fear God and who give glory to God out of fear, and they were right to fear God! All verse 13 tells us that these people had **finally awakened**, not that they had **finally repented**.

What did Nebuchadnezzar say after he saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of that fiery furnace unhurt?

Daniel 3:29 — Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

What was Nebuchadnezzar's motivation in making that decree? Was it a love of God, or was it shock and awe at what he had just seen? I think it was the latter, and we see the same motivation and the same response here in verse 13. Those who remain alive now recognize that God is going to win, and they want to be on the winning side.

Those left alive in verse 13 are not Christians. How do we know that for sure? For the simple reason that they remain on this earth. The church figuratively ascended into heaven in verse 12; the survivors in verse 13 did not. In this book, the faithful are pictured as being in heaven with God, while the wicked are repeatedly referred to as those who dwell upon the earth.

Those called the enemies of God in verse 12 remain the enemies of God in verse 13 — the difference is that now that are *astonished* enemies who are probably wondering for the first time whether they chose the winning side! Their fate remains unchanged. We are not told that they repented in any way from their murders, thefts, sorceries, and idolatries. Just a few verses earlier they were exchanging gifts to celebrate the apparent demise of the Lord's church!

There are many atheists in **this** world — but you know what? **There are no atheists in the next world.** The Psalmist tells us that it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1). There are many such fools in this world — **but there are no such fools in the next world.** No atheist or agnostic will remain so forever! Someday all atheists will believe, and someday all agnostics will care. Someday all fools will be wise when it comes to whether there is a God. Sadly, for most, that realization will come too late.

Nikita Khrushchev once gave a speech in which he said that the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin “flew into space, but didn't see any God there.” If Yuri had really wanted to see God from his tiny space capsule out in space, all he needed to do was open the door! Nikita and Yuri are believers today, as is the recently departed Stephen Hawking. I don't know if there are any atheists in foxholes, but I do know there are no atheists in hell (only **former** atheists). We are seeing that same sort of realization here in verse 13.

Let's take a moment to review where we are: The message John is told to relay is that the church will undergo severe hardship and may at times appear to be defeated. But John's message also tells us that God is on the church's side and all will be well in the end. The church's final victory is assured.

So far, John has relayed this message in two ways: First, the city of God will be trampled under foot for three and a half years, but the church will be sustained and protected. Second, two witnesses will prophecy for three and a half years, and then be killed by the beast, but that apparent defeat is only temporary. After three and a half days they come back to life and ascend to heaven in front of all their enemies.

In Chapters 12 and 13 this message will be told again in two different ways: First, in Chapter 12, a woman will be forced to flee into the wilderness for three and a half years, yet she will find there a place of nourishment and protection. Second, in Chapter 13, a beast will overcome God's people, and yet his authority will last for only three and a half years.

As we study this book, I know that sometimes it seems I repeat myself a lot. The reason for that is that God is repeating himself a lot! The central message of this book is being told again and again through many different images and symbols.

What is that central message? God loves the church! Things may appear bleak, but the church will be victorious! God's enemies will not win, but rather they will be judged and punished! Yes, the church will follow Christ through suffering and death, but that pathway of faithfulness unto death is the pathway to a crown of righteousness! No kingdom of this world is more beautiful or more powerful than the eternal kingdom of God, and God's kingdom will sweep away all of the kingdoms of this earth, starting with Rome!

What happens next? Verse 14 tells us: "the third woe cometh quickly!" That third woe of Revelation 8:13 is the seventh trumpet. And the inspired text tells us it is coming **quickly**. The time frame that we saw in the very first verse of this book has not changed and will not change — we will see it repeated again at the end of the book.

Revelation 11:15

15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Finally in verse 15 the seventh trumpet sounds. The first four trumpets sounded in Chapter 8. At the end of Chapter 8, the lone eagle announced the final three trumpets, and the first of those final three, trumpets 5 and 6, sounded in Chapter 9. From the beginning of Chapter 10 through verse 14 of Chapter 11 we have been in an interlude that was intended to provide comfort and assurance to the suffering saints. Now in verse 15 that interlude is over, and the seventh trumpet has just sounded.

From Revelation 10, we know that it was at this time that the mystery of God was finished.

Revelation 10:7 — *But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*

When did that happen? We discussed that question at length in our lesson on Chapter 10. What we are looking at here with the sounding of the seventh trumpet is the end of Rome as far as God was concerned. Yes, Rome continued on beyond this point, but God was finished with Rome. Rome had served a role in God's plan, but now that role was over. With the death of Domitian, there were no more Old Testament prophecies left to be fulfilled by Rome, and so the time had come for Rome to be judged and sentenced. That view of verse 15 fits perfectly with verse 14 — “behold, the third woe cometh **quickly!**”

A great silence followed the opening of the seventh **seal** in Chapter 8. Not so with the seventh **trumpet**. The sounding of the seventh trumpet is followed by great (or loud) voices in heaven.

Most commentators think that the seventh **seal** contained (or unleashed or revealed) both the seven trumpets and the seven bowls that followed, and that the seventh **trumpet** contained the seven bowls of wrath that will soon follow in the text. **I agree with that view because of Revelation 10:7.** That verse tells us that the seventh trumpet would mark the end of Rome, and that is what we will see with the seven bowls of wrath. So it seems to me from Revelation 10:7 that this seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 must contain the seven bowls of wrath.

That view of the seventh trumpet is also supported by what the great voices say in verse 15: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” That cry is a cry of victory! Rome has been swept away by the eternal kingdom of God just as Daniel had prophesied in Daniel 2:44!

We see in verse 15 something we have seen before in this book — a statement pointing to a public manifestation of something that was already true but that was not yet apparent to everyone. Now it is apparent to everyone. Verse 15 does not mark the beginning of Christ's kingdom or the beginning of Christ's authority or reign over anyone. Instead, verse 15 shows us a public reaffirmation of that kingdom and of that authority and reign through the church's victory over a great enemy of God's people.

Some premillennialists will tell you that Jesus is not reigning as king today, but that is not what the Bible says.

Revelation 1:5 — *And from Jesus Christ, who is [NOT WILL BE] the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.*

Ephesians 1:20-22 — *Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him [NOT WILL SIT HIM] at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put [NOT WILL PUT] all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church*

1 Peter 3:22 — *Who is gone into heaven, and is [NOT WILL BE] on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made [NOT WILL BE MADE] subject unto him.*

1 Timothy 6:14-15 — *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is [NOT WILL BE] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*

1 Corinthians 15:25 — *For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

What does that verse from 1 Corinthians tell us? It tells us that Jesus is **presently** reigning. Why? Because death remains an enemy. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and 1 Corinthians 15:25 tells us that Christ will reign as King until that last enemy is destroyed. The premillennialist tells us that Christ won't begin to reign until **after** death is destroyed — the Bible tells us that the opposite is true.

Oh, but some will say, the world is in such a mess! How could Jesus be reigning as King when the world is in such a mess? Here's a question for them: Was the world in a mess at the time of the flood? Yes, and God was reigning then as king.

*Psalm 29:10 — The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea,
the Lord sitteth King for ever.*

What that verse tells us is that God was *reigning* while the sky was *raining*! The world has been in a mess since the fall, but that is not God's doing, that is sin's doing. God is reigning as King to get the world out of that mess, and Christ reigns as King to redeem the faithful from that mess.

What does verse 15 mean when it says that “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord.” In the Greek text, the word “kingdoms” appears only once — literally, the text reads “the kingdoms of the world did become of our Lord and of His Christ,” meaning the kingdoms of the world became those of God.

As we have discussed, Rome was composed of many different kingdoms. What verse 15 tells us is that God took them back. Why? Because they were his all along. In verse 15, Rome is made to realize something that King Nebuchadnezzar was made to realize centuries earlier.

*Daniel 4:32 — And they shall drive thee from men,
and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field:
they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven
times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the
most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and gi-
veth it to whomsoever he will.*

But how can the kingdoms of this world already belong to God if verse 15 says that they *are become* the kingdoms of God? This verse is the clearest example yet of how this book uses verb tenses to make us look in a **new way** at something that has been true all along.

Yes, Rome already belonged to God — but Rome was wicked, and so God judged Rome and took back the kingdom that had been entrusted to Rome. That Roman kingdom had played an important role in God's plan, but as we have already discussed — that role was now over, and so God is taking that kingdom back. It was God's all along, but we are seeing a new manifestation of that ownership, which is why the verse uses the phrase “are become” to describe it.

We see the same thing at the end of the verse — Jesus “shall reign” for ever and ever. The reign of Christ did not begin here in verse 15. Jesus has been reigning all throughout these events.

Revelation 1:5-6 — *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

Jesus has been reigning all along, and the church has been reigning with him. Verse 15 is not the beginning of that reign. Instead, verse 15 is a public reaffirmation of that reign. If anyone doubted the truth of Revelation 1:5-6, they should doubt no longer now that King Jesus has overcome the mighty Roman empire!

And one more point: Although the church is the promised eternal kingdom of Christ, Christ does not reign *just* over the church. Christ reigns as king over the entire universe. In that sense, the entire universe is Christ's kingdom. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, which means that Jesus is King and Lord of everyone and everything. All are subject to the rule of Christ.

Revelation 11:16-19

16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. 18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. 19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven,

and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The last time we saw the twenty-four elders was back in Chapter 7. We first saw them in Chapter 4. In that chapter we saw that the twenty-four elders represented something that is royal, something that is pure, something that is priestly, and something that includes all of God's people, with no one left out. With those clues, there could be no doubt as to their identity — the twenty-four elders represent the church! They are the royal priesthood.

What we see in verse 16 is the church worshipping God in response to all that God has just done for the church with regard to Rome. We haven't seen all of the details yet, but it all happened when the seventh trumpet sounded. And the church is worshipping and thanking God, which is just what we would expect the church to be doing.

The reign of God in verse 17 is the reign of God over Rome. Rome thought that no one reigned over it, but Rome was very badly mistaken. Rome's attitude was that of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:30 — "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" And we remember what happened to him. Much worse had just happened to Rome. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Rome had been reminded of the truth of Daniel 4:32 — "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

Verse 18 tells us "the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come." Rome did not like having God rule over it. Just the suggestion of that was enough to make Rome angry, but here we are seeing much more than just a suggestion. In fact, verse 18 tell us that God's wrath is come. We are about to see the bowls of God's wrath poured out on top of Rome. The time for repentance is over; the time for judgment is here. Rome can shake its fist all day at God, but that will not change one thing about the judgment that is coming against them.

This part of verse 18 is modeled after the beautiful second Psalm.

Psalm 2:1-4 — Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,

against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

This scene also reminds me of Isaiah 52.

Isaiah 52:15 — *The kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.*

God is in charge of the nations of this world, and God takes them out when he sees fit. Remember Psalm 110.

Psalm 110:5-6 — *The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.*

The world today is filled with raging nations. The world today is filled with people who imagine a vain thing. We can take comfort today in the same fact that provided comfort to the Psalmist: God reigns! And God is laughing at those raging nations and those vain imaginations!

Lesson 27

Last week when we ended we were looking at the first half of verse 18. Let's begin this week by looking at the second half of that verse.

Revelation 11:18b — *And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great.*

Okay, time frame or no time frame, verse 18 must be the end of the world, right? Well, no. It doesn't have to be. And assuming we don't throw our time frame out the window, we shouldn't be too quick to leap to the end of the world even when we reach a verse such as verse 18. But how can we make sense of verse 18 and remain consistent with the time frame of 1:1, 1:3, 22:6, and 22:10? Several ways.

First, we need to remember how other judgments are described in the Bible — both Old Testament judgments as well as the New Testament judgment of Jerusalem in Matthew 24. When we recall those descriptions, I think we will discover that the language used here is similar to that other language that we know was not describing the end of the world. If the language here is being used as it was used for those other judgments, then what we see here is a vivid image of Rome's judgment — not a description of the judgment at the end of all time.

After all, is verse 18 speaking of Rome really that different from Matthew 24:30 speaking of Jerusalem?

Matthew 24:30 — *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

We know with certainty because of Matthew 24:34 that Matthew 24:30 occurred in the first century — why not verse 18 here in Revelation 11, also? Yes, one day there will be a **literal** judgment of all men on that last great day — but God **figuratively** comes in judgment when he judges an enemy of his people. We know that is what we see in Matthew 24:30 as to the judgment of Jerusalem.

I think we are seeing the same thing here, but as to the judgment of Rome rather than of Jerusalem.

A **second** point about this judgment in verse 18 is that Hebrews 9:27 tells us that we each have an appointment with death. That's true today, and it was also true in the first century. Christians died, and Romans died. Those Christians who remained faithful unto death received a crown of glory, while those Romans who rejected God received wrath and indignation. **When did they receive those things?** Did they receive it the first century or is that all still yet to come on the last great day?

In one sense, it is all yet still to come. On that last day, Christ will judge the world and men will hear their sentence. Some will hear "well done," while others will hear "I never knew you." But let me ask you this — for anyone who will have already died before Jesus' return (such as everyone who lived in the first century), will the sentence they hear on the last great day come as a surprise? No. They will have known what that sentence will be ever since the moment of their death.

Whether we believe that the dead in Christ today are with Abraham (as was the case at least *prior* to the cross) or that the dead in Christ today are with Christ (as I believe, and as I believe Paul believed), one thing we can all agree on is this — those who are dead already know their eternal fate. So, at least in that sense, the judgment of the Romans happened when they died.

As soon as a Roman persecutor died, including the Roman emperors themselves, that person knew that he or she had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. And that was a **first** century realization, wasn't it? Perhaps that is what verse 18 has in mind when it refers to "***the time of the dead.***"

Rome was judged in the first century, and perhaps much of that judgment involved the individual judgments by God of individual Romans that occurred at the moments of their individual deaths. We have talked a lot about the judgment of the **nation** of Rome — but in the end all judgments are personal, individual judgments. Nations are not lost or saved; people are lost or saved.

A **third** point is to recall something we discussed in our introduction and something we have already seen in our study of the text: **sometimes a literal event is used as a figure for some other event.** We have seen this with a literal **past** event — the literal plagues of Egypt have been used as figures for the judgment that is coming on Rome. We may be seeing the same thing here, but with a literal **future** event.

God may be using the **literal** future judgment of the world as a **figure** for the first century judgment of Rome. If so, then these descriptions here (and also later descriptions, such as in Chapter 20) may tell us something about that yet future event (the judgment of the world) as well as tell us something about the past event that it is depicting (the judgment of Rome).

Those are just three points to think about. We will have much more to say on this topic as we proceed into the second half of the book.

Whenever verse 18 happens, **the message is clear** — Christ's enemies will be judged and destroyed; Christ's faithful servants will be rewarded.

Notice that the **prophets** are among those rewarded in verse 18. They had looked forward to and foretold the coming King and his eternal kingdom, and now their reward is to see those prophecies fulfilled. Their reward is to witness the unfolding of the mystery. Their reward is to witness the vindication of God's people. Can't we just picture Daniel and Zechariah watching these events unfold?

What about the phrase at the end of verse 18 — “and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth”? What does that mean? Thayer tells us that “to destroy does not mean to extinguish or bring to extinction, but to change for the worse, to corrupt,” as moths corrupt garments in Luke 12:33 or as evil dispositions corrupt minds in 1 Timothy 6:5.

Rome had corrupted the earth, but the tables were about to be turned on Rome. God's people would put on incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:54), but not so with Rome. God's people have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4), but not so with Rome. Rome was about to reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). Why? Because of Galatians 6:7 — “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Finally, why are we shown the ark of the covenant in verse 19?

***Revelation 11:19** — And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament.*

The ark of the covenant was located in the Holy of Holies, inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen and into which the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. But that temple was now destroyed, and the ark of the covenant had been missing since at least the Babylonian captivity.

Why do we see the ark here? The ark of the covenant provides reassurance to God's people that God remembers his promises. The ark is pictured as always being in the presence of God to remind him of those promises. Whatever the terrors to come, God will not forget his promises.

In a similar way, the thunder, the lightning, the earthquakes, and the hail in verse 19 are Old Testament symbols of judgment that are intended to remind us that God keeps his promises. God promised to judge and punish the church's enemies — and he will. God promised to vindicate the church — and he will. God keeps his promises.

In fact, verse 19 is a confirmation that God has (past tense) kept his promises because verse 19 comes after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which marked the judgment of Rome. The church has triumphed! Rome has been defeated!

Chapter 12

Revelation 12:1-2

1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: 2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Chapter 12 begins with a great wonder or great sign in heaven. In the gospel accounts, John often used this Greek word translated “sign” where Matthew, Mark, and Luke used the Greek word translated “miracle.” This same Greek word for “sign” used by John in his gospel account occurs seven times in the book of Revelation — three times in reference to God and four times in reference to the deceptions of Satan. This sign in verse 1, of course, is a sign from God, and the first thing we see in this great sign is “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Who is this woman? As we always do with such questions, let's start by looking at the clues in the text.

First, she is clothed with the sun. Second, the moon is under her feet. Third, she is wearing a crown. And fourth, there are twelve stars on the crown.

Let's start with the last of those clues — the twelve stars. We have seen the symbol twelve before in this book, and we know what that symbol means. Twelve is the symbol for the people of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New — twelve sons of Jacob, twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve apostles. So we should expect this woman in verse 1 to depict, in some way and at some time, the faithful people of God.

What else do we see? We see the sun, the moon, and the stars. Where else in the Bible do we see those same three symbols used closely together with regard to the people of God? One place is Jeremiah 31. We are all familiar with verse 31 of that chapter in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31 — Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.

But after the description of the new covenant in verses 31-34, we then get to verses 35-36 of Jeremiah 31, where God makes it very clear that the new covenant did not mean that God was going to turn his back on his faithful people under the old covenant. Instead, as we know, the gospel of the new covenant is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; **to the Jew first**, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Listen as Jeremiah describes this in verses 35-36 of Jeremiah 31.

*Jeremiah 31:35-36 — Thus saith the Lord, which giveth **the sun** for a light by day, and the ordinances of **the moon** and of **the stars** for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.*

The sun. The moon. The stars. God pointed to those heavenly ordinances in Jeremiah 31 as evidence that he would not forget his people under the old covenant when he established the new covenant. And here in Revelation 12, we see the people of God represented by those same three heavenly ordinances: the sun, the moon, and the stars.

We have one textual clue remaining in verse 1 — the crown. That would make the woman, not a king, but a queen. In verse 2, we see this woman delivering a child, which we will see in verse 5 is a son. What do you call the son of a queen? You call him a king! This woman is giving birth to royalty.

So who is this woman in verse 1? Is she the church? **Yes and no.**

Yes, in the sense that the faithful people of God under both the old covenant and the new covenant are now a part of God's eternal kingdom, the church, that was established in Acts 2. In fact, the Old Testament prophets make up part of the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

So why yes and no? I say yes and no because, although those under the old covenant **became** part of the church after its establishment, verse 1 is looking back to a time prior to the establishment of the church. Verse 1 is describing the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Perhaps that is why we see twelve used here rather than twenty-four or 144,000. I think we are looking here at the faithful people of God prior to the new covenant.

And that makes sense with the other clues as well. Jeremiah 31:35-36 (the sun, the moon, and the stars) was addressed to God's faithful people under the old covenant who were wondering about their position under the new covenant. The answer to that concern in Jeremiah is the same as Paul's answer to the same concern in Romans 9.

***Romans 9:4-5** — Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.*

And notice what Paul adds in verse 5 — “of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” I think Revelation 12 is making that same point. And I think the child in Romans 9:5 is the same child we see in Revelation 12:2 — the child Jesus who came from the faithful people of God under the old covenant. And he came to bring salvation under the new covenant, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

We see Messianic promises in the Old Testament that are very similar to what we see here in Revelation 12:1-2.

***Isaiah 66:7** — Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.*

Micah 4:10 — *Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*

And what do we see in the very next chapter of Micah?

Micah 5:2 — *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

So what then is the point of Revelation 12:1-2? The point is that Jesus did not appear on this earth fully grown. Jesus was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). This woman in Revelation 12 is not Mary, but this woman is the faithful people of God under the old covenant, of whom Mary was numbered.

Why did God bring his faithful people back to Jerusalem out of Babylonian captivity as we studied earlier from the book of Ezra? Because God's faithful people had to be living in Jerusalem in the first century for the promised blessings of Christ to come to pass. Absent the faithfulness of God's people from the time of Ezra to the time of Christ, God's plan could not have proceeded according to prophecy. I think it is those faithful people who we are seeing here in the opening verses of Revelation 12.

So the woman in verse 1 represents the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Will that be the case for the entirety of the chapter? Perhaps not. We need to be on the lookout for a possible transition in this description from the old covenant to the new covenant. If that happens, then we would expect to see this woman represent God's faithful people under the new covenant rather than under the old. But however you look at her and whenever you look at her, she represents God's faithful people.

So who then is the child in verse 2? No one who has read this far in the Bible could have any doubt as to the identity of this child! This child is Jesus, who descended from God's people under the old covenant. We will witness the birth of this child in verse 5.

This child is the royal child of Micah 5:2, that we read just a moment ago — "out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose go-

ings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” That explains the crown on this woman’s head! “Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be **ruler** in Israel.”

Yes, Jesus came from the womb of Mary, but Jesus more broadly came from the womb of those faithful Jews who were awaiting the promised Messiah — people like Simeon, who “was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).

Some of the most beautiful and dramatic images found anywhere in the Bible are found right here in Chapter 12. The destiny of this woman depends upon her child of promise. And what could be more helpless than a little new born child? But surely no one would seek to harm a baby, right? Wrong! On to verse 3.

Revelation 12:3-4

3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

Verse 3 reminds me of a quote by one of my very favorite authors, J. R. R. Tolkien. He once wrote that “it does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.” That’s good advice for us here in Revelation 12 because in verses 3-4 we meet a powerful, bloodthirsty dragon who appears before the woman waiting to devour her newborn child.

Where have we seen this same cast assembled before? For that we must turn from the last book of the Bible all the way back to the first.

Genesis 3:15 — And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

This battle has been going on for a long time — and guess what! It's head bruising time! This child has been in the womb of God's faithful people since the opening chapters of the Bible, and now this child has arrived. And Satan knows what that means! Satan knows all about Genesis 3:15 — Satan was there to hear it spoken, and Satan knows the Bible better than we do! Satan is a Bible scholar!

So who is this great red dragon? This great dragon in verse 3 depicts Satan, but more precisely in this context the dragon depicts Satan using Rome as a powerful weapon against the church. It would have been difficult to think of a more potent weapon than the mighty Roman empire and its godless emperors. And who was wielding that weapon? A murderer! John 8:44 tells us that Satan was "a murderer from the beginning." This murderer is waiting in verse 4 to murder a new born child.

How do we know for sure that Rome is involved here? We know that from the dragon's description in verse 3 — "seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads." Why seven? Why ten? Why horns? Stay tuned. We will see these same symbols again in Chapter 13, and they will be explained to us by an angel in Chapter 17. When we get there we will see that they very precisely represent Rome. In fact, we looked at them earlier in our study of Daniel, which we will review when we get to Revelation 13 and 17.

But even here in these verses we have enough clues to get a glimpse of what we will discover in those later chapters. The word "crowns" in verse 3 occurs three times in Revelation, but nowhere else in the New Testament. It is different from the crown of victory (*stephanos*) that we have discussed before. These crowns in verse 3 denote royal power or royal rule. Which royal rule is in view here? Well, who was reigning at this time on earth? What royalty was Satan using to attack the church? Rome! Satan is arrayed with the emperors of Rome! It was through their reign that Satan sought to destroy the church of Christ.

What are the stars of heaven in verse 4 that are cast down by the dragon? Sadly, I think they represent the people of God. Why sadly? Because the dragon causes some of them to fall to the earth. The word translated "cast" in verse 4 means to drag away or to pull away.

Are they people in the church who fell away? The timing here suggests not. Instead, I think these were faithful people under the old covenant who fell away. People who did not continue to faithfully await their coming Messiah. Remember, here in verse 4 the woman has not yet given birth to her son.

But while this description is focused on those who fell away under the old covenant, it has a lesson for those who are tempted to fall away under the new covenant. Didn't we read about such fallen stars in Revelation 2-3? It was through Roman persecution and emperor worship that Satan caused some Christians to compromise with the world and be lost. These stars did not fall when they died physically; these stars fell when they turned away from Jesus and died spiritually.

Luke 9:24 — *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

Matthew 13:20-21 — *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

Some did not endure faithfully to the end.

But although Satan caused some to fall away, he did not cause all to fall away. Just as a third was used earlier in this book to denote a partial judgment, a third is used here to describe Satan's partial success in causing some of God's people to fall away. And how important that was! If all of God's people had fallen away, then how could Jesus have come into the world? Where would God have found Mary and Joseph and John the Baptizer and the Apostles? God was depending on his faithful people under the old covenant to prepare the way for his son to bless the entire world under the new covenant.

There is an important lesson here for us in verse 4 — this dragon should not be underestimated! Yes, Satan has been defeated. Yes, Satan is acting out the role in this book that God has given him. But, Satan is real, and Satan is dangerous. Otherwise why do we have all the warnings in the Bible about Satan? Satan causes people to fall away from God, and when that happens it is as if a star has fallen from heaven — whether it be because of Roman persecution or just because someone has other things he or she would rather be doing on Sunday morning.

All throughout this book, God is calling upon us to see things as he sees them. Many people say that the symbols in Revelation are describing things that we cannot see, but I think that is wrong. I think the symbols in Revelation are de-

scribing things that we can see, but that were aren't seeing correctly. God wants us to see things correctly, and the way to see something correctly is to see that thing as God sees it.

I fear that we do not always see a Christian's fall from grace in the same cataclysmic terms in which God views that departure. It looks like such a non-event from our perspective — the person is here, and then the person is sometimes here, and then the person is never here. We may ask about the person, we may even call him, but then very often that is the end of it. They drift away from the church, and we drift away from them. Drifting doesn't seem very dramatic, does it?

But if that is the way we see things, then we aren't seeing things correctly. Perhaps we need to picture that person as a shining star cast back down to earth by the tail of a great red dragon. **That's how God sees it!**

Luke 15:10 — Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

“Joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Is that how we see things when someone comes forward to repent of wrongdoing? If not, we aren't seeing things correctly! The book of Revelation is many things — but perhaps more than anything else the book of Revelation is an eye test!

But was Rome really a great red dragon waiting to devour the church? The handout this week (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) shows two coins minted during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (and also a third coin minted about 20 years later during the reign of Hadrian). On one coin,



Domitian is referred to as **Divi Filius** — which means son of the divine, or son of god. On the other coin, Domitian's own infant son (who died very young) is referred to as “The Divine Caesar, Son of the Emperor Domitian.” That child of Domitian is shown sitting on the globe and stretching his hands out toward seven stars. Note also the seven stars shown on the coin from Hadrian's reign, about twenty years after Domitian. A divine child who holds seven stars in his hand — where have we seen that before? Revelation 1:16, speaking of Christ, says, “and he had in his right hand seven stars.”

These similarities are unmistakable. Domitian must have seen Christianity as a great threat to his own claims of divinity for himself and for his own infant

son. Remember what Paul say about Domitian in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 — “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” Read that description and look at those two coins! And you might want to show those two coins to anyone who doubts that Rome is the villain in this book. Who can look at those coins and doubt that Rome and the church were on a collision course? And who can then read Daniel 2:44 and doubt the outcome of that conflict? Domitian thought that his own child was a royal divine child holding seven stars in his hand — but Domitian was very badly mistaken.

Here in Chapter 12, a great red dragon waits to swallow up the son of God. We know very little about Domitian’s son except that he died in infancy. It certainly makes you wonder who swallowed up whom! Perhaps Domitian experienced the last of those Egyptian plagues **literally**. We will have much more to say about Domitian as our study continues.

In verse 4 this great red dragon stands before the woman, waiting to devour her child as soon as the child is born. To any outside observer it must have looked like this child had absolutely no chance. How could anyone, much less a newborn baby, prevail against a great red dragon? The great red dragon likely had the same view — how could it be possibly defeated by a newborn baby? The dragon will just swallow it up, and that will be the end of the matter. Right? **Wrong! Things are not what they seem!**

Satan had once attempted to swallow up this child literally through Herod the Great, which was really through Rome even then since it was by Rome’s authority that Herod ruled. Satan has crucified this child, again using Roman hands. Now Satan was once again trying to do the same thing to the body of Christ, his church, and once again through Rome. Satan knew that he would never have a better opportunity than this — attack the church in its infancy with the mighty Roman empire, the greatest weapon he had ever had. Satan had been waiting to devour this child since Genesis 3, and now was his chance!

This devouring of God’s people reminds us again of Old Testament imagery. In Jeremiah 51:34 Babylon swallowed God’s people “like a monster.” Egypt, which also tried to devour a servant of God as a child (Moses) and which also persecuted God’s people, is called a great dragon in Ezekiel 29:3. At the time of this book, Satan’s weapon had changed from Babylon and Egypt to Rome, but the one wielding that weapon is the same serpent we met all the way back in Genesis 3.

Revelation is often viewed as a book that looks forward — but it might equally be described as a book that looks backward as it repeatedly describes Rome in terms of past events.

Lesson 28

Last week we began Chapter 12, and in verse 1 we saw a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head. In verse 2, we saw that she was with child, and in verses 3-4, a great red dragon appeared and stood before the woman waiting to devour her child as soon as he was born.

The woman depicts the faithful people of God under the old covenant, from whom the Messiah (the child) came in the flesh. The dragon is Satan, or more particularly, Satan using the Roman Empire as a weapon against the church.

In verse 5, the child will be born. Who will win? Does a newborn baby stand any chance at all against a great red dragon? Most would say no — but things are not what they seem!

Revelation 12:5-6

5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.
6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

We find in these verses conclusive evidence that this child is Jesus. Verse 5 says that this child was to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Recall Psalm 2.

Psalm 2:9 — Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Also, recall Revelation 2.

Revelation 2:26-27 — And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give

power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

Later in Revelation 19, we will read:

Revelation 19:15 — *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

We already knew that this child is Jesus, but now in verse 5 we really know it! There is no doubt at all in verse 5.

Before the dragon can devour him, the child is caught up to God and to his throne. Here we see the ascension of Christ back to his father's throne in heaven as recorded in Acts 1:9. The ascension in Act 1 was prophesied in Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:13-14 — *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*

That ascension is what we are seeing here in verse 5. Notice in Daniel 7 that the Son of man came to the Ancient of days, and "there was given him" a kingdom. That sequence of events in Daniel 7:13-14 is the same sequence of events we see in Acts 1-2: the ascension in Acts 1 followed by the establishment of the eternal kingdom in Acts 2.

On this earth, Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. On this earth, Jesus was tempted by Satan, yet without sin. On this earth, Jesus was put to death by wicked Roman hands. But Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus defeated Satan, and Jesus ascended back to heaven, forever out of Satan's grasp. Do you think that's a message the first century church needed to hear? I do.

Satan failed to defeat Jesus when Jesus was the most vulnerable, while he was made in the likeness of men and found in fashion as a man (Philippians 2:7-

8). Satan certainly won't fair any better after Jesus has ascended to rule the universe from the right hand of God the father in heaven!

Before we read any further, we know what God's message to the church is going to be! Just as these Christians had followed the example of Christ in their suffering, they would also follow the example of Christ in ascending to heaven. They, too, would escape the clutches of this great red dragon.

One last point about verse 5 — when we see the ascension of Jesus in verse 5, we know that we have now moved from the old covenant to the new covenant. That transition occurred at the cross, and the cross occurred prior to the ascension. What that tells us is that the woman who depicted God's faithful people under the old covenant in verse 1 now depicts God's faithful people under the new covenant. This woman now depicts the church!

What happens next? Verse 6 tells us that the woman flees into the wilderness to a place prepared by God. We are reminded of Moses fleeing from Pharaoh into the wilderness. We are reminded of the Israelites fleeing from Egypt into the wilderness. We are reminded of Elijah fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel into the wilderness. We are reminded of Mary and Joseph fleeing from King Herod into the wilderness. Here we see the church fleeing into the wilderness.

How long does this sojourn in the wilderness last? Verse 6 tells us that the woman is in the wilderness for 1260 days, which is 42 months, which is three and a half years. **This book is so beautiful when we understand the symbols! Those who take these numbers literally are missing so much!**

The church is figuratively shown as being in the wilderness for three and a half years! That symbol of a broken seven tells us that this wilderness experience is not going to be permanent. What God does to Rome is a perfect seven; what Rome does to the church is just a broken seven.

And verse 6 tells us something else about this time in the wilderness for the woman — verse 6 tells us that God nourishes and sustains her there. God is assuring his people that although they are being persecuted by Rome and although Jesus is no longer with them in person, that situation will not last forever. But while it does last, God will sustain them and protect them and nourish them. Someday that persecution will end, and someday they will be with their Savior, forever out of the reach of the great red dragon.

We are reminded of the exodus from Egypt.

Ezekiel 29:3 — *Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great*

dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.

God's people also fled into the wilderness to escape that great dragon, and, as here, God sustained and nourished his people while they were in the wilderness.

For those keeping count, this is the third time and the third different way that this same message has been delivered to the readers of this book!

First, the city of God will be trampled under foot for three and a half years, but the church will be protected.

Second, two witnesses will prophesy for three and a half years and then be killed by the beast, but after three and a half days they will come back to life and ascend to heaven.

Third, a woman will be forced to flee into the wilderness for three and a half years, yet she will find there a place of nourishment and protection.

One of the more popular approaches to the book of Revelation is the historical approach. We talked about several big problems with that approach in our introduction, but we can see one of those big problems right here. The historical approach would taken each of these three descriptions and apply them to different historical events on the timeline of church history — but they are all describing the same thing! They are not separate events. Instead, God is showing us the same thing and giving us the same message from many different perspectives.

Revelation 12:7-9

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast

out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

“And there was war in heaven.” Those six words have caused no end of commentary and controversy! How are we to understand them?

Let’s start with a simple question: is this a **literal** war in heaven? Many say yes, but in response to the question “is this a literal war in heaven,” I would respond with two other questions: **How could it be, and why should it be?**

Remember one of our key interpretive rules: difficult verses in the Bible (such as verse 7) should be interpreted in view of easy to understand verses in the Bible. Here is one such easy to understand verse:

John 12:31-33 — Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

Satan was defeated and cast out at the cross. That was the **literal** defeat of Satan. Yes, the church’s triumph over Rome would also be a defeat for Satan and for his plans — and I believe we are **figuratively** seeing that defeat here — but that defeat of Satan’s plans to destroy the church through Rome came after the complete defeat of Satan at the cross.

Oh, but how could Satan be defeated and yet still be around causing trouble and giving orders? Picture Adolf Hitler in his bunker as the Allied tanks rolled into Berlin. Adolf had already been defeated, but he was still barking commands. That is Satan’s situation after the cross. The Allied tanks are right outside Satan’s door!

Satan and death are in a similar situation. Paul told Timothy that Jesus “hath abolished death” (past tense), but Paul also told the Corinthians that death remains as the last enemy that “shall be destroyed.” How do we reconcile that? In the same way that we reconcile the similar verses about Satan — Jesus defeated Satan and death at the cross and at his resurrection and ascension. Yes, Satan and death continue on, but they are **defeated enemies**. The war against them is over! Jesus took care of that for us long ago.

But if that is true, then why do we see a war here in verse 7? How can the war be over when we see a war right here? Simple — the war that was fought and won at the cross was the **literal** war; this war in verse 7 is a **figurative** war.

How do we know that for sure? We know that for sure because of who is fighting this war in verse 7 — Michael and his angels. The literal war against Satan and against sin and death was not fought by any angel, but was fought and won by the Son of God! Jesus did not need any help from Michael or any angel to win that war.

Hebrews 2:14 — *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, **he also himself** likewise took part of the same; that through death **he** might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*

1 John 3:8 — *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that **he** might destroy the works of the devil.*

That is something Jesus did all by himself. That is not what we are seeing here in verse 7. Jesus is not fighting the war in verse 7. Instead, that war is being fought by Michael (who is an archangel, Jude 9) and his angels.

Okay, so this war is not the literal war fought by Jesus at the cross. But why couldn't this war be some other literal war fought by Michael and his angels? Because this war in verse 7, like everything else we have been seeing, is figurative. There is no literal woman clothed with the sun; she is a figure for God's people. There is no literal great red dragon; the dragon is a figure for Satan. The 1260 days in verse 6 is not literal; it is a figure for a temporary persecution.

But the child is a literal child, right? No. The child is a *figure* for Christ. How do we know that? Because in verse 5 it is the *child* who ascends to the Father. When Jesus ascended in Acts 1 he was no longer a child.

But Michael is literal in verse 7, right? I think not. I think as we will see in just a moment these fighting angels in verse 7 are being used as a figure for someone else. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

What is the point of this figurative war in heaven? Why is it being shown to us here? Well, what just happened in the prior verses? The faithful people of God had just given birth to the promised king, that king had just ascended into heaven, and the church had just fled into the wilderness for 1260 days (three and a half years) to be nourished and sustained by God.

The context and the time frame suggest that that wilderness period was the period of Roman persecution that followed Christ's ascension. What was hap-

pening in heaven during that time of persecution? That is what verses 7-9 are here to tell us about.

So what was happening in heaven while God's people were being persecuted on earth? What was happening in heaven was a war — but what kind of war? Was it a literal war in heaven, like some sort of scene from a Lord of the Rings movie with elves replaced by angels? No. This war was not a physical war; this war was a spiritual war. What spiritual war was going on during the Roman persecutions?

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 — *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For **the weapons of our warfare** are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*

Ephesians 6:11-12 — *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

1 Timothy 6:12 — *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

The spiritual battle that was occurring during the persecution was the battle in the heart of every Christian — it was the good fight of faith. Would the Christians remain faithful to Christ, or would they compromise with Rome and fight *with* rather than *against* the great dragon? That was the fight that was going on. It was not the fight of the cross — Jesus had already won that fight. We just saw the ascension in verse 5! This fight in verse 7 is the fight of the faithful to remain faithful unto death.

How does God view that good fight of faith? What does that fight look like from God's perspective? Verse 7 shows us! That fight is like a war in heaven! God

sees that fight like a war in which Satan is trying to snatch souls away from God in heaven — and isn't that exactly what it is? Isn't that exactly what Satan is trying to do?

Is that how we see our own spiritual battles? Is that how we see our own struggles and the struggles of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? If not, then we are not seeing those fights correctly. We all have our great battles with Satan, and those great battles often would not look like much of a battle to an outside observer. But, **things are not what they seem! God is showing us right here how we should view our spiritual battles!**

But if this war in heaven is a spiritual battle being fought by Christians, then why is this a war in heaven (rather than on earth) and why does verse 7 show us Michael and his angels (rather than Christians) fighting against the dragon?

We know the answer to the first question. Throughout this book, God's people have been pictured as being in heaven (even those still physically on the earth), while the Romans have repeatedly been referred to as those who dwell upon the earth. As far as this book is concerned, God's people are already spiritually safe in heaven, so where else would see them fighting a battle?

But what about the second question? Why do we see angels rather than Christians fighting the battle?

The love of God for his people is really on display in these verses. God loves his church, and this book is intended to provide comfort to the persecuted Christians. Why does God show angels doing the fighting? I think he does that to convey an important truth that we all need to hear — **God is on our side!** We don't have to struggle alone! God wants us to win, and God has done everything possible to equip us for that battle. He has withheld nothing from us, not even his only Son.

***Romans 8:31-32** — What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? **He that spared not his own Son**, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

If God be for us, who can be against us! **And God is for us!** That is the message of these beautiful verses! We are not in this alone!

***Ephesians 1:3** — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings **in heavenly places** in Christ.*

Yes, Christians are fighting the good fight of faith, but we are not fighting alone. That is the beautiful message of verse 7.

What is the result of this spiritual battle? Is Satan's assault on the church successful? Is Satan able to turn all of the faithful away from God? No. Satan's assault is not successful. Verse 8 tells us that he prevailed not. There was no place for him in heaven, so he and his evil cohorts were cast out.

What event does this casting out depict? Is this a flashback? Is this the original fall of Satan? No. The timing is wrong for that. Whatever this casting out is, it is happening after the ascension of Christ, and it is happening soon after this book was written (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). We have not left our time frame or our context in these verses; we are still looking at the conflict between Rome and the church. What we see here is Satan's defeat as to his attack against the church using the Roman empire.

But is this casting down in verse 9 really describing a spiritual battle being waged by Christians against Satan? What did we read just a moment ago from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5?

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the **pulling down** of strong holds;) **Casting down** imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

Pulling down? Casting down? Yes, we are looking here in verses 7-9 at a *spiritual* battle, and we (not the angels) are the ones who are *literally* casting down every high thing (including Satan) that exalts itself against God. We do that when we remain faithful to God.

So did no one fall away? We know that *some* fell away. We saw that in Revelation 2-3 with regard to Christians, and we saw that in verse 4 of this chapter with regard to some who fell away prior to the birth of Christ and were no longer faithfully awaiting their promised Messiah. But not all fell away — the church continued. Satan wanted to destroy the church, but Satan prevailed not!

Verse 9 confirms that this great red dragon is Satan, the ancient serpent from the Garden. It was through this serpent's deceptions that sin entered the world, and he has been an active enemy of God and of man ever since. He is

the devil or *diabolos*, which means accuser or slanderer. And he is Satan or *satanas*, which means adversary or opponent.

Verse 9 also describes Satan as the deceiver of the whole world. Paul told us in 1 Timothy 2:14 that it was by deception that the world was plunged into sin. In John 8:44, Jesus said of Satan, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” In fact, the first recorded words of Satan in the Bible contained a lie.

Genesis 3:1-4 — Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.

God gave Eve a command, and Satan convinced her to do the very opposite. God told Eve a fact, and Satan convinced Eve that the opposite was true.

Satan’s method of operation has not changed one bit! Why should Satan change, when what he does works so well? God tells us that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved. And what does Satan say? He says that those who believe and are saved shall be baptized. **A small twist — but a deadly one!** Satan delights in twisting God’s word and then telling people, “Ye shall not surely die.” Satan is a deceiver! We must not be “ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Revelation 12:10-11

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day

and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

We saw a verse in the previous chapter that is very similar to verse 10.

Revelation 11:15 — The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

As we saw before with this earlier verse, the statement here in verse 10 does not mark the beginning of God's kingdom or of Christ's authority. Instead, verse 10 describes a public reaffirmation of the kingdom of God and the power of Christ in the judgment of Rome.

This view is confirmed by the second half of verse 10, which explains *why* "is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ." The reason those things have occurred is that "the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

Who was that accuser? That accuser was Satan, or more specifically, Satan using and speaking through the Roman empire.

We talked about these accusations when we looked at Revelation 2-3. (Remember that those two chapters at the beginning of the book provide the all-important context for the visions we see in the remainder of the book.) Christians in Roman days were accused of all sorts of terrible crimes, including cannibalism and incest. Tacitus accused the Christians of having a "hatred of the human race." (That accusation sounds familiar — I think I saw it repeated recently in the *New York Times*!) Nero accused the Christians of burning down the city of Rome. Why did Rome bother making an accusation? Because as bad as Rome was, it remained a nation with laws and certain legal protections. And so, for most persecuted Christians, their persecution began with an accusation. Many times those accusations were false (such as cannibalism and arson), but sometimes they were true (such as refusing to offer incense to Caesar).

Verse 10 tells us two important things about those accusations. First, Satan was behind them. And second, those accusations were ultimately not success-

ful because the accuser, rather than the accused, was the one who was cast down. This casting down in verse 10 is the same casting out that we saw in verse 9.

How was Satan cast down? How was Rome, Satan's powerful tool, defeated? How was the church victorious? How were the faithful people of God delivered? Was it a physical deliverance and a physical defeat? Was Rome destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah? Were the Christians protected from physical suffering like Daniel and his three friends?

We answered those questions a moment ago when we looked at verse 9, and we answered them earlier in our study as well. It is what we have been saying all along. The deliverance of the church was not a physical deliverance, and the judgment of Rome was not a physical judgment. Instead, the deliverance was spiritual, and the judgement was spiritual. The war in heaven that we saw in verse 7 was the war to remain faithful; it was the good fight of faith.

But how do we know that for sure? Two words: verse 11!

Revelation 12:11 — And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Verse 11 is one of the most important verses in the entire book of Revelation! Verse 11 confirms that everything we just said about verses 7-10 is true. Verse 11 confirms that the war in verse 7 is not a literal war. Verse 11 confirms that the war in verse 7 is the war that was fought in the heart of every Christian struggling to remain faithful during the Roman onslaught. Verse 11 confirms that the great struggle we see throughout this entire book is a spiritual struggle, and that the promised deliverance is a spiritual deliverance. How could Rome have been judged in the first century and yet continue to exist for centuries after this book was written? Verse 11 answers that question.

Verse 11 is one of the most important verses in this book!

How did the Christians overcome Satan? How did the that small ragtag bunch of Christians, many slaves, overcome the mighty Roman empire? The answer to those questions that we find in verse 11 is **death**. The Christians overcame Satan and Rome through death. **Whose death?** Verse 11 gives us two answers to that question. First, the church overcame Rome through the death of Christ ("the blood of the Lamb" in verse 11), and second, the Christians overcame Rome through their own deaths ("they loved not their lives unto the death" in verse 11).

Christianity is filled with paradoxes, but none is more powerful than the paradox in Luke 9:24 — “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” **The pathway to life is death!** Isn't that what Jesus told us?

*John 12:24-25 — Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: **but if it die**, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

Read that last sentence again and compare it with verse 11. John 12: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal,” and then verse 11: “they loved not their lives unto the death.”

You mean that Satan was defeated by the death of those he was trying to kill? That doesn't sound like much of a defeat! **Yes, but things are not what they seem!** Satan was defeated by the death of Christ on that cross, and Satan is defeated again when Christ's servants follow the example of their Master by being faithful unto death. The death of Jesus was a defeat—but not for Jesus. Likewise the death of a faithful Christian is a defeat — but not for that faithful Christian. It is Satan who suffers the defeat. It is Satan who is cast down.

The greatest defeat of Satan occurs when a faithful child of God dies. Why? Because that faithful child of God has forever escaped the clutches of that great red dragon!

And the greatest victory for Satan? What is that? Satan's greatest victory and greatest delight comes when he causes one of God's children to fall — be it either a Christian who falls away from grace or a physical child who grows up in this sin-soaked world never having obeyed the gospel of Christ. That puts a smile on Satan's face.

And us? How do we react when the faithful fall? Nothing on this earth should sadden us as much as that. How can we read these verses and reach any other conclusion?

Noice that verse 11 mentions the blood of the Lamb. Satan was defeated by that blood. It was the blood of Christ that provided the forgiveness of sins that took the faithful forever out of Satan's clutches. It was that blood that made Satan's accusations of no effect.

There is power, power, wonder-working power

In the blood of the Lamb
 There is power, power, wonder-working power
 In the precious blood of the Lamb!

The next time you sing *Power in the Blood*, think of verse 11! That blood defeated the most powerful earthly kingdom the world has ever known!

Oh, but this spiritual view can't be right. The great battle is coming! The Anti-christ, who is now living somewhere in Europe, will array his great forces in the Holy Land. He will roll out the ballistic missiles and Cobra helicopters of unrighteousness! Right? Wrong! **That sort of thing is the complete opposite of what verse 11 is teaching us.** In fact, that sort of thing is the complete opposite of what the entire Bible is teaching us. Are our weapons carnal or are they not? Do we war after the flesh or do we not war after the flesh?

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 — For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

You would really have to work hard to misunderstand that verse! “We do not war after the flesh.” “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” That’s was Paul said, and that’s what verse 11 is saying. Why do so many commentaries on Revelation say the exact opposite?

Verse 11 is a reminder that this book of comfort and assurance is not promising a **physical** deliverance from the clutches of Rome. Instead, God is promising a **spiritual** deliverance from the power behind Rome. And likewise, God is not promising here to **physically** destroy Rome. Instead, the judgment of Rome is a **spiritual** judgment, which is much worse.

Have we seen anything like this elsewhere in the Bible? Yes. We saw something very similar when we studied the judgment of Babylon by God at the hands of the Medes and the Persians. First, let’s look at how that judgment was described by Isaiah, writing about 160 years *before* it happened.

Isaiah 13:17-22 — Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when

God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

After reading that vivid description of Babylon's judgment, we might think that the Medes would do to Babylon what the Romans did to Jerusalem — obliterate it — but that is not at all what happened. We have already studied that event. Daniel 5 describes what happened in two short verses:

Daniel 5:30-31 — In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

The Medes and the Persians took the city of Babylon without firing a shot. The city was not destroyed, and the walls were not torn down. The people were not slaughtered.

But how then can Isaiah 13 be true? Isaiah 13 is not describing at all how things looked from a human perspective. **EXACTLY!** Things are not what they seem! The vivid apocalyptic language in Isaiah 13 is describing how the fall of Babylon looked from God's perspective!

And maybe that gives us the best answer of all to a question we asked all the way back in the introduction — **why does God use apocalyptic language?** Perhaps God uses this type of vivid symbolic language to show us how he sees things, which then tells us how we should see them as well.

From God's perspective the seemingly smallest and most insignificant events in this world (such as the death of a faithful Christian or the birth of a child in a manger) are in reality the most important events in this world, while the events that seem so important to so many (such as celebrity and sports) mean less than nothing in the grand scheme of things. This entire book of Revelation

is calling on God's people to see things as God sees them. Let's resolve to heed that call!

One last point about verse 11 — yes, the church overcame Satan by death, but verse 11 gives **another** way the church overcame Satan: “by the word of their testimony.” That word is the word of God. How do we know that? Because the word of God was their testimony.

***Revelation 6:9** — I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for **the word of God**, and for the testimony which they held.*

***1 Corinthians 2:1-2** — And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you **the testimony of God**. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

So what is the difference between the word of God and the testimony of God? Paul just answered that question: “**declaring** unto you the testimony of God.” These early Christians were not persecuted for **reading** the Bible in their homes; they were persecuted for **declaring** the word of God in the public square.

But, and here is the crucial point in verse 11, that testimony was one way in which the church overcame Satan. Yes, the word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and yes the word of God is “sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), **but that sword won't do much good if we leave it in the scabbard!** If we want to defeat Satan, we need to take that sword out and use it!

Lesson 29

We looked last week at Chapter 12, and we talked about the war in heaven in verse 7, the casting out of Satan in verse 9, and the casting down of Satan in verse 10. These are difficult verses, but one thing is very clear — Satan tried to do something but failed.

What was Satan trying to do? I think the simplest answer is the best answer — Satan was trying to do what he always tries to do: corrupt the people of God and cause them to fall. Satan was trying to destroy the church, the promised eternal kingdom that had just been established a few decades earlier. And what was Satan's weapon? Just the most powerful earthly kingdom the world had ever known being run by blood-thirsty rulers who thought they were themselves gods!

The casting out of Satan in verses 9-10 shows us that Satan was not successful. In fact, verse 8 tells us that Satan prevailed not in what he was trying to do. Why? Why did Satan fail? Many reasons, but one is that his target proved to be stronger than he thought, and his weapon proved to be weaker than he thought. The early Christians remained faithful in the face of terrible persecutions, and Satan's terrible weapon of Rome proved ineffective in destroying the eternal kingdom.

So what is the casting down of Satan in verses 9-10? It is not the literal fall of Satan because that had happened much earlier. And it is not the literal defeat of Satan by Christ because that happened at the cross. The casting down in verses 9-10 is happening after the ascension in verse 5. The casting down in verses 9-10 is not the movement of Satan from one *place* to another, but rather the movement of Satan from one *state of mind* to another. Satan thought he was going to win, but as verse 8 tells us, he prevailed not!

What is the message of Chapter 12? Let's turn that question around. What did the church need to hear? What did a new Christian struggling to remain faithful in the face of terrible persecution need to hear? What sort of message did he or she need? A message of comfort and encouragement? Or a message of some remote battle and some remote time that had nothing to do with their present situation? We know that answer to that question!

Yes, this book of Revelation was written for us — but this book was written *first* for them. And you know what? They needed this book's message more

than we do — for which she should be very thankful! We are not suffering the sort of persecution they endured. We do not face the same sort of temptations to walk away from Christ to save their own lives that they faced. If our view of this book has no message of comfort and encouragement for the original suffering audience of this book, then our view is wrong.

But, going back to verse 7, can we really describe the battle against Satan in a Christian's heart as a war in heaven? Two answers to that question.

First, we have discussed why the war is in *heaven*. In this book, all Christians are pictured as already being in heaven even while some of them are still living on the earth, and the Romans are repeatedly described in this book as those who dwell upon the earth. Why? Because that figurative description of the persecuted Christians provided comfort to them and reminded them of where they were literally going if they remained faithful unto death. And if they remained faithful, then their final destination was so certain that God pictured them as already being there!

And is that really a *new* message for the Christian? Didn't Paul describe it in the same way?

Colossians 3:1-3 — *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. That beautiful truth is what is shown to us figuratively in this book each time faithful Christians literally living on earth are figuratively described as already being in heaven.

Think for just a moment about what this description of the church says about the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. Calvinists recognize that people struggle to be faithful to Jesus, but they say that the struggle is to determine whether your conversion was genuine. If you fall away, they say that just means you were never really a Christian to begin with. Is that what we see here? Where does the inspired text show these struggling Christians? Already in heaven! They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God. Their struggle is to remain faithful, not to prove that their original conversion was genuine. We know it was genuine because of where they are figuratively located in these verses! The church is the body of the saved, and in this book that body

is located in heaven. Those who fall, do just that — they fall away from the body. There are no lost people in heaven.

And didn't we see just such a fall of God's faithful people back in verse 4 — "And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth." I think that verse is confirmation of two things. First, it confirms that faithful people can fall if they do not remain faithful. And second, verse 4 confirms that what we are seeing in this chapter is a personal struggle to resist Satan and remain faithful. Why? Because I am the only person who can keep me from remaining faithful and being saved. If I prove faithless in the end, that will be because of what I did or did not do. I will not be able to blame my condition on anyone else. The fight to remain faithful is an individual fight.

And as for the war in heaven being fought by angels, remember what we saw in Chapters 2 and 3. Each of the seven churches was figuratively described as an angel. I think we are just seeing the same thing here with the individual Christians.

And that's the first reason why the battle in the Christian heart is described here as a war in heaven. What is the second reason?

In 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. **What did that fight involve for a first century Christian living under Roman persecution?** Let's put ourselves in the position of a new convert living under Nero or Domitian, and ask ourselves if we think that person was in a great spiritual war. The fight of faith — what might that fight have been like for a Christian in the first century?

To begin, this person had a family, had a career, and had social position. He worshipped the Roman gods, he went to the Roman banquets at the false temples, and he offered incense to Caesar, whom he considered a god.

But then something happened. He was walking down the street, and he heard a commotion. Someone was shouting over the crowd. He listened to the message, and how preposterous it seemed at first — who was Christ and him crucified? Why would anyone follow and serve a criminal? And yet the more he listened, the more the message struck home with him. After awhile, he believed the message, and he was baptized into Christ. Now what?

His family? They thought he had gone mad. They tried all they could do to talk him out of this new life. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his own family for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that

Christ must come before his family. Eventually, his parents disowned him, his wife divorced him, and his children walked away from him.

His friends? They also tried to talk him out of this new life. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his friends for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his friends. Eventually his friends all turned away from him. They accused him of being unpatriotic to Rome and to Caesar.

His career? To practice his trade, he had to be a member of the local trade guild, and everyone in the local trade guild was required to burn incense to Caesar once a week and to confess Caesar as their lord. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his job for him?** The night before, he had struggled with what to do. What would he do if he lost his job? In the end, he decided that Christ must come before his job. He was thrown out of the trade guild.

One day there was loud knock on his door. It was the authorities. The trade guild had done more than just expel him; they had reported him to the authorities. He was accused of insulting Caesar, and he was brought before the Magistrate and commanded to deny Christ and confess Caesar as lord. If he did that, he could walk away free. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his freedom for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his own freedom. He was thrown into prison.

At his trial, he was given an opportunity to walk free or face execution — all he had to do was deny Christ. By now he had lost almost everything for his crucified King. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his life for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his own life. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24).

And what happened to him? I’ll let the Roman historian Tacitus answer that question for us: “And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.”

Here’s the question for us — **did that child of God experience a great battle?** Do you think the battle in that Christian’s heart to remain faithful could figuratively be described as a war in heaven fought by the angels against the powers of darkness? Or is that an overstatement of his struggle? It is no overstatement!

At each step he struggled to make the right decision. The temptation was so great to turn his back on Christ — to focus on the seen rather than the unseen — but he remained steadfast to the end. He lost his friends, his family, his job, his freedom, and his life — but he gained Christ! Can anyone say that personal struggle (repeated many times over by many faithful Christians) was not a great war?

Here is a question for anyone who studies this book of Revelation: does your interpretation have a message for that first century martyr? Would your interpretation have given him encouragement to remain faithful? Would it have given him comfort in the face of all that he had lost? Would it give him a promise of victory over his persecutors? Would it give him a blessed assurance that Jesus knows all about his struggles? If not, then that interpretation is wrong.

This book is not about a great cosmic war in heaven divorced from what is happening down here on earth. This book is not about a war in Palestine with 200 million Chinese soldiers and atomic weapons. This book is not about the end of the world. Instead, this book is about our brothers and sisters in Christ who were persecuted by Rome and who died with a prayer on their lips.

The person we just described is, of course, fictional, but we know from the Bible and from secular history that his story was repeated over and over again in the first century. We need to keep those fellow Christians in mind as we study this book. Their persecution and their suffering and their faithfulness must ground us in our interpretation of this book. If we ever leave that ground, then we have gone astray.

Revelation 12:12

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Who are the people who dwell in the heavens and who are told to rejoice in verse 12? Remember that this book has divided everyone in the world into either one of two groups — those who are on God's side, and those who are

not. And, of course, the book of Revelation is not the only book of the Bible to make that division. Jesus made the same division in Luke 11:23 — “he that is not with me is against me.”

The interesting thing about Revelation is not that it makes this same division, but rather *where* it symbolically depicts those two groups. Those who are on God’s side in this book are pictured as being spiritually *safe* in heaven, even while many of them were physically *unsafe* living on earth under Roman persecution. And those persecuting Romans are repeatedly referred to in this book as those who dwell upon the earth, which is what the very next sentence in verse 12 calls them: “the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea!”

Later in this book, after Rome is figuratively cleared out of the way, we will see the church, *not ascending* into heaven as it will at the end of time, but rather *coming down* out of heaven to live in a world in which Rome is no more.

Revelation 21:2 — And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

So back to our question — who is rejoicing in verse 12? The church is rejoicing in verse 12! And isn’t that exactly who we would expect to be rejoicing in verse 12?

But not everyone is rejoicing in verse 12 — those who dwell on the earth have a woe pronounced against them — why? “For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”

In Revelation 6:16 we saw the wrath of the Lamb. Here in verse 12, we see the wrath of the devil, but unlike the wrath of the Lamb, Satan’s wrath is not a righteous wrath. And another difference is that Satan is mad at everybody, including his own followers here in verse 12! Even though the Romans are on his side, Satan has no concern for their welfare. Instead, Satan will use them and discard them as he sees fit in his attempts to thwart God’s plans.

But Satan’s schemes are not working, and it certainly can’t be his fault! So Satan blames his minions here in verse 12. Why? Because Rome had failed to accomplish what Satan wanted Rome to accomplish!

Can we point to a specific first century example of Satan’s failure to destroy the church using Rome? Yes, we can point to the Emperor Nero, who was a terrible persecutor of the church. Peter and Paul were martyred under Nero, as were countless other Christians. Satan wanted Nero to destroy the church, but that did not happen because Nero died without having destroyed the

church. And what do you suppose was waiting for Nero when he showed up on Satan's doorstep having failed to accomplish that task?

And what happened to Rome after the death of Nero? Chaos and civil war followed the death of Nero. When Nero came to power in AD 54, there were six other males who traced their heritage back to Augustus or Claudius. These men all died during Nero's reign. Nero's death left a political vacuum that many rushed to occupy.

Initially, the leader of the Spanish rebellion, Galba, was the accepted replacement. But the sole basis of his regime was his soldiers' support, and when they turned against him in January AD 69, he was murdered. Nero's friend Otho attempted to take Galba's place, but he was immediately challenged by the legions on the Rhine, who wanted their commander, Vitellius, installed as emperor. The German legions invaded Italy and toppled Otho in April. In Palestine, the war against Jewish rebels was coming to an end, and the troops there proclaimed their general, Vespasian, as emperor. Another invasion of Italy followed, Vitellius was removed, and Vespasian became emperor in December 69, thus becoming the fourth Roman emperor in twelve months. This chaos is a result of the wrath of Satan directed against the Romans in verse 12.

Revelation 12:12 — *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

That verse gives us another reason for Satan's wrath — Satan knows that his time is short. What does that mean?

The first thing it means is that the time frame for this book is still very firmly in place. We saw that time frame in the opening verse of the book, and we will see it again in the closing verses of the book. Here we see it in the middle of the book. If we are ever tempted to toss our time frame out the window, we need to remember just how often we are being reminded of that time frame all throughout the book. That time frame is our rudder; let's not toss it overboard!

The second thing the short time in verse 12 tells us is that Satan is frustrated. Why? Because Satan is having trouble destroying the church, and that failure is very frustrating in view of the incredibly powerful weapon Satan is wielding — the mighty Roman empire. From Satan's perspective, he is having trouble killing an ant with a bazooka! But things are not what they seem! Even to

Satan! And Satan knows that his opportunity to use Rome as a weapon is coming to an end. Satan knows that his opportunity to attack the church through Rome will not last forever. That door is closing, and that is why Satan is filled with wrath and frustration in verse 12.

Revelation 12:13-17

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Satan's wrath was directed against his *own* people in verse 12, but they are not the only ones who received that wrath. Verse 13 tells us that Satan's wrath is once again directed at the woman, who we know (after the birth and ascension of her child) represents the church. What we see in verse 13 is a *renewed* persecution of the church. (More on that in just a moment.)

In verse 14, the woman is given wings with which to escape the pursuing dragon by flying into the wilderness. We know what these wings symbolize

— they show the church being protected and preserved by God. Wings are often used in the Bible to symbolize God's protection:

***Exodus 19:4** — Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.*

***Deuteronomy 32:11-12** — As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him.*

***Psalms 36:7** — How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.*

***Isaiah 40:31** — But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

This time in the wilderness lasts three and a half years (a time, and times, and half a time). And, as with the symbol of the wings, we also know what this symbol means. It is a **broken seven**, which is the most either Satan or Rome can bring against the church. God rains sevens down on Rome; Rome can bring only broken sevens against the church. This period of flight into the wilderness will be temporary — that is what the symbol of the broken seven means.

What happens next? In verse 15, the serpent or dragon attacks the woman with a **flood**. But in verse 16, the **earth** helps the woman by swallowing up the flood. What does that mean?

As with so many of the images in this book, this image takes us back to the exodus from Egypt. While the people of God were escaping the great dragon of Egypt (Ezekiel 29:3), God held back the water to allow his people to cross the Red Sea on dry ground, and then he led them through the wilderness.

***Psalms 106:9** — He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.*

Here we again see a flood threatening God's people, but once again that flood turns out to be an empty threat. God protects his people!

What sort of flood had Satan unleashed on God's people?

- He had unleashed a flood of delusion and deception.
- He had unleashed a flood of false religion.
- He had unleashed a flood of idolatry.
- He had unleashed a flood of false charges.
- He had unleashed a flood of false philosophies.
- He had unleashed a flood of immorality.
- He had unleashed a flood of temptations to compromise.
- He had unleashed a flood of perversion.

Satan may not have had much luck with this flood in verse 15, but that has not kept him from trying again and again. We still see these same Satanic floods today.

What does it mean that the **earth** swallowed up the flood waters? Isn't the earth in the enemy's camp? **Why is the earth helping the woman?**

First, we should note that the concept of water being absorbed by the sands of an arid wilderness would have been familiar to John's initial readers. The rivers that flow eastward from the Lebanon mountains disappear into the sands of the eastern desert. We recall that Job accused his friends in Job 6:15-20 of being like a deceitful brook that vanishes away — "when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place."

But is that all that is involved here, or is there a **symbolic** meaning behind this flood being swallowed up by the **earth**? Is there some sense in which the earth did come to the rescue of the woman? Hailey says yes:

In the same way the earth, that is, the unregenerated earthlings, helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing up the lies of the dragon. In doing this the earth established a clear distinction between the world, satiated with its false religions and philosophical teachings, on the one hand, and the church, clothed with truth and righteousness, on the other. From the viewpoint of Satan and the world, the earth's help was incidental and unintentional: but from the viewpoint of the church, it was providential. As long as the world absorbs the river of Satan's lies, and the church drinks from the fountain of divine

truth, the separation between the two will remain clear and distinct. But when the woman begins to compromise with Satan and his lies, becoming submerged in his river of falsehood, tragedy follows.

The church is distinctive. We are different. We stand out and stand apart. The most common attack on the church from **within** is a call for the church to lose its distinctiveness — to just blend in with the rest of the religious world. They use instruments in worship; why don't we just blend in? They disregard what the Bible says about male leadership in the church; why don't we just blend in? And we could go on and on, but we must never heed those calls to compromise. We must never let the church lose its distinctiveness. Perhaps that is how the earth helps the church — by highlighting the difference between the two! Was that perhaps what Paul told us about?

1 Corinthians 11:19 — For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Perhaps we should be thankful when the earth swallows that flood of falsehood. Why? Because it helps those who are searching to locate the Lord's church in a sea of confusion and falsehood. It makes us stand out even more when we are the only people who don't swallow Satan's flood. And perhaps the first place to start in not swallowing Satan's flood is to turn off the **spigot** in our own homes. And what is Satan's spigot? It can be the TV or the Internet if we don't watch we see and hear.

Yes, the earth helped the woman. And that means that Rome was turned on itself as it both helped the church and persecuted the church. In that sense, we have two Romes. We will see that very thing again later in this book, and Daniel told us about it six hundred years before Revelation was written when he told us that Rome would have feet of iron and feet of clay.

Remember the sequence of events here. We started off with the dragon on earth trying to devour the child. We then moved to heaven, where Satan was defeated and cast out. We now see Satan back on earth again and being defeated again — and the earth is helping to defeat him! What is the message? The message is that God can defeat Satan anywhere he happens to be. God can defeat Satan on God's turf in heaven or God can defeat Satan on Satan's turf on earth.

What happens next? In verse 17, the dragon is angry with the woman and wages war “with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” If the woman is the church, then who are the remnant of her seed? They are also the church, but I think that they are the part of the church that remains physically alive on earth suffering under the Roman persecution. Why?

First, we know they are faithful Christians — verse 17 tells us that they keep God’s commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. But second, we also know that the woman represents the church for the many reasons we have discussed so far in this chapter.

With both the woman and the remnant of her seed being the church, there are really only two identifications that are possible. One is that the woman represent Jewish Christians, and the remnant of her seed represents Gentile Christians. About the only thing going for that view is that prior to the birth of her child, the woman represented faithful Jews under the old covenant. But other than that, there is no particular reason for us to see different symbols for Jewish and Gentile Christians at this point in the text.

The only other identification that is possible is that the woman in verse 17 represents those Christians who have gone to their reward, and the remnant of her seed represents those suffering Christians who remain alive under the Roman lash. That view fits the context very well. Satan is angry with the woman in verse 17, but the suggestion of verse 17 is that the woman is out of Satan’s reach. That is why Satan attacks the remnant of her seed instead.

If that view is correct, then the woman in Chapter 12 symbolizes three things at various points in the chapter. First, she is the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Second, she is the faithful people of God under the new covenant. And third, she is the faithful people of God under the new covenant who have died and who are now with Christ.

We will find more support for this view in the next chapter, which will provide more details of the attack that is mentioned here in verse 17. Chapter 13 will introduce us to two of the weapons that Satan will use in his battle against the church — a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. As we will see, these beasts represent Rome, but they do so from different perspectives. Just as we see the church from many different perspectives in this book, so do we see Rome from many perspectives.

Please look at the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com. What we see here in Chapter 12 is Satan's defeat as to his attack against the church using the mighty Roman empire as a weapon. But can we be more specific than that? I think we can.

What we see here in Chapter 12 are **two** periods of persecution. The first period is shown in verses 6-9, with the woman fleeing into the wilderness and the war in heaven. That first period ends with Satan being cast out into the earth at the end of verse 9. The victory of the church over Rome with regard to that first period of persecution is described in verses 10-11.

But that first period of persecution is followed by a second period of persecution in verses 12-17. The devil, after being cast down, knows that his time is short, so he again persecutes the woman in verse 13, and she again flees into the wilderness in verse 14. And Satan once again wages war in verses 15-17.

Why do we see everything **twice**? Wait! Notice the word "twice"! We have been on the lookout for uses of the number two, and here we see it. Chapter 12 describes the same basic sequence of events **twice** — why? What is that two-fold repetition depicting?

Remember what we have said about the number two so far in our study of this book. It usually represents something about Rome — Romulus and Remus (the twins raised by a beast), the military might and false religion of Rome, feet of iron and feet of clay, Greek culture and Roman might — and one other example that we have mentioned: Nero and Domitian, the evil "twins" of the two evil Roman dynasties of the first century. When each died, his dynasty died with him. Nero was the last emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and Domitian was the last emperor of the Flavian dynasty.

Were there two periods of persecution involving Nero and Domitian? Yes. In fact, Tertullian called Domitian "a limb of the bloody Nero," and Eusebius said that Domitian was "the second that raised a persecution against us." A rumor spread during the reign of Domitian was that Domitian was Nero raised from the dead, the so-called Nero Redivivus. Later we will discuss why Domitian is represented by the number 8 in this book, and we will see it is because 8 is the number of renewal, which in this case points to Domitian's renewed persecution of the church.

So with those thoughts in mind, please look at the timeline for Chapter 12 shown on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com.

The first period of persecution in verses 6-9, with the woman fleeing into the wilderness and the war in heaven, corresponds to the persecution of the church under the Emperor Nero (which had already occurred by the time this book was written) and the church's fight to remain faithful to Jesus.

The casting down of Satan at the end of verse 9 corresponds to the death of Nero in AD 68. That victory of the church over Nero is what is described in verses 10-11. And verse 11 ("And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.") would then be describing Peter and Paul, along with many other faithful Christians who died under Nero's persecution.

After Nero's death, verse 12 shows the church rejoicing and the earth filled with woe. That verse is describing the year AD 69, right after Nero's death, when Rome had four emperors (three of which died in that year) along with civil wars. Satan's frustration in verse 12 about having only a short time would be his frustration in having failed with Nero, and his realization that he needs to find someone else to attack the church.

The second period of persecution in verses 12-17 is the renewed persecution under Domitian (which had not yet started when this book was written, but which would begin very soon). The persecution repeated, which is why much of the description is repeated. It is this renewed persecution under Domitian upon which the next chapter will focus.

As we will soon see, this book was written in the reign of Vespasian, who ruled between Nero and Domitian. The Christians had overcome Nero — could they do the same with Domitian? The persecution under Nero had come to an end — was there really going to be another round of such persecution under Domitian? Yes, that was coming — but God was on the church's side! The church would once again be victorious!

Lesson 30

Chapter 13

Revelation 13:1-2

1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. 2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

We will see two terrible beasts in Chapter 13 — one here in verse 1, and another in verse 11. Keep in mind all that we have said about the number two and its association with Rome — founded by twins raised by a beast, composed of Roman power and Greek culture, composed of military might and false religion, two powerful dynasties in the first century, with each culminating in a great persecution of the church, the first with Nero and the second with Domitian. The number two is a thread that we have seen running all throughout this book, and in this chapter we see *two* beasts.

The first beast in verse 1 is a beast that rises out of the sea. We have seen the sea used before in this book to depict separation, and we have also seen the sea used to depict the restless, unsettled nations of the world. That latter symbol seems to be the one God is using here. Recall the similar imagery in Isaiah 17.

Isaiah 17:12-13 — *Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm.*

And that symbol fits perfectly. This beast represents Rome, and Rome rose from the restless, unsettled nations of the world.

But there may be an additional reason behind the use of the sea here. In Jeremiah 51:13, the prophet says this about Babylon: “O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come.” And later in verse 42 of that same chapter, Jeremiah writes, “The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with its tumultuous waves.” And in Ezekiel 26:3, God says this about Tyre, “Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves.” So not only does the sea denote wicked and restless nations, the sea also denotes judgment.

When we last saw the dragon we were told that it had gone off to make war against those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. What we see here is one of the weapons that Satan was going to use in that conflict.

This beast from the sea is both a weapon of Satan and a manifestation of Satan. Satan was the driving power behind the attack by Rome against the church. That the beast is now wearing Satan’s royal headdress from Revelation 12:3 tells us that the great red dragon has given power and authority to this beast from the sea to act on his behalf. We are seeing both Rome and the power behind Rome, Satan.

This beast has seven heads with ten horns and ten crowns. This is the same description we were given of the dragon in Revelation 12:3. What is represented by the seven heads and ten horns in verse 1? When we first saw these heads and these horns in 12:3, I mentioned that we would see them again in Chapters 13 and 17, and that their meaning would be explained to us by an angel in Chapter 17. We will wait until Chapter 17 for an in-depth study the angel’s explanation, but one thing we will learn in Chapter 17 is that the seven heads are seven kings and the ten horns are ten kings.

Which kings? That's the part that we will look at in Chapter 17, but knowing that this beast is covered with kings is enough for us to know that we are looking at Rome in verse 1. Why? Because it was Roman kings who were persecuting the church at the time this book was written. It was the Roman king Nero who had previously persecuted Christians, and it was the Roman king Domitian who would very soon pick up where Nero had left off. As for why we see seven kings and ten kings, we will look at that question in Chapter 17, and we looked at previously in our study of Daniel.

Verse 1 gives us another reason to know that we are looking at Roman kings on this terrible beast. The end of the verse says, "and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." These Roman kings thought they were gods, and they demanded to be addressed as such. Recall how Paul described the man of lawlessness.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

That sounds just like what history tells us about Domitian. Domitian ordered that all address him as "Our Lord God Domitian," and one of our earlier handouts (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) showed coins with blasphemous descriptions of Domitian and of his father and infant son.

And Domitian was not alone. Every emperor called himself *divus* or *sebastos*, which means divine. On his coins, Nero referred to himself as *The Savior of the World*. The emperors took as their title the Latin word *dominus*, or its Greek equivalent *kurios*, which mean Lord, and which is used throughout the New Testament as a title for Jesus.

Notice the end of verse 1 — heads, which we will see in Chapter 17 are Roman kings, with the name of blasphemy on them? Where have we seen that very thing — heads of kings with names of blasphemy on them? Isn't that a good description of a Roman coin? Was John seeing Roman coins on this terrible beast? Those coins certainly fit the description — they show the heads of kings, and they show the blasphemous names that were applied to those kings.

Verse 2 tells us that the beast “was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.” These descriptions point us unmistakably back to Daniel 7, which we studied earlier. The fourth kingdom in Daniel 7 is Rome, and the first three kingdoms are Babylon (shown as a **lion** in Daniel 7:4), Medo-Persia (shown as a **bear** in Daniel 7:5), and Greece (shown as a **leopard** in Daniel 7:6). Daniel 7:12 tells us that these beasts lost their dominion but didn’t die.

Daniel 7:12 — As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

Here we have an explanation of that verse from Daniel 7. Those earlier kingdoms lived on through Rome! That is how their lives were prolonged. And when Rome was judged, so were those earlier persecutors of God’s people.

We looked at these earlier kingdoms in our study of Daniel. Babylon, the first of the four kingdoms, was the invading power that carried Daniel and his three friends off to exile. The Medo-Persians, the second kingdom, was the kingdom that came to power after Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. It was this second kingdom that threw Daniel into the lions’ den. The third kingdom, Greece, conquered Persia under Alexander the Great but then split into four parts after his death. Rome was the fourth kingdom, which conquered Greece.

This beast in verse 2 is part leopard, part bear, and part lion. Rome, the fourth beast in Daniel 7, embodied all of the wickedness of the first three beasts and much more, and so Rome is pictured as being composed of pieces of the previous three kingdoms, which was actually the case in reality as Rome conquered and thus included their former territories.

Where did Rome get this great power? Who gave Rome its seat and its great authority? Verse 2 tells us that those things were given to Rome by Satan, the dragon. But how can that be true if God has all authority and if “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1)?

God has all authority and all power, and that includes all authority and all power over Satan and over Rome. Rome existed by the will of God and the providence of God. Rome was used by God as a great tool to spread the gospel, but Rome was also used as a tool by Satan to persecute the church. What we see at the end of verse 2 is Rome being used as a tool of Satan. What did Paul say about Domitian?

2 Thessalonians 2:9 — *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*

All power and signs and lying wonders. Paul tells us that that all came from the working of Satan, and that is also what verse 2 tells us. Satan was using Rome as a weapon against the church, and it was a weapon with great power and great authority.

This description makes me think of the temptation of Christ.

Matthew 4:8-10 — *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Satan's temptation of Jesus was not successful — but when Satan made Rome that same offer, Rome accepted! Rome fell down and worshipped Satan in exchange for the power, the seat, and the authority offered by Satan in verse 2.

As a final point, we should note that as bad as Rome was, there is nowhere in this book any hint that the persecuted Christians were to violently resist Rome or even to seek the overthrow of Rome. The commands in Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 had not be repealed. Yes, Rome had veered far away from the ideal government described by Paul and ordained by God — but nowhere was the church told to take matters into its own hands. When Peter commanded his readers to “honor the king” in 1 Peter 2:17, Peter was referring to none other than Nero himself!

Why? Why was the church told to honor the king who was at the same time putting them to death? Paul answers that question in Romans 13:2 — “Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” An attack against a God-ordained authority is an attack against God's authority. But what if that authority has departed from God's word and has become an evil authority? Then we have another verse: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). And we have Acts 5:29 — “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But the command to the church is to honor the king, even if that king is the Emperor Nero or the Emperor Domitian!

I think we can all see the damage that is being done by those who do not honor the leader of our own country — and that goes for both the current leader and the previous leader. The command of 1 Peter 2:17 is easy to disobey, but it is impossible to misunderstand: “Honor the king.” If we think that command is difficult, just think how difficult it was for those to whom that command was first directed!

Revelation 13:3

3 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

One of the heads on the beast is “as it were wounded to death.” That phrase does not mean that the head just looked like it was dead; that phrase means that the head was dead, and the marks of its death were upon it. We saw a similar phrase earlier in Revelation 5:6 with regard to the Lamb — “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb **as it had been slain.**”

Did this wound kill the entire beast or just one of the seven heads on the beast? Later, in verse 12, we will find out that this wound kills the entire beast. That is, the entire beast dies when one of its heads dies. Whatever this beast is (and we will discuss that point in just a moment), it is inextricably linked to its seven heads (as we would expect with any creature). If (as I think we will see) these seven heads are the emperors of Rome, then this beast is something that lives and dies with those emperors.

But verse 3 tells us something else about this beast and its head that was wounded to death — verse 3 tells us that that deadly wound was healed, which caused all the world to wonder at the beast.

Which Roman emperor is depicted by this head in verse 3 that is slain? We will learn more about this head when we get to Revelation 17. In verse 8 of that later chapter we will read this about the beast: “it was and is not and is to come.” That verse suggests that when this vision was being received, the beast was dead (it “**is not**”) and the deadly wound had not yet been healed (it “**is to come**”).

If this beast is Rome, and if these heads are the emperors of Rome, then what does it mean that the beast died and then come back to life?

If we had been living in Rome in the first century, then we would not have had to pause for one second in answering that question. We would have known exactly what was being shown to us here. We would have immediately recognized **Nero** in this description. Why?

After the death of Nero in AD 68, there were many rumors that Nero had in fact not died at all, but rather that he was planning to return and retake Rome. This belief came to be called the *Nero Redivivus* legend. The earliest written version of the legend is found in the Sibylline Oracles, which claim that Nero did not really die but fled to Parthia, where he planned to build a large army and return to Rome to destroy it.

At least three Nero imposters emerged to lead rebellions. The first, who sang and played the lyre and whose face was similar to that of Nero, appeared in AD 69 during the reign of Vitellius. Sometime during the reign of Titus there was another impostor who appeared in Asia and who also sang to the accompaniment of the lyre and looked like Nero. Twenty years after Nero's death, during the reign of Domitian, there was a third pretender. Domitian himself was regarded by some as the *Nero Redivivus*. Tertullian called Domitian "a limb of the bloody Nero."

Why would *Nero Redivivus* have been so frightening? What sort of persecution occurred under Nero? What sort of person was Nero? Here is how Suetonius describes him:

Nero castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his home attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that same kind of wife!

We are also told that Nero married his step-sister and that he murdered his step-father, his mother, and his wife. Nero first tried to kill his mother, Agrippina, by putting her aboard a boat that had been constructed to collapse, but after she survived, he had her hacked to pieces by his soldiers. (It tells us something about Nero's mother that Nero was cheered by the Romans when he returned to Rome after having killed her!)

When Nero came to power in AD 54, there were six other males who traced their heritage back to Augustus or Claudius. These men all died during Nero's reign, which was the main reason that Rome was plunged into chaos and civil war at Nero's death.

Nero took the wife of his closest friend (Otho) as his mistress and later kicked her to death when she was with child. In AD 64, Nero set fire to Rome so that he could rebuild it himself, and when suspicion turned on him, Nero blamed the Christians, who all knew were anticipating a fiery end of the world. As one modern historian puts it, "the belief that the fire had been started deliberately became so prevalent that Nero was forced to point a finger away from himself. He singled out the strange eastern cultists called Christians." Tacitus describes Nero's subsequent persecution of Christians in this way:

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

In short, it would be difficult to find a greater enemy of God and of God's people than the Roman emperor Nero — **and the rumor of the day was that this great enemy was about to return.**

While there was (and always will be) persecution of God's people, that persecution was much worse under Nero and again under Domitian. When we get to Revelation 17, we will see that this book was written between the reigns of Nero and Domitian, during the reign of Vespasian, Domitian's father. When this book was written there was a relative lull in the persecution. But the terrible persecution would soon start again — which is why the church really needed to hear a message of comfort and encouragement.

A modern analogy might be Hurricane Harvey. It is as if Houston had just been hit by that terrible storm, and then, a short time later, an equally terrible storm was once again approaching from the gulf. What sort of message would we need to hear in the lull between those two storms? That is the situation the church was in at this time, but they were not facing hurricanes; they were facing blood thirsty Roman emperors.

Domitian was that second hurricane, and he was coming. In fact, he was already around because he was the younger son of the current emperor, Vespasian. Domitian would become emperor soon himself after the death of his father and his older brother. Tertullian said that Nero was "the first emperor

who dyed his sword in Christian blood,” and Eusebius wrote that Domitian “finally showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us.” Hurricane Domitian was approaching!

This beast from the sea represents Rome from the perspective of the Roman emperors. This beast depicts Rome as a civil persecutor of God’s people, which reached its heights in the first century under Nero and Domitian. The government ordained by God had gone bad and had turned against the people of God. The first beast denotes that rogue Roman government.

In a moment, John will see a second beast, and that second beast will also represent Rome, but it will show us Rome from a different perspective.

Revelation 13:4

4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

In this verse we see two of the most horrible images in this entire book: dragon worship and beast worship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: “A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

If we worship the dragon, then like the dragon we will become. If we worship the beast, then like the beast we will become. And have no doubt — dragon worship and beast worship are alive and well today!

As we have already discussed, this dragon is Satan who was the driving power behind Rome’s attack against the church. Verse 4 tells us that the dragon had

given power to the beast. That tells us that Satan had given his authority to Rome so that Rome would attack the church on Satan's behalf.

Who is doing the worshipping in verse 4? It must be those on Rome's side, which this book consistently refers to throughout as those who dwell upon the earth. It is the ungodly who are worshipping the dragon and the beast. It is those outside the church.

But wait, some might say. What about all of the *good* Romans? What about the morally upright Romans who, although pagans, did not agree with what Rome was doing to the church. What about the people like Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10? Those Romans were in the same boat that Cornelius was prior to Peter's visit; they were lost. There was something they must do (Acts 10:6), but they had not done it yet. God had given them opportunities to repent, but they had not done so.

As much as mankind may want a third group of moral, well-intentioned people who are okay with God but who just haven't gotten around yet to obeying the gospel — there is no third group. There are only two groups: those in Christ and those out of Christ. And the group here in verse 4 is the group of those out of Christ. Yes, they weren't all cheering on the sidelines as these people in verse 4 seem to be doing, but Jesus' statement in Luke 11:23 is impossible to misunderstand: "He that is not with me is against me." Where is there a third group anywhere in that verse?

And why did these people worship the beast? Verses 3-4 tell us exactly why — this beast had died and had come back to life! Verse 3 tells us that this event caused the world to wonder after the beast. Verse 4 tells us that this event caused the world to ask who was like the beast and who could make war against the beast. This beast seemed unstoppable! But, of course, everything is not what it seems!

What did Jesus say about himself in the very first chapter of this book? "I am he that liveth, and was dead" (Revelation 1:18). What we are seeing here in Chapter 13 is truly horrible — we are seeing a ghastly parody of Jesus, who truly died and came back to life. Like Pharaoh's magicians, Rome is saying, "Look! We can do that, too!" The question in verse 4, "who is like the beast?" is a grim parody of the great question of Exodus 15:11 — "who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" It reminds us of Revelation 5:2 — "who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"

Remember one of the **central themes** running all throughout this book is the theme of Caesar or Christ. Which one has the true authority? Which one has the real power? Which one is worthy of our worship? Which one has a kingdom that will last forever and that will sweep away all other kingdoms? That theme is front and center in verse 4.

Just imagine this scene from the church's viewpoint. It must have almost seemed to them that even God was powerless to stop this great beast of Rome. Just when they thought the beast was dead, it had come back to life. What hope did the church have against such a powerful, unstoppable beast? Would this beast ever be killed once and for all? Would this beast always come back from the dead to persecute the church? Could this beast ever be stopped?

The situation looks bleak, but the very next verse includes a symbol that should provide hope and comfort to an alert reader!

Revelation 13:5-6

5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

What we are seeing in verse 5 is the resurrected beast — the beast who had come back to life. So if the beast who had been killed was Nero, then the beast who came back to life was Domitian. Let's see if the description given here fits with what we know about Domitian.

But first, why should an alert reader see hope and comfort in verse 5? Because verse 5 tells us that this resurrected beast has authority for only 42 months, which is three and half years — a broken seven! Now that we know what the symbol means, this statement in verse 4 provides a reason to rejoice. Verse 5 tells us that although this beast may seem unstoppable, all is not what it seems! This situation is temporary!

Jesus died and rose from the dead, never to die again. Verse 5 tells us that such will **not** be true of this beast from the sea! **Jesus is a seven! This beast is a broken seven!** (Keep that thought in mind as we inch ever closer to the very famous verse 18.)

The resurrected beast is pictured here as haughty and blasphemous. Was that true of Domitian? Yes. He required everyone to address him as “Our Lord God Domitian.” Remember the coins we looked at earlier. One coin described Domitian as a son of a god, and another coin pictured Domitian’s infant son as a deified world conqueror sitting on a globe and reaching for seven stars.

How did Paul describe Domitian in 2 Thessalonians?

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

How did Daniel describe Domitian six centuries before Domitian was born?

Daniel 7:25 — And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

Did you notice that broken seven there in Daniel 7? The Bible may seem like a puzzle at times, but the pieces all fit together perfectly! Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 13 are all describing the same person — the evil Roman emperor Domitian who picked up where Nero left off in persecuting the church of Christ!

Notice the end of verse 6 — “those who dwell in heaven.” That’s the church! That’s the opposite group from those who dwell upon the earth. Yes, those Christians who remained alive were still literally dwelling on the earth, but this book figuratively pictures them as dwelling in heaven. We see that comforting thought very clearly here in verse 6.

Why do I keep making this same point? Two reasons. First, because the text keeps making this same point. And second, because understanding this division between those who dwell on the earth and those who dwell in heaven

will be **crucial** to understanding the closing chapters of this book — chapters, I might add, that have very often been ripped from their proper context and from their proper time frame.

Lesson 31

Last week we started looking at Chapter 13, and we looked at the beast from the sea that John sees in verse 1. We saw that this first beast represents Rome from the perspective of the evil Roman emperors. We saw how the beast being killed but then coming back to life represented the death of Nero and the rise of Domitian, who picked up persecuting the church where Nero had left off. The broken seven in verse 5 gave us hope that this resurrected beast of Rome under Domitian would not continue forever. Verse 7 continues the description of Rome under the Emperor Domitian.

Revelation 13:7-8

7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. 8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

In verse 7, the resurrected beast (Domitian) makes war on the church, and he is pictured here as actually overcoming the church. This is the same situation we saw back in Revelation 7:7 where the beast (Rome) came out of the bottomless pit and killed the two witnesses (the church).

Here, as in Chapter 7, we are simply being shown the situation from the beast's perspective. Rome *thought* it had overcome the church — but things are not what they seem! We already know from verse 5 that verse 7 is not the end of the story! We are in a period of 42 months, which means that what we are seeing here is temporary, just a broken seven. Verse 7 may look like a defeat of the church, but we know it is not. How do we know that for sure? Because God has already shown us how this all ends! We saw the happy ending for the church back in Chapter 11.

The end of verse 7 confirms that we are looking at a Roman emperor — who else at this time could be said to have power “over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.” And who gave that power to Rome? Ultimately, all authority comes from God, but we know that Rome was not using its power according to God’s will. Instead, Rome was following the will of the dragon, who verse 2 told us was the one who gave power to Rome.

Those who dwell upon the earth in verse 8 are those outside of the church, who are on Rome’s side. What does it mean in verse 8 when those outside the church are described as those “whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”? Here is how the ESV translates that verse: “everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”

Our first question is this — which translation is correct? Were the names written in the book from the foundation of the world, or was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?

If we go by the order of the Greek words, then the KJV is correct — the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. That would mean that the sacrificial death of Christ was part of God’s plan all along, which is something we know already from Genesis 3:15.

What is the support for the ESV translation? The best support comes from the parallel passage in Revelation 17.

***Revelation 17:8** — The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, **whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,** when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

In fact, that parallel verse is enough for me to conclude that the ESV of Revelation 13:8 is the correct translation: “everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”

But does that then mean that those in the book of life were predestined for salvation before they were even born, and that those not in the book of life were predestined for damnation before their birth? **Of course not! How could it?** The entire Bible screams out against such a heinous concept.

As we often do, let's turn to an easy to understand statement in the Bible that can help us with this more difficult statement in verse 8.

2 Peter 3:9 — *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

“Not willing that any should perish.” How can anyone misunderstand that? Is God willing that some should perish? No. God's will is that no one should perish. So then why do so many perish? Because of their own will.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 — *And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that **perish**; because **they** received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

It is not God's will that anyone should perish! It is impossible to reconcile that fact with the idea that God predestined the vast bulk of mankind to damnation before they were even created! Any Christian should be repulsed by such an idea! I am concerned about anyone who could read the entire Bible and then here, in the final book of the Bible, believe that God created some people just to fuel the fires of hell. But is that really what Calvinists believe? Let's let John Calvin answer that question.

Calvin: “We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of **each man**. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as **any man** has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of **him** as predestined to life or to death.”

Why proclaim the gospel at all if the Book of Life had already been filled up before the world was even created? And why is there is a struggle to remain faithful unto death if the Book of Life is written with indelible ink? And what about Revelation 3:5, which talks about God blotting names out of that book? Although not everyone's name will be in the book of life, that book has enough space in it to hold everyone's name — there is no other way to understand 2 Peter 3:9.

So what then is meant by verse 8? Paul tells us exactly what it means. Notice the **plural** pronouns as I read these verses, and notice how they differ from the **singular** pronouns used by John Calvin.

Ephesian 1:4-6 — *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

Yes, predestination is true. **But, individuals are not predestined. Instead, what is predestined is the church.**

God's plan was that there would be a book of life and that those in his eternal kingdom would have their names written in that book — and that was God's plan from before the foundation of the world. **But that is a plan for the church.** That is what Ephesians 1 tells us. And verse 8 here in Revelation 13 gives us the other side of that coin — just as those in the church are predestined to life, those outside the church are predestined to death. **The two groups are predestined; not the individuals in the two groups.** Those outside the church can join the group predestined to life if they obey the gospel, and those inside the church can fall back into the group predestined to death if they are not faithful unto death.

We earlier discussed what it meant for God to mark his people as his own special possession. That symbolic mark is tied to having one's name marked or recorded in the Book of Life. The Old Testament closes with a beautiful description of this idea.

Malachi 3:16-17 — *Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

“They shall be mine!” One of the greatest Bible scholars I ever knew was Marion Williams, and here is what she wrote next to Malachi 3 in the margin of her Bible (which I now own):

No matter how lonely this life, how far from loved ones and friends, think on this splendid, magnificent truth: Almighty God says of us, ‘This one is mine’ — the ultimate recognition, the ultimate friendship.

Yes, God has a Book of Life. Yes, God has a Book of Remembrance. And, yes, that book is the book you want to be in! That is the book where God writes the names of those to whom he says, “this one is mine!” And the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God’s book of life has enough space in it for everyone’s name to fit! That’s not what John Calvin says, but it is most certainly what Jesus says.

Matthew 11:28 — Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Is the invitation of Christ to **all** people or just to **some** people? “Come unto me, **all** ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Revelation 13:9-10

9 If any man have an ear, let him hear. 10 He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The message of verse 10 is the same message we find in Romans 12:19 — “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” And God’s repayment to Rome would be a repayment in kind. Those who had led Christians captive would themselves be led captive, and those who had killed Christians with the sword would themselves be killed with the sword. We are reminded of the word of Jesus in Matthew 26:52 — “for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

When would this happen, and how would this happen? The book itself answers the question of when — it would happen **soon**. We are told that from the very first verse of the book all the way through to the closing verses of the book.

But how would it happen? Would Rome literally be taken captive? Would Roman literally face the sword? Yes, Rome later had some very rough times, leading eventually to its fall in AD 476. But I don't think that is what we are seeing here.

This book is not about a physical deliverance and a physical judgment — everything we have seen so far has been pointing to a spiritual deliverance and a spiritual judgment. In fact, the suffering Christians have been told that their suffering on this earth will continue, and that they must remain faithful unto death. Likewise, while Nero and Domitian met gruesome ends, most Romans did not. Their judgment was not physical, but was spiritual.

I think that verse 10 of Chapter 13 is telling us the same thing we saw in verse 11 of the previous chapter: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Both verses confirm that what we are seeing in this book is a **spiritual** deliverance of God's people rather than a **physical** deliverance. Why? **Because verse 10 confirms that the Christians would be led captive and would be put to death by the sword.** Verse 10 confirms that their deliverance would not be a physical deliverance.

There are consequences in this life from following Christ, and Christians must accept those consequences. We know from 2 Timothy 3:12 that those consequences will involve persecution, and part of daily taking up our cross is accepting those consequences. In the first century, those consequences included death and captivity, and verse 10 does not promise a physical deliverance from those consequences. In fact, it promises the opposite; it promises that those consequences will occur.

But verse 10 ends by listing the weapons and the armor that are available to a Christian and that will allow a Christian to be spiritually delivered. “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

The Greek word translated *patience* does not mean passive endurance, but rather it means courageously accepting the worst in this life so that we can turn it into glory for God. The Greek word translated *faith* means a fidelity that never wavers. Those were the weapons that Christians used in the first century to conquer the mighty Roman empire, and those same weapons will still conquer the strongholds of Satan today.

Ephesians 6:16 — Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Was the church at war with Rome? Yes. Most definitely. Are we likewise at war today with the godlessness that threatens to engulf us? Yes. Most definitely. Are our weapons carnal? No. Most definitely not. Our weapons are steadfast endurance and loyalty to Christ. Nothing on earth can defeat us while we wield those weapons! Faith is the victory!

1 John 5:4 — For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

That verse is not describing a physical victory, and neither is this book of Revelation. Jesus conquered Satan through death, and so will we if we remain faithful unto death. When we cross over that finish line, we will be forever out of Satan's grasp.

We know that those who remain faithful unto death will one day hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." But the sad truth is that everyone will one day hear those same words, but for many those words will be spoken, not by Christ, but by Satan. Everyone on earth is the faithful servant of someone, but the victory of faith belongs only to those who are the faithful servant of Christ.

One final comment about verse 10 — notice the word "here" in the final sentence. "**Here** is the patience and the faith of the saints." How can we remain patient in the face of persecution? How can we remain faithful in the face of discouragement? By remembering that God is in control, that God knows what is happening, and that God loves us. Isn't that the message of the first half of verse 10? God knew what Rome was doing to the saints, and God was going to take care of Rome and take care of the saints — but in very different ways! Rome was to be judged and face punishment. The saints were to enjoy a spiritual deliverance putting them forever out of the clutches of the great red dragon. **Here** is the patience and the faith of the saints!

Revelation 13:11-12

11 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and

he spake as a dragon. 12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

The first beast arose from the sea. In verse 11, we meet a second beast that arises, not from the sea, but from the earth.

First, why are there **two** beasts in this chapter? Throughout our study we have seen the number two being used to represent Rome. The appearance of two beasts in this chapter points us all the way back to the mythology of how Rome was founded. According to legend, Rome was founded by the twin brothers Romulus and Remus, who were raised by a wolf. Because Romulus was raised by a wolf, one early source even called him “the son of the beast.”

Since ancient times, the image of the twins brothers Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf has been a symbol of the city of Rome and the Roman people. According to Roman mythology, Romulus killed Remus and then went on to found the city of Rome and the Roman Kingdom. Coins minted at the time of this book show the twins living as two beasts, being nursed by a wolf (with Domitian on the front of the coin).

The beast twins Romulus and Remus had by the first century been replaced by another set of beast twins — Nero and Domitian (who, although not physical twins, acted as twins when it came to persecuting the church). Back in Chapter 11, we saw the church represented by two witnesses, where we saw that the number two represented royalty and priesthood. Here we see the same combination — the first beast showed us the royal side of Rome, while we will soon see that this second beast is showing us the religious or priestly side of Rome.

Earlier we saw two witnesses, and here we see two beasts. Which pair will prevail? Will Nero and Domitian conquer the two witnesses, or will the two witnesses conquer Nero and Domitian? Caesar or Christ? Which royal priesthood is eternal and which is not? Those are the questions in this chapter.

So what can we say about this second beast? What aspect of Rome does this second beast depict? As we always do, let’s consider the clues.

The first thing we see about this second beast is that it rises from the **earth**. This part of the beast's description stresses its **human origin**. In verse 18 we will see that it is given "the number of a man" This second beast is man-made. This second beast is a beast made with human hands.

Now where have we seen that distinction before? All the way back in Daniel, written six centuries earlier, where Daniel was also talking about the Roman empire.

***Daniel 2:44-45** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that **the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands**, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.*

The logic of that verse is inescapable: **you show me a man-made religion, and I'll show you something that is NOT the eternal kingdom of God!** The eternal kingdom of God was not made with human hands. Instead, it was created by the hands of God in Acts 2. There is a sharp line drawn all throughout the Bible between those things made with human hands and those things that are not.

***Acts 17:24-25** — God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, **dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands**, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.*

This second beast rises up from the earth. Its origin is with man. Later in Revelation 16:13 and Revelation 19:20, we will see this second beast referred to as a **false prophet**. That identification, combined with the description here in Chapter 13, shows us that this second beast is depicting Rome as a false, man-made religion. And what was the religion of Rome? **Caesar worship**.

Verse 12 confirms this view — there we see that this second beast causes the earth to worship the first beast. The first beast showed us the royal side of

Rome with its seven heads and its ten horns, all representing kings. Verse 12 tells us that the false, man-made religion of Rome shown by the second beast caused men to worship the Roman emperors shown by the first beast.

Finally, verse 11 tells us that this second beast looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon. This second beast is a dragon in sheep's clothing. We are reminded of something else that dresses like a sheep.

Matthew 7:15 — *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

So already here in verse 11, we see this second beast shown to us as a false prophet, which is what it will be explicitly called later in Chapters 16 and 19.

Verse 11 also reminds of something we saw earlier about the first beast. Like that first beast which died and came back to life, this second beast is also being shown as a terrible parody of the true lamb of God. But this lamb in verse 11 is a false lamb. This lamb in verse 11 is really a dragon. We are reminded of something Paul wrote.

2 Corinthians 11:13-14 — *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

Here in verse 11 Satan has transformed himself into a lamb!

The two horns in verse 11 give us yet another appearance of the number two. The "two horns like a lamb" may be saying that, like the true lamb, this second beast is a combination of royalty and priesthood. The beast looks like a king, and it looks like a priest — but it speaks like Satan. The two horns may instead or may also be pointing to the two Roman kings, Nero and Domitian.

You mean Satan would attack the church by creating a false man-made religion that looks like a lamb on the surface but is anything but a lamb underneath? Yes, and in fact that seems to be Satan's most common way of attacking the church! If Satan can't conquer the church with a frontal assault, then perhaps Satan can bury the church in a sea of religious confusion and religious error. How can we stop him from doing that?

Matthew 5:14-16 — *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a can-*

dlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

The cure for religious darkness is a flashlight! And we are God's flashlight! It is up to us to shine the light of Christ into this dark world of sin and death.

2 Peter 1:19 — We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

If we don't shine that light, who will? If we don't proclaim the truth in a world full of darkness, who will? Who else will stand up against Satan's plans?

So where are we? The first beast from the sea portrayed the royal side of Rome. This second beast from the earth portrays the perverted religious side of Rome. This second beast is pointing to Caesar worship, the Roman cult that worshipped the Roman emperors and considered them to be gods. This Roman cult was especially strong in the provinces to which the seven letters of Chapters 2-3 were directed. It was this Roman cult that led to the great persecution of the church. Verse 12 shows us how closely they were tied together — the second beast "exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him." Caesar worship got its power from Caesar.

Together, these two beasts portray Rome as a **royal priesthood**, with the first beast showing the royalty of Rome and the second beast showing the priesthood of Rome. Just as we have seen Rome masquerading as a parody of Christ, we see Rome here masquerading as a parody of the kingdom of Christ, the church.

It looks like we have two royal priesthoods! We have the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9 and Zechariah 6, which is the church, and we have the royal priesthood of Rome. Which royal priesthood will prevail? Caesar or Christ?

The next few verses tell us some more about the priesthood of Rome.

Revelation 13:13-15

13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth

in the sight of men, 14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

Throughout this book, that which is genuine and from God has been accompanied by that which is false and from the earth, and the signs and wonders from God are no exception. Here we see that the beast also had signs and wonders, but of course they are just **false** signs and **false** wonders.

Paul described such signs and wonders (and confirmed that they were false) when he described the lawless one (Domitian) in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 — “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and **lying** wonders.” Verse 14 also confirms that these were false signs — it tells us that they **deceived** those who dwell on the earth. True signs confirm (Mark 16:20); false signs deceive.

What were these false signs and lying wonders? Much of it involved magic and the occult. Stephen Benko in his book *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (page 128) writes that “certain elements in the official Roman religion were based on magical principles” and that “magic was an accepted form of religious piety.”

History tells us that the Roman priests were both ventriloquists and magicians. Originally ventriloquism was a religious practice. The word ventriloquism comes from the Latin phrase meaning to speak from the stomach. The noises produced by the stomach were thought to be the voices of the dead, who took up residence in the stomach of the ventriloquist. The ventriloquist would then interpret the sounds as if he were speaking to the dead, and he would also foretell the future. Roman priests used ventriloquism to make it appear as if statues of Roman emperors were speaking. That is likely what is

being referred to in verses 14 and 15 — making an image and giving life to the image so that it speaks.

An example of such a person in the Bible may have been Elymas the sorcerer in Acts 13:8 who had influence over a Roman proconsul. And you remember what Paul said to him in verse 10 — “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Paul certainly knew how to get right to the point!)

Verse 14 tells us that these false miracles deceived those that dwell on the earth. The Christians were not deceived; they knew the miracles were false. But many outside the church were deceived. Remember how Revelation 12:9 described Satan — he “deceiveth the whole world.” Satan was deceiving the world with lying wonders in the first century, and Satan is still doing that same thing today. Just turn on the TV and watch the so-called faith healers. People wait in line and pay money to be deceived by such people.

One of the great lessons in this book for us is the lesson of how Satan operates in this world. Satan is still doing today what Satan was doing then — he is trying to destroy the church from within and from without, and he is trying to deceive the world. In 2 Corinthians 2:11, we are cautioned to not be ignorant of Satan’s devices, but for us to heed that caution we must know Satan’s devices. Those devices are on full display in the book of Revelation. We need to study those devices in this book so that we can recognize them when we see them at work in our own world.

Verse 15 says that this second beast would kill those who refused to worship the image of the beast. The magistrate and Roman religious hierarchy had the power to impose death on anyone who refused to confess Caesar as Lord.

Hailey: “This put the Christian in the position where he must confess either Christ or Caesar as Lord, thus choosing between immediate death and a few added years of life before eternal death.”

As an aside, the idolatry pictured again and again in this book points directly at Rome and at the false religious practices of Roman Caesar worship. Those who think the villain in this book is Jerusalem have a lot of trouble explaining all of these references to idolatry. Idolatry was not a problem in Jerusalem in the first century.

We all know the steps to salvation: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and remain faithful unto death. Is one of those steps more important than the others? We might be tempted, perhaps, to say that baptism is more important because baptism is the point where the transition occurs from the kingdom of darkness to the eternal kingdom — but that baptism is just a bath if it is not preceded by the previous steps. If I let down a ladder so that you can escape a burning building, will you think that one rung of that ladder was somehow more important than the other rungs? Aren't they all equally important from the first rung to the last rung if you are using the rungs of that ladder to climb out of the burning building?

Why do I ask that question? Because sometimes I fear that we treat the step of confession as secondary to the step of baptism; that somehow confession is less important. Would we see that step of confession differently if we had a loaded gun at our head while we proclaimed our belief that Jesus is the son of the living God? Those who made the good confession in the first century often did so under threat of death. Let's think about those Christians the next time we hear someone make that good confession. And let's make sure we have a microphone for that confession so that everyone in this building can hear it! "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). And let's make sure that our first confession is not our last confession. We need to daily confess our faith in Jesus Christ as the son of living God to all who will listen!

We haven't said much in our study of the book of Revelation about the anti-christ. And that is because the antichrist is nowhere mentioned in this book. But John does tell us in another book what it means to be an antichrist — and it involves confession.

*2 John 1:7 — For many deceivers are entered into the world, who **confess not** that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

The world is full of such deceivers and such antichrists. How do we fight them? By doing what they will not do — by confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh!

Lesson 32

Last week we looked at the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth in Chapter 13. We saw that each beast represents Rome, but from different perspectives. The beast from the sea shows Rome from the perspective of the evil Roman emperors. The beast from the earth shows Rome from the perspective of its false religion — Caesar worship. Combining those two views of Rome, we see that Rome is being shown to us as a royal priesthood, just as the church was earlier shown to us. Which royal priesthood will prevail? The royal priesthood of God? Or the royal priesthood of man?

Verses 16-18 tell us more about the beast from the sea, including a description in verse 18 that is one of the most well-known descriptions in the entire book of Revelation.

One of the things we saw last week is that this second beast representing Caesar worship arose from the earth. As we discussed, that this beast comes from the earth shows us that it is a man-made religion. And no man-made religion could possibly be the eternal kingdom made without hands. That was true then, and that is still true today.

There is also a historical reason why this second beast is shown as arising from the earth. Caesar worship did not arise from Caesar; Caesar worship arose from the Roman people.

It is wrong to think that the various peoples conquered by Rome all resented that new Roman government. Instead, for the most part, they were grateful for it. Rome had brought justice, and law, and peace, and prosperity. The *pax Romana*, the Roman peace, stretched over all the known world.

That is why the Roman people, and especially the people who lived in the Roman provinces, were grateful to Rome, and it is easy to see how that gratitude began to be focused on the emperor, who stood for Rome and embodied Rome. It was in Asia Minor (to which the letters in Chapters 2-3 are addressed) that people first began to think of Caesar as a god.

At first the emperors discouraged this worship. Then they tried to confine it to the provinces, but soon it spread everywhere. And then the Roman government saw that they could use that Caesar worship as a unifying force to bring together all of the various peoples and cultures that they had conquered. And

eventually the emperors began to believe their own press clippings — they began to believe that they were in fact gods. That was certainly true of Domitian, as Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

One other thing that we should understand about Rome is that Rome was the essence of toleration. After someone had burned his pinch of incense to Caesar and confessed that “Caesar is Lord,” that person could then go away and worship any god he liked, so long as that worship did not affect public decency and public order.

But, of course, no Christian could ever make such a confession. Christians refused to conform, and so the Roman government regarded them as dangerous and disloyal. The Roman government persecuted the church because they insisted that they had no king but Christ. Persecution came to the Christians because they put Christ first. And doesn't persecution always come to people who do that?

Today we also live in a nation that is the essence of toleration — but doesn't our nation also have its pinches of incense? Doesn't our own nation have its own required confessions?

Aren't we daily called upon to confess that homosexuality is natural and approved by God? Aren't we daily called upon to confess that evolution is a fact? Aren't we daily called upon to confess that all religions are equal? And we could go on and on because the list of required confessions gets longer and longer every year.

No Christian can make those confessions, and so we face persecution. Not much has changed, although thankfully we are not facing the type of persecution they faced, at least not yet. In Rome, the persecution began as economic persecution — the Christians would lose their livelihood when they failed to make the proper confession. We have already reached that point in this country. What is next?

Whatever comes next, we know what we must do. We must remain faithful to Christ. Yes, the world will hate us — but isn't that what Jesus told us to expect?

***Luke 6:22-23** — Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in*

heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

Is the book of Revelation relevant for us today? Let me ask that question a different way — is a book that shows how a Christian must live in the face of government persecution relevant today? Yes, and it is increasingly relevant. We also need the message of comfort and victory in this final book of the Bible. Yes, that message was originally for those suffering under the hand of Rome. But it is also a message for the church in any age.

Revelation 13:16-18

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Verse 16 tells us that the beast marked his own people. Just as God marked his people in Chapter 7 to show that they are his, the beast marks his people here in Chapter 13 for the same reason — to show that they belong to the beast.

God knows his people. Satan also knows his people. Everyone on earth then and everyone on earth today is wearing someone's mark. Each of us either belongs to God or to Satan. Each of us is either in the power of darkness or in the kingdom of God's dear son (Colossians 1:13).

But surely all of the famous people are okay with God, right? And the rich people don't have any reason to worry, right? Wrong. God and Satan have one thing in common — neither is a respecter of persons! Verse 16 tells us that Satan marks "both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond." Men create all sorts of distinctions based on race, wealth, politics, and many other categories. But when viewed from eternity only one distinction matters — in

Christ or out of Christ. It is that distinction and no other that determines whose mark you are wearing. It is that distinction and no other that determines where you will spend eternity.

Verse 17 tells us that no one could buy or sell without the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. What does that mean?

When we discussed the letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3, we discussed the economic persecution that Christians suffered at the hands of the Roman trade guilds. A confession that Caesar is Lord was usually required before one was allowed to buy or sell. Those who refused to make that confession were seen as unpatriotic, and they suffered severe economic hardships. Remember what Jesus said to some of them in Revelation 2:9 — “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich).” They had physical poverty and spiritual riches.

Christians in the first century were faced with a daily choice — Caesar or Christ. They could wear the mark of Christ by confessing Christ, or they could wear the mark of the beast by confessing Caesar. The mark of the beast allowed them to practice their trade and make a living. The mark of Christ brought hardship and persecution. That is the daily choice for every Christian in every age: Caesar or Christ.

***Matthew 5:10-12** — Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

***Luke 9:23-24** — If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

Verses 17-18 tell us four more things about the mark of the beast — it is the name of the beast, it is the number of his name, it is the number of a man, and the number is 666. What does all of that mean?

Revelation 13:18 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible, perhaps ranking right up there with John 3:16. Verse 18 has entered the public consciousness

to a greater degree than any other verse in the book of Revelation. People who can't even name the four gospel writers can tell you something about 666. As one commentator has noted, "no verse in Revelation has received more attention than this one with its cryptic reference to the number of the beast."

Verse 18 begins with a call for wisdom, and yet verse 18 has spawned a great deal of foolishness. Did you know that the barcodes found on every product you buy today are the mark of the beast and a clear indication that we are living in the end times? Some say so. The two bars that denote the number six appear at the beginning, middle, and end of every barcode found on the back cover of most books. Terry Cook in his book *The Mark of the New World Order* writes that "the entire [UPC barcode] system is very deceptively designed around the infamous numerical configuration, Biblically known as 666, the mark of the Antichrist or devil." Mary Stewart Relfe in her book *The New Money System 666* writes that "the Prophet John identified this Cashless System of Commerce 1900 years ago as one in which business would be transacted with a 'Mark' and a Number; the Mark will obviously be a Bar Code; the Number will be '666;' the combination of the two, about which you will read in this book, will be an integral part of the '666 System.'" Ridiculous? Yes, extremely so, but sadly not uncommon at all when it comes to explanations of 666. How anyone can reach those crazy conclusions in a verse that opens with the phrase "here is wisdom" is beyond me!

When I think of the number 666, I think of my sister. That statement likely needs a bit of explanation! Many people today are very superstitious about the number 666. When my sister worked at *Texas Commerce Bank* in the early eighties, she received the following letter (which she gave to me, and which I still have):

To Whom It May Concern, I feel that I must return this credit card to you because of the account number. If you'll notice the last 3 digits are the numbers "666." I am a Christian and these numbers have been talked about in the Bible as a mark of the Antichrist. For this reason I am returning this card to you. If you do not understand what I am talking about I would only encourage you to open your bible and read it to understand.

That's good advice, but when we open our Bibles, we will not find anything in here at all about the mark of the antichrist. In fact, the word "antichrist" appears nowhere in the book of Revelation. And we will not find anything in here about bar codes or credit cards. Instead, what we find is a number that

must be interpreted, as we do all of the symbols in this book, in view of its context and its time frame. And we need to interpret the symbol with wisdom, which means we must apply the wisdom we obtain from the entirety of God's word — not just this one verse.

What does the number 666 depict? Let's ask another question first — what number would we choose to represent **divine perfection**? Well, three is the number for God, and seven is the number for perfection — so wouldn't 777 be a very good choice for a symbol of divine perfection? If we did, then we know that no created being could ever be described as 777. Instead, that symbolic number 777 could be applied only to the Creator, not ever to a mere creature.

With that thought in mind, let's re-ask our earlier question: what does the number 666 depict? Isn't the answer easy now? Doesn't verse 18 itself give us a big clue? It is the number of a man. Is it not the number of the Creator, but it is the number of a man. If 777 denotes divine perfection, then what number would we choose to represent someone who had aspirations of divinity, but who fell hopelessly short of that goal? The number 666. This beast wanted to be a 777, but it was only a 666! It fell short in every respect! The beast thought it was a god, but it was just a man. The beast thought it was 777, but it was only 666.

Does that view of the symbol 666 accurately describe this beast? Yes! No symbol could describe this beast any better! This beast represents the false perverted religious side of Rome. It represents the man-made Roman religion that worshiped the creature (Caesar) rather than the creator (Romans 1:25). **Jesus is 777! Caesar is 666!** It is a beautiful symbol that shows the stark contrast between God and his creation.

Hailey: "666 stands for the complete and total failure of all human systems and efforts antagonistic to God and His Christ — all are doomed to ultimate and complete defeat and failure."

But can this really be all there is to 666! Surely it must be something more than that! It was a lot more than that in that movie, *The Omen*! As I recall, Gregory Peck found 666 tattooed on the head of Damien the Antichrist! There are several responses to that objection.

First, for those apart from Christ who are struggling to locate 666, all they need to do is look in a mirror. For anyone outside of Christ, the number 666 is easy to find — they are wearing it! Satan has marked them with it. The only

way to remove that mark is with the blood of Christ through obedience to the gospel.

Second, we need to let the Bible rather than Hollywood explain the symbols in this book, and we need to view this symbol in its proper perspective. The symbol of 666 is just another symbol in a book full of symbols. It may stand apart from the other symbols in our modern consciousness, but it does not stand apart from the other symbols in the text.

Yes, 666 is a wonderfully descriptive symbol, but there are many other wonderfully descriptive symbols in the book of Revelation. We must remember that this book was primarily intended to provide comfort to the first century Christians who were suffering intense persecution by Rome. If our interpretation of the book ignores that fundamental fact, then our interpretation is wrong. The church needed to know that Rome was just a 666!

Lenski: In other words, not 777, but competing with 777, seeking to obliterate 777, but doing so abortively, its failure being as complete as was its expansion by puffing itself up from 6 to 666.

Is there a lesson for the church today in the symbol of 666? Yes. The church needs to understand today that there are many 666's in our own world. **We are surrounded by man-made churches, man-made religions, and man-made philosophies — and all of them are just 666.** There are many so-called churches today that should have 666 printed on their signs out front because they are just **a man-made church proclaiming a man-made gospel.** They may have delusions of grandeur, but they are just 666. And on that great last day, the last thing you want to rely on is a 666.

*Acts 4:12 — Neither is there salvation in any other:
for there is none other name under heaven given
among men, whereby we must be saved.*

And that name is 777!

Before we leave our discussion of verse 18, we need to consider another possible significance for 666, and it stems from something called **gematria**. Gematria refers to the representation of words by their numerical equivalents so that the number then represents the word. It is not very common today, but that has not always been the case.

We know that gematria was common in the first century. At Pergamum, inscribed stones have been found containing numerical riddles based on gema-

tria. Graffiti found in the ruins of Pompeii reads, “I love her whose number is 545,” and “Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honorable name is 45.” One commentator states that “gematria was widely used in apocalyptic [literature] because of its symbolic and enigmatic quality.” I don’t think it is widely used in the Bible, but it may be used here in verse 18.

Here are the questions we need to consider: **First**, is the reference to 666 in verse 18 an example of gematria? **Second**, if so, then to what or to whom does the number refer? **Third**, if so, is that meaning the primary meaning of the symbol or perhaps just a secondary meaning?

Let’s start with the third question first. Earlier we discussed the symbolic meaning of 666 as something that has fallen hopelessly short of the divine 777, and we saw how that symbol perfectly depicted the second beast from the earth. That symbol fits so perfectly and is explained so well in terms of the symbol seven (around which this entire book is constructed), I am convinced that the primary meaning behind the symbol of 666 is something that has fallen hopelessly short of divine perfection. And so, if we determine that gematria is being used in verse 18, I think it must be just a *secondary* meaning of the symbol.

And there is some evidence in the text for that view — verse 18 begins with a call for wisdom, which may be an indication that a dual meaning is involved here. We see something similar in Matthew 24:15 when Jesus refers to Daniel’s prophecy about the abomination of desolation: “whoso readeth, let him understand.” When we studied Daniel we saw that Daniel prophesied about two such abominations, one that occurred under the Greeks and one that occurred later under the Romans. I think Jesus was cautioning his listeners to read those prophecies from Daniel extra carefully to make sure they didn’t confuse those two events. Perhaps the phrase “let him that hath understanding” in verse 18 is here for a similar reason. We have discussed before how difficult it is to determine secondary meanings for prophecies absent being explicitly told by God. There is no such explicit statement in verse 18, but there may be a suggestion in verse 18.

So, that leaves us with two questions — was gematria used here, and, if so, to what or to whom does the number 666 refer?

Before we answer those questions, we should pause to consider an important warning. One has to be very careful when heading off into this direction in the Bible because right near the edge of these questions there is a very steep

slope heading straight down into sheer speculation and utter nonsense. Those going down this road sometimes find themselves trying to read some numerical significance into every word of the Bible. Many books have been published that claim to have discovered a secret code in the Bible that predicts the names, locations, and dates of future events. What those books fail to tell you is that those same methods could be applied to almost any book to obtain similar secret messages. People need to quit looking for secret messages in the Bible and start heeding the messages in the Bible that are clear for all to understand.

We need to be particularly careful with gematria because, as we know, it is possible to prove anything with numbers if one is willing to twist the facts while ignoring the context and all other evidence to the contrary.

But with that said, anyone who studies 666 and the history of its interpretation must be struck by some strange curiosities. For example, we all know the six Roman numbers: I(1), V(5), X(10), L(50), C(100), and D(500). What do you get when you add up the values of the five Roman numbers? 666. Take the first seven primes numbers (2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, and 17) and sum their squares: $4 + 9 + 25 + 49 + 121 + 169 + 289$. What do you get? 666. Spooky! (And irrelevant!)

So, going back to the text, is gematria used in verse 18? Possibly. We know that gematria was common at the time, and we know that some of the earliest commentaries on Revelation have turned to gematria to explain this verse.

But then what could 666 denote? There are a number of words and names that could be represented by 666, depending on the language we choose (Hebrew, Greek, or Latin) and how we then associate letters in that language with numbers. Having this many variables makes it very difficult to determine which (if any) was the word or phrase (if any) that God intended for us to associate with 666.

We should probably not expect a perfect fit. Why? Because in my view the primary meaning of 666 does not rely on gematria but rather relies on the symbolic meaning of 666 as falling short of 777. That is, the number 666 was not chosen to represent a name but was chosen for its symbolic significance. It may also represent a name, but if it does we should probably not expect the same perfect fit we would have had if the number had been chosen solely on that basis.

There is evidence that some have tried to change the text to make what they consider a better fit. Some of your Bibles may have a footnote that says some

early texts have 616 in verse 18 rather than 666. Lenski describes that textual issue:

This is not a faulty transcription but a deliberate alteration that was made very early and against which the strongest protest was at once raised. The alteration was made so that by gematria the number would fit the emperor [Caligula]. This was the man who made the effort to have his image erected in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Thus, those early texts that show 616 in place of 666 most likely represent someone's attempt to make the number 666 a better fit for someone's name by changing it to 616. The correct value is 666, not 616.

But those early manuscripts with 616 do tell us something important. Those changes from 666 to 616 confirm that from very early in its history commentators have understood verse 18 to include an example of gematria. We should not be too quick to discount viewpoints that are closely located in time to the original readers of this book.

So who could 666 represent? There are numerous candidates, but, not surprisingly, the leading candidate is Nero, whose name could also be said to depict Domitian as *Nero Redivivus*. Various numerical representations will give us 666 from either Nero Caesar or *Neron* (the Latin form of his name that appears, for example, in the subscript in the KJV at the end of 2nd Timothy), but other names can be made to fit as well. In short, no one can be certain that gematria is used, and if it is used, no one can be certain who is represented, but Nero is a likely candidate because of the context of verse 18.

Let's next consider the other side of the argument. A very good case can be made for the proposition that no gematria at all is involved in verse 18. For example, verse 18 omits a definite article before "man," which may indicate that no particular man is in mind. Also, as one commentator notes, "what is not generally stressed is that [the most commonly given] solution [pointing to Nero] asks you to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling." Lenski gives us other objections as well:

It is surprising to note how many men think that "666" is the product of gematria. ... Yet nowhere is Scripture, nowhere in Revelation do we meet with another case of gematria. ... A number that is produced by gematria would remain an insolu-

ble conundrum; yet the very title of this book is “Revelation.” ... Take some name and set down the value of each of its letters, add these, write the sum. A hundred other names may produce the same sum.

Those are all good objections, and some of them are even compelling. But with those objections stated, I still believe it is possible that 666 has a secondary significance based on gematria, and I would point to verses 17-18 for support as well as the view of ancient commentators on that subject.

Whatever we conclude about gematria, the primary significance of 666 is that it falls hopelessly short of the divine perfection. That idea fits perfectly with the context of this second beast representing the false perverted religion of Rome.

What then is the setting at the end of Chapter 13? A terrible dragon has given his authority to a seven headed beast that has arisen from the sea. The beast is killed but comes back to life. A second beast arises and looks like a lamb but sounds like a dragon. The second beast performs signs and wonders and causes the earth to worship the first beast. The chapter ends with the whole earth in the spell of the dragon and the two beasts.

What does the church need at this point? The church needs comfort and assurance, which is exactly what Chapter 14 provides.

Chapter 14

Revelation 14:1-5

1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: 3 And

they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. 4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Look at the incredible contrast between the last verse of Chapter 13 and the first verse of Chapter 14! Chapter 13 ended with the mark of the beast that was written on all those who worshiped the dragon. Chapter 14 begins with those who have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father on their foreheads.

We have been tracing the number two through this book, and here we see two groups. We see the group that has chosen Caesar in Chapter 13, and we see the group that has chosen Christ in Chapter 14. There is no third group.

There is no doubt to whom these people in Chapter 14 belong! They have the Father's name written on their foreheads! "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

There is a lesson here for us today. Is there ever any doubt about to whom we belong? There was no doubt for these Christians in first century Rome. To be a Christian in Rome meant a constant risk to one's life and one's livelihood. There were very few half-hearted lackluster Christians at that time.

But what about today? We need to live our lives in such a way that no one will ever have any doubt that we belong to Christ. Our Christian walk should be so apparent to the world that it is as if we literally had the name of God marked on our foreheads.

Who is the group in verses 1-5? Let's consider the clues:

- We see the 144,000 again in verse 1. We recognize that number as a beautiful symbol for ALL of God's people: twelve times twelve times ten times ten times ten!
- The Father's name is written on their foreheads in verse 1. These people belong to God. He has claimed them as his own.
- In verse 3, there is a new song that only the 144,000 can learn. That tells us that this group has a special relationship with Christ that no one else can share.
- In verse 3, this group is described as those "which were redeemed from the earth."
- In verse 4, this group is described as virgins, which stresses their purity.
- Verse 4 tells us that they "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."
- Verse 4 tells us that they are "redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."
- Verse 5 tells us that "in their mouth was found no guile."
- Verse 5 tells us that "they are without fault before the throne of God."

There cannot be any doubt as to the identity of this group — **it is the church!**

Lesson 33

To begin, I need to clear up something I said in a previous lesson. I said earlier that the phrase “The antichrist” (with the definite article) is not used in the Bible. While that statement is true of the King James Version of the Bible (which I use and teach from), that statement is not true of the Greek text, and I should have checked the Greek text before I made such a sweeping statement.

To clear up that confusion, I think it would be helpful to quickly look at the five times the word “antichrist” appears in the Bible (which are shown on the left side of the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com). But before we do that, let’s start with a more basic question: what does the word “antichrist” mean? We usually think of the term as a title (and usually capitalize it as we would a title), but the Greek word just means “against Christ.” The antichrist or an antichrist is someone who is opposed to Christ.

With that definition in mind, the phrase “the antichrist” immediately sounds strange to us — why? Because “*the* antichrist” suggests that there is only one opponent of Christ, while of course we know there are many opponents of Christ. It would be just as strange to hear the phrase “the atheist” or “the unbeliever.” And I think when we look at the four verses in the Bible that use the word “antichrist” we will see that that is precisely the point that is being made — there is not just one antichrist, there are many antichrists. Or, put differently, there is not just one opponent of Christ, there are many opponents of Christ.

- **1 John 2:18** says that many antichrists were around in John’s day.
- **1 John 2:22** says that an antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ.
- **1 John 4:3** says that an antichrist is anyone who confesses not that Jesus is come in the flesh. **2 John 1:7** makes the same point.

Based on the those definitions, we would all have to agree that, as in John’s day, there are many antichrists in our own day. In fact, there has never been a shortage of antichrists. They have always outnumbered Christians.

In the Greek text, two of the four uses of the singular word “antichrist” are preceded with a definite article: “the antichrist.” The first is in 1 John 2:18 —

“ye have heard that **the antichrist** shall come,” and the second is in 1 John 2:22 — “He is **the antichrist** who denies the Father and the Son.”

I think the first of those two instances is referring to Domitian. While the second instance also uses the definite article, I think it is just making the point we discussed earlier: “You are waiting for THE antichrist? Well, look around you, THE antichrist is anyone who denies Christ.”

We looked at Domitian when we studied Daniel 7, and we will look at Domitian in great detail when we get to Revelation 17. Also, I think Paul was referring to Domitian in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. In fact, John’s readers already knew something about the antichrist — they had heard that he was coming (1 John 2:18 and 1 John 4:3). I think what they had heard was the prophecy of Daniel and the prophecy of Paul.

Had Domitian already come by the time of 1 John? I think so. In 1 John 2:18, we see that it was already the last time (the critical hour), and that many antichrists had come. I think Domitian was included in that number, and in fact he was their leader. 1 John 4:3 is more explicit: “and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; **and even now already is it in the world.**” The internal evidence of 1-3 John also suggests that they were written after AD 81, which is when Domitian came to power.

In short, what I think John is saying is this: “You have heard that a great opponent of Christ is coming? Well, he’s here already, and he has a lot of company!”

And how do we overcome the antichrist? John also answers that question:

1 John 5:4-5 — For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

In Revelation, the choice is between Christ and Caesar; between faithfulness and unfaithfulness; between the church and Rome. The choice was to confess Christ or to deny Christ. And what about anyone who denies Christ? “He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). That was the choice then, and it remains the choice today.

One more point before we get back to Chapter 14: The book of Revelation is focused on the first century conflict between the church and Rome. Most observers would have bet on Rome to win that fight, but Rome never stood a

chance. The church's victory had been foretold six hundred years earlier by the prophet Daniel.

This book is about Rome, but is it only about Rome? No. In a larger sense this book is about any earthly kingdom that would set itself against the Lord's eternal kingdom.

One of the most frequent images in the Bible for the nations of this world is the restless sea. One wave comes in, full of sound and fury, but it soon vanishes away, only to be followed by another wave full of sound and fury. That is how God sees the nations of this world, be it Rome or the United States. There is but one eternal kingdom, and it is a kingdom made without human hands.

When we ended last week, we had just read the first five verses of Chapter 14. And what a contrast we saw between Chapter 13 and Chapter 14! Chapter 13 describes the followers of the beast who wear the mark of the beast, but Chapter 14 describes the followers of Christ who wear the mark of Christ. Caesar or Christ? That was the daily choice in the first century, and it remains the daily choice in the twenty-first century.

What group is described by the opening five verses of Chapter 14? Last week we looked at nine clues from the text as to the identity of this group, and we saw that all nine of those textual clues are pointing straight at the church.

- The 144,000 in verse 1 is a beautiful symbol for ALL of God's people.
- The Father's name is written on their foreheads in verse 1.
- In verse 3, there is a new song that only the 144,000 can learn. That tells us that this group has a special relationship with Christ that no one else can share.
- In verse 3, this group is described as those "which were redeemed from the earth."
- In verse 4, this group is described as virgins, which stresses their purity.
- Verse 4 tells us that they "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."
- Verse 4 tells us that they are "redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."
- Verse 5 tells us that "in their mouth was found no guile."
- Verse 5 tells us that "they are without fault before the throne of God."

Who else could this be but the church? Just compare those nine clues with what we know about the church:

***Ephesians 5:27** — That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

***Titus 2:14** — Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

***1 Peter 2:9** — But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

***2 Corinthians 11:2** — For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

***James 1:18** — Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Those who take the 144,000 as a literal number miss out on one of the most beautiful symbols in the entire book! But worse than that — they end up carving the church into pieces, with 144,000 in one group and everyone else in another group or in yet other groups. Does that make any sense at all? Is that what the first century Christians needed to hear — that God was going to take care of **SOME** of them? Or did they need to hear that God was going to take care of **ALL** of them? That is what the symbol 144,000 depicts — **ALL** of God's people! With **NO ONE** left out!

We have already seen many of the symbols in the opening five verses, and we won't repeat here all that we said about them earlier (but we will repeat some of it). The Lamb, of course, is the resurrected Christ. Although the Lamb had been slain (Revelation 5:6), the Lamb now stands on Mount Zion. What about the harps? We saw that before in Revelation 5:8. What about the new song? We saw that before in Revelation 5:9. We have also already talked about the four beasts and the elders and the great voices.

What is Mount Zion here in verse 1? Zion was initially introduced as the stronghold and city of David in 2 Samuel 5:7 and 1 Chronicles 11:5. Physically it was a specific hill in Jerusalem that was located to the south of Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount), but it very soon began to be used as a synonym for Jerusalem itself.

In time Mount Zion came to represent God's dwelling place among his people, as in Psalm 9.

Psalm 9:11 — *Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.*

Mount Zion was a refuge because God was there, as in Psalm 48.

Psalm 48:2-3 — *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

Mount Zion was a symbol of security, as in Psalm 125.

Psalm 125:1 — *They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

Zion also denoted deliverance. Psalm 14:7 tells us that Zion is the place from which deliverance comes — “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!” Romans 11:26 quotes Isaiah 59:20 and tells us that Zion is the place from which the Deliverer will come — “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

What did the church need? Deliverance! Where are these people in verse 1 now standing? At Mount Zion — at the very source of deliverance!

And who was going to deliver the church? The Lamb, who is standing on Mount Zion in verse 1. Zion played an important role in many Messianic promises.

Psalm 2:6 — *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*

Psalm 110:2 — *The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

Isaiah 2:3 — *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Isaiah 59:20 — *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. (Romans 11:26)*

Isaiah 28:16 — *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6)*

Micah 4:7 — *and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.*

Isaiah 35:10 — *And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Isaiah 62:11 — *Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.*

Those verses were all fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah. That was when the great deliverance occurred.

Hebrews 2:14-15 — *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Is that the same deliverance we see here in Chapter 14? Yes and no. No, in the sense that these events involve the persecution of the church by Rome that occurred decades after the cross. But yes, in the sense that God's deliverance of his people over Rome was a spiritual deliverance — and that spiritual deliverance would not have been possible expect for the cross of Christ! That is why we see Jesus as a Lamb in verse 1 — to remind us of that perfect sacrifice that made our spiritual deliverance possible. Jesus opened the door for everyone. Isn't that what John 3:16 says?

John 3:16 — *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Has there ever been an open door like that one?

But, some might say, this scene really looks like the end of the world. Is it? No. First, we have our time frame, repeated over and over all throughout the book. That time frame should make us reluctant to suddenly leap thousands of years into the future. But second, we have Hebrews 12. Notice the verb tense as I read verses 22-24.

Hebrews 12:22-24 — *But ye **are come** unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

We don't need to wait to stand on Mount Zion with our great deliverer. Those in the church of the firstborn are standing there now! The church is the city of the living God! The church is the heavenly Jerusalem! The church is Mount Zion! The deliverance of Zion is something we have right now — and something those first century Christians had as well.

Verse 4 describes the church as “they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul describes the church as a “chaste virgin” presented to her one husband, Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:21-33 Paul describes the relationship between Christ and his church as a marriage. Throughout the Old Testament, idolatry was viewed as spiritual fornication, and so the church, following the command in 1 Corinthians 10:14 to flee from idolatry, is pictured here as a virgin. This image of virginity may also be intended to emphasize that the redeemed had no congress with the harlot of Rome whom we will meet in Chapter 17.

Verse 3 tells us that only the 144,000 could learn the new song. This new song is the song of redemption we saw in 5:9-10. That **only** the 144,000 could learn this new song confirms that the 144,000 is **all** of the redeemed. The 144,000 is not just a part of the church. The 144,000 is the church. To argue otherwise is

to say that there are some in the church who cannot sing the new song of redemption.

The church is the body of the saved. If you are saved, then you are in the church. If you are lost, then you are not in the church, either because you never were or because you have fallen away from Christ. How do we know that for sure? Look at verse 5. “They are without fault before the throne of God.” That statement can be true only of the faithful children of God. Only they can approach the throne **boldly** (Hebrews 4:16).

Verse 4 is a beautiful description of the church: “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” We generally think of a lamb as following a shepherd, but here the church is the one following and the Lamb is the one who is leading. Earlier we saw the wrath of the Lamb. Here we see a Lamb who is leading. A lamb that has wrath? A lamb that leads? Our Lamb is like no other lamb!

What we see in these first five verses is the church — ALL of the church. No one is left out. God has marked each one so that no one will be misplaced. Had God forgotten about the church? Absolutely not! Did Jesus care what was happening to his church? Absolutely he cared! That is the message of these beautiful verses. There are no more beautiful descriptions of the church of Christ than those descriptions found in Revelation. In fact, they are so beautiful that many think they are describing heaven rather than the church. But if that is our view, then we don’t properly understand the church.

If we ever think that some description is too beautiful to be describing the church, then we aren’t seeing the church as God sees the church. Can any description ever be too beautiful to be describing the body of Christ? God forbid that we would ever think such a thing! We must always seek to see the church as God sees it. Why? Because when we do, then this book of **Revelation** will become a book of **revolution**! When our view of the Lord’s church changes, we will change as well. If we see the church as just another in a long list of denominations, then we will never be the people God wants us to be. But if we see the church for what it is — the beautiful immovable unshakable eternal kingdom of Christ that will sweep away all the kingdoms of this earth — then we will begin to live and to act as the people of such a powerful kingdom should live and act. We can’t be the people God wants us to be if we fail to see the church as God wants us to see the church.

Revelation 14:6-7

6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, 7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Verse 6 is the only occurrence of the word “gospel” in any of John’s writings. This angel delivers an eternal gospel — good news to those who follow God and a warning to those who don’t. If there is a final opportunity for repentance in this book, this would seem to be it. The hour of God’s judgment has come. But even as that hour comes, God continues to proclaim the eternal gospel. It is not God’s will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We have talked before about how God’s people are sometimes represented by angels in this book. The letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 were directed to the angels of those seven churches. When we looked earlier at the war in heaven, we saw that it was being fought between angels and Satan, even though from the text we saw that it was referring to the spiritual battle of the Christians trying to remain faithful to God when faced with terrible persecution. Here we see something similar — an angel who is preaching the everlasting gospel. Who *literally* is proclaiming that gospel? Christians. The church. We have been given the great commission to spread the good news. This flying angel is depicting the church doing the great work it has been assigned to do by God: preach the eternal gospel unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

There is a wonderful example here for us. In the midst of the most terrible persecution and in the face of intense pressure to remain silent, what was the first century church doing? They were proclaiming the gospel of Christ. In fact, they were proclaiming that gospel even to the household of Caesar himself (Philippians 4:22). What would this world look like if we were that coura-

geous? If I were that courageous? Our first century brothers and sisters have left us a tremendous example to follow.

Those who were worshiping the emperor would soon discover they had made a very bad choice. The emperor thought he was God, but he was not. The emperor did not make heaven or earth or the sea or the fountains of water. The emperor was not a creator; the emperor was a creature. The judgment about to come would demonstrate to all that God alone is worthy of worship.

Revelation 14:8

8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

“Babylon is fallen!” We have been waiting 14 chapters to hear that message proclaimed! The church has not fallen, but instead Babylon is fallen.

Who is Babylon? **Who else could it be but Rome?** Who else made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion? Who else did Peter refer to as Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13? Who else at this time could better be described as Babylon, the great enemy of God’s people? In Chapter 17 we will see Babylon pictured as a harlot who is drunk with the blood of the saints. **Who else could that be but Rome?**

Some might say that Jerusalem could be this Babylon. But what effect did Jerusalem have on the seven **Asian** churches who initially received this letter? How did Jerusalem make **nations** drink the wine of her impure passion? Babylon depicts Rome. That was true in First Peter, and it is true in the book of Revelation.

And the good news is that Babylon **is fallen**. Notice the past tense. Does that mean that the fall of Rome had already happened in the first century?

Whatever verse 8 is telling us, it is not telling us that the literal physical fall of Rome had already occurred. In fact, we know from history that that event was still centuries away. The Roman empire in the West continued until AD 476 with the sacking of the city of Rome, and the Roman empire in the East continued until 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. Those events are not what

are in view here in verse 8. How do we know that for sure? Because of our time frame for starters. But also because everything we have seen so far in this book has been pointing to *spiritual* deliverance and *spiritual* judgment rather than *physical* deliverance and *physical* judgment. I think Rome would have been very happy if all it had suffered by way of judgment for its attacks against the church was the sacking of its great city. That would have been a very light sentence for such a crime, but that is not the sentence Rome received.

So why the past tense here? If verse 7 is a final opportunity for repentance, then it seems to have been a very brief opportunity if the judgment has already happened by the very next verse. The solution to that problem is to see here something that we see elsewhere in the Bible — the prophetic past tense.

When God says that something is going to happen, that thing is then so certain to occur that the Bible will sometimes speak of it with the past tense even before it has actually happened. In Genesis 17:5, God said to Abraham, “for a father of many nations **have** I made thee,” even though at the time Abraham had no children! At least fifty years before the actual city of Babylon fell to the Medes, God said, “Babylon is suddenly **fallen** and **destroyed**” (Jeremiah 51:8). Just as the fall of literal Babylon was so certain that Jeremiah could speak of it in past tense fifty years before it happened, so is the fall of Rome just as certain. Yes, Rome fell physically (as will all the nations of this world), but Rome fell spiritually long before when God weighed Rome in the balances and found it wanting — when Rome had played its role in the plan of God and was no longer needed. Nero and Domitian certainly discovered their fate at the moments of their gruesome deaths, but so did every other Roman persecutor at the moment of their deaths. Unlike faithful Christians, who escaped the dragon at their deaths, the unfaithful Romans found themselves in the clutches of that great red dragon at their deaths. Could we image a worse fate than that? Can we image a more terrible judgment than that? This judgment is not a hoard of barbarians sacking the city in 476; this judgment is much much worse!

The “wine of the wrath of her fornication” is likely a reference to a prophecy from Jeremiah about the literal city of Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:7 — Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

We see in verse 8 a mingling of two images — the wine of Rome’s fornication and the wine of God’s wrath.

Swete: “The wine of Rome, as of Babylon, was the intoxicating influence of her vices and her wealth; but viewed from another point it was the wine of wrath, the wrath which overtakes sin.”

Psalm 75:8 — *For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.*

We will see this wine again in Chapter 17 where it will be called “the wine of her fornication” (17:2). In that chapter, we will learn that this wine represents “the blood of the saints” and “the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6). That explains the wrath! Babylon was drunk on sin and drunk on the blood of the saints! Is it any wonder that the hour of its judgment has come? The next angel we see will serve Babylon another drink — the unmixed wine of God’s wrath!

Is there a lesson here for our own country? Was Rome the last nation to have and to share with other nations “the wine of the wrath of her fornication,” which another translation called “the wine of its impure passion”? Was Rome the last nation to be a source of moral infection to the world? Hardly. Our own country also shares the wine of its impure passion with the entire world. By the age of 16, the average child raised in the U.S. has witnessed 26,000 overt sex acts and as many as 400,000 sexual references and innuendos, as well as 200,000 portrayals of violence, including 33,000 murders, in television and in movies. And those numbers don’t include video games. Is it possible that we are already drinking the wine of our own impure passion?

And what about the church? Do we stand apart or do we join right in? Tertulian writing in the second century said that the principal sign of a man’s conversion to the Christian faith was that he renounced the bloodthirsty Roman spectacles (*Spectacles*, Chapter 24). What have we renounced? What is the principal sign of our own conversion? When the world looks at us and looks at our neighbors, what is the principal difference that they see?

1 John 3:3 — *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

Christ is pure. Christians work constantly at purifying ourselves so that we can become more like Christ. And we will never be pure if we roll around in

the mud with the rest of the world. The best way for us to live apart from this world and to be seen as different from the world is to be pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Lesson 34

There are at least two approaches to the book of Revelation that are popular in the church today. One is the **preterist** approach, which is the approach that we are taking and the approach that I believe is correct. (This is very different from the extreme preterist approach (the 70 AD theory or Max Kingism), which is most definitely **not** correct.)

The preterist approach that we are taking says that, while the book of Revelation has many important lessons for us, the book is primarily about the conflict between the first century church and the Roman empire.

The other popular approach in the church is the historical approach, which sees the book of Revelation as a description of the entire church age stretching all the way to the end of the world. I have already mentioned some serious problems with that view, not the least of which is that it presumes we are living today in the end times.

But for those of you familiar with the historical view, you may have noticed that there is a major player in the historical approach that we have barely mentioned at all — the Catholic church. For centuries, many have seen the prophecies in this book as descriptions of the Papacy.

Does this book of Revelation have anything to say about the Catholic church? Yes and no.

No, in the sense of this book being a direct prophecy of the Papacy. I think the focus here is on the Roman emperors, not the Catholic Popes. I think both the context and the time frame demand that conclusion.

But there is a sense in which this book does have something to say about the Catholic church. How? Because the Catholic church today has rightly been called the last echo on earth of the ancient Roman empire.

It is an undeniable historical fact that the Catholic church is modeled, not according to the organization we find in the New Testament, but according to the organization we find in history books about the Roman empire. No one can deny that.

The Pope plays the role of the Roman emperor, the cardinals play the role of the Roman senate, the Catholic diocese corresponds to the old Roman diocese, and we could go on and on. Catholic canon law was explicitly modeled on

Roman law. And not just with their organization — even their clothing is modeled after ancient Rome. Cardinals wear red shoes because Roman law restricted the wearing of red shoes to specific levels of the nobility.

Why do I mention this now? Because we can use the book of Revelation as an open door to teach Catholics about the true church. We can, in all kindness, describe the nature of the Roman empire and then point out its similarities to the modern Catholic church. Catholics are difficult to teach because they reject the authority of Scripture, and they defer completely to the priests in their interpretation of the Scripture. Perhaps we can use Revelation to reach them.

And there may be more Catholics today than in the past who are looking for something different. Just this month, we learned that more than three hundred priests in Pennsylvania have molested over a thousand children. That's about 8% of the total number of priests who worked in the area during the relevant time period.

The Pope has now responded with his shock and his disgust. I can understand his disgust, but I cannot understand his shock. Why? Because this problem is not a new problem for the Catholic church.

How far back does the problem go? To answer that question I would point you to a specific book that raised an early alarm about the problem. That book described priests who were molesting young children, and it also described the coverup of the problem and the protection of the perpetrators by the Catholic church, and it appealed to the Pope to do something about the problem. When was that book written? Ten years ago? Fifty years ago? A hundred years ago? No. Try a thousand years ago! The book is entitled *The Book of Gomorra*, and it was written by a Benedictine monk named Peter Damian in 1051. As I say, I can understand the Pope's disgust, but I cannot understand his shock about something that has been going on in the Catholic church for at least a thousand years!

Catholics may be looking for something else these days, and if so we need to point them to the gospel and to the church of the New Testament. And perhaps we can use this book of Revelation as an open door to reach them. Of course, our mission is not to bash Catholics or to bash anyone else; our mission is to speak the truth in love to everyone (Ephesians 4:15).

Last week we started Chapter 14, and we began by noting the contrast between those worshiping the beast in Chapter 13 and those worshiping the Lamb in

Chapter 14. The opening five verses of Chapter 14 gave us a beautiful picture of the church.

In verses 6-7 we saw an angel having the everlasting gospel and proclaiming the message, “Fear God, and give glory to him.”

Then in verse 8, we saw a second angel who gave us the announcement we had been eagerly anticipating — “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city.” As we said, this symbolic Babylon is Rome. Just as ancient Babylon had been judged for being a great enemy of God’s people, so was Rome now being judged for the same reason.

In verse 9 we will see a third angel.

Revelation 14:9-12

9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. 12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

God's wrath is reserved for those who worship the beast and his image and who receive the mark of the beast. Their judgment is coming soon, and the penalty is severe. Verse 10 tells us that such a person "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb."

Is this language literal or figurative?

We know it is figurative. We know that the wine is not actual wine. We know that the fire is not actual fire. We know that the brimstone is not actual brimstone. Each of these terms is a traditional term used in the Bible to depict the judgment of God.

Jeremiah 25:15 — For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the **wine** cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it.

Psalms 11:6 — Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, **fire and brimstone**, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their **cup**.

We know the language used here is figurative. But what is it describing? I think the first use of the word "brimstone" in the Bible answers that question.

Genesis 19:24 — Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

Yes, that fire and brimstone was literal, but there after that literal fire and brimstone became a symbol for what happened in Genesis 19:24 — judgment.

For example, here is how Isaiah described a judgment against Edom.

Isaiah 34:9-10 — And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into **brimstone**, and the land thereof shall become **burning pitch**. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

Was Edom literally destroyed by fire and brimstone like Sodom was? No. Was Edom judged by God like Sodom was? Yes.

What happened to Edom? After they helped Babylon conquer Judah, Babylon also conquered them. Eventually they ceased to be a nation, thus sharing the fate of Sodom, albeit not in quite the same swift and spectacular fashion.

Would it even be possible to interpret that description of Edom from Isaiah 34 literally? No. Why? Because in Isaiah 34:9–10 we read that the land of Edom would burn endlessly, and yet in verses 13–15 we read that at the same time wild animals would live there. The language is not literal. Instead, the language is figurative, and it is intended to create an image of utter devastation.

Revelation is using the same language we find in Isaiah 34, but Revelation is using it to describe Rome instead of Edom. What we see here is language of judgment, and that is a perfect fit with the context here in Chapter 14. Remember what we saw in verse 7 — “Fear God, and give glory to him; **for the hour of his judgment is come.**” What we see here is a judgment that was coming soon.

These verses are sometimes used to talk about the final judgement of the world. Is that what we are seeing here? No. The context says no, and the time frame says no.

In my opinion, the final judgment is **not** being pictured here. Instead, what we are seeing here is the same thing we have been looking at in all of the surrounding verses — God’s judgment of Rome. And that judgment is being described here with terms that are used elsewhere in the Bible to describe other judgments by God.

And there is another reason I don’t think the final judgment is being discussed here. Notice from verse 10 that the judgment pictured here takes place “in the presence of the holy angels, and **in the presence of the Lamb.**” But what do we read in 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10 about the final judgment? We read that it will take place “**away** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (ESV).

But saying that this language is not describing the final judgment at the end of all time does not mean this language is not describing hell. Hell is what awaited these faithless persecutors, and hell was the judgment they received. Hell was where they were headed once their lives on this earth ended. There is no earthly punishment that could ever compare with the eternal judgment of hell, and that was the judgment that awaited them. As with the rich man in Luke 16, when they lifted up their eyes after death they found themselves being tormented in flame.

Note that in verse 10 the wine of God's wrath is poured **unmixed**. What does that mean? It may mean that the wine is undiluted with mercy because the day of mercy and long suffering is now past. These people had been offered mercy in the gospel that had been proclaimed to them earlier, but now the day of judgment had come for those who rejected the truth and who persecuted the faithful.

This judgment is against all who worship the beast and who wear the mark of the beast. That certainly included the godless Romans, but it also included those once faithful Christians who had compromised with the world by denying Christ. They now wore the mark of the beast instead of the mark of Christ. And what a terrible price they were going to pay for rejecting Christ and bowing to Caesar! There is a high cost to compromise, and the time for payment had arrived.

Verse 11 tells us that the smoke of their torment would ascend for ever and ever. Again, we see a parallel with Sodom and Gomorrah.

***Jude 7** — Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

To this day, the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah continues to serve as an example. Likewise, Isaiah 34:10 tells us that the smoke of Edom's destruction "shall go up forever." That tells us that the judgment of Edom would also continue to serve as an example. The same is true with Rome — to this day, God's judgment of Rome serves as an example. We are studying and learning from that example two thousand years after it occurred. That is why the smoke in verse 11 "ascendeth up for ever and ever."

Verse 11 includes the haunting phrase, "they have no rest, day or night." That is very different from what awaits the people of God.

***Hebrews 4:9** — There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*

We look forward to eternal rest; the faithless will experience external restlessness. But to say that we are resting in heaven, does not mean we will not be busy. Remember what we saw back in Chapter 4.

***Revelation 4:8** — And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes*

within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Our rest in heaven will be from the work we are given to do here on earth, but the children of God will never rest from their worship of God.

The first half of verse 12 from Chapter 14 reminds us of verse 10 from Chapter 13. "Here is the patience of the saints." They had cried out to God for vindication, and they can be patient in the knowledge that God knows what is happening to them, and God will judge the enemies of his people. They can be patient because of the messages of the three angels we just saw. First, our God is the true God, and his gospel is the everlasting gospel. Second, Babylon is fallen. And third, swift judgment awaits those who are persecuting the church. As verse 12 says, here is the patience of the saints.

The second half of verse 12 jumps all the way back to verses 1-5 by describing the group we were looking at prior to the three angels we saw in verses 6-11. "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." That was the group we saw in verses 1-5. That group is the church. They are obedient, and they are faithful. They walk with the Lord in the light of his word; they trust and obey. They are the faithful and true people of God.

Revelation 14:13

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

The book of Revelation is structured around the number seven. For example, the book contains seven beatitudes. The first was all the way back in verse 3 of Chapter 1: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Here in verse 13 we have the second beatitude: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." (For those who just can't wait, the remaining

five beatitudes are in 16:15, 19:19, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14. We'll get to them all eventually!)

We understand that those who die in the Lord are blessed. To die in the Lord, of course, means to die as a faithful Christian. Those in the church are in Christ — that is, they are in the body of Christ, which is the church (Colossians 1:24). And how are they added to that body? How does one become in Christ?

Galatians 3:27 — *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

There is nothing complicated about that. What did we just see in the previous verse? “They that keep the commandments of God.” And what is one of those commandments? “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). As I said, there is nothing complicated about that.

The difficult part, and especially in the first century, was to remain faithful unto death after becoming part of the body. The pressure was intense to denounce Christ and confess Christ. But verse 13 is a reminder of the blessings that await those who stand firm. And verses 9-11 were a reminder of the fate that awaits those who turn away from Jesus.

Why does the statement in verses 13 include the word “henceforth”? I don't think it means that this blessing is just for those faithful followers who die from this point onward. We know that this blessing applies to all who die in the Lord. I think the best way to interpret the word “henceforth” is that it means that the blessedness will occur after death for those who die in the Lord. The faithful child of God dies in the Lord, and then from that point onward that person is blessed.

The situation is very different for those who die outside the Lord. In this life and on this earth, Rome seemed blessed and the Lord's people seemed cursed — but what a difference after death! Remember, things are not what they seem! A moment before death, the Christian is wearing rags, and the emperor is wearing royal robes. But a moment after death, those garments are switched. A moment after death, it is the faithful Christian, not the Roman emperor, who is wearing a crown (2:10). Christians who died to the sound of cursing, awoke to the sound of blessing.

Verse 13 ends with a beautiful elaboration of this blessing: “Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Earlier we saw eternal restlessness; here we see eternal rest. They will leave their labors behind, but not so with their works. Their works will continue, both in eternity and also on earth as a testimony to their faithfulness. Our money will be left behind, but not our works. Our works will follow us into eternity. We should all be toiling to leave behind that sort of legacy — not a legacy of money or a legacy of property, but a legacy of good works. We need to make sure that our labor on this earth is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58 — Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Revelation 14:14-16

14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

The word “sickle” occurs 8 times in the New Testament: once in Mark 4:29, and seven times in Revelation 14. A sickle and the act of threshing are frequent images in the Old Testament.

Joel 3:13 — Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great.

Jeremiah 51:33 — For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; The daughter of Babylon is like a thresh-

ingfloor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come.

A sickle is a sign of judgment, and threshing represents the act of judgment.

Luke 3:17 — *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.*

The wheat and the chaff are about to be separated with regard to Rome. And how can God tell the difference? Simple. His people are wearing his mark, while everyone else is wearing the mark of the beast.

Jesus is, of course, the Son of Man in verses 14. We have seen many images of Christ in this book, but this must be one of the most striking: Jesus riding on a white cloud, wearing a golden crown of victory, and holding a sharp sickle ready to reap the harvest. Those universalists who believe that Jesus will save everyone no matter how they live or what they believe need to consider this image of Christ very carefully.

We see another angel in verse 15. The word “another” points back to the three angels we saw earlier in this chapter. Here we see a fourth angel. This angel comes from the temple — from the very presence of God — and delivers a message to the person on the cloud, who is Jesus: “Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

That message confirms some very important points for us. First, it confirms the time frame of the book: “for the time is come for thee to reap.” And second, the message confirms what we have been saying about Rome — Rome’s place in the plan of God was finished. Rome had performed an important role in God’s plan, but that role was now over — “for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

And finally in verse 16 the reaping occurs. Jesus thrusts in his sickle on the earth, and the earth is reaped. Is this the final reaping that will occur at the end of all time? I don’t think so. Our time frame and our context are still in place. In fact, we were reminded our time frame in just the previous verse. I think what we see here is what this book has been building up to — the separation of those wearing the mark of Christ from those wearing the mark of the beast.

I know there is a constant temptation in this book to leap forward to the end of the world, but we need to resist that temptation. The time frame of a prophecy is the most important clue in interpreting the prophecy, and this book

leaves no doubt as to its time frame, starting from the very first verse. The context is all about first century Rome, from the letters in Chapters 2-3 all the way to the Roman emperors we will study when we get to Chapter 17.

Faced with the choice of viewing these verses as a discussion of the end of the world or viewing these verses as a discussion of the end of Rome — shouldn't we choose the view that most closely agrees with the time frame and the context? If we do, then what we are seeing here is the end of Rome and the deliverance of the church.

Where does that reaping occur? Where does that separation happen? It happens at death. In this world we are all mingled together, but not so in the next world. This reaping confirms that what we are seeing here is the spiritual judgment of Rome and the spiritual deliverance of the church. Those who die in the Lord are blessed. Those who die outside the Lord are cursed. And that separation happens at their deaths, not at the end of the world. It will all be confirmed at the final judgement at the end of time, but there is a separation that occurs much earlier than that. All who have died prior to the Lord's return already know their eternal fate.

Revelation 14:17-20

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by

the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

We see two angels in verses 17 and 18 — one angel who carries a sharp sickle and another angel who comes “out from the altar” and who “has power over fire.” The first angel begins to reap clusters of grapes at the command of the second angel.

If anyone has any remaining doubts that we are seeing a judgment, these images should put those doubts to rest. The gathering of grapes is a classic figure for God’s judgment of the wicked. God tramples the wicked as one would trample grapes.

In Isaiah 63, the prophet describes a judgment against Edom in which God tread the winepress alone.

Isaiah 63:3 — I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

Here in Revelation 14, Rome has replaced Edom as the great enemy of God’s people, but the imagery is the same. God tramples the wicked as one would trample grapes.

And what comes out of this winepress? Not wine, but blood. A lot of blood. A whole lot of blood!

The vast amount of blood in verse 20 dramatically depicts the severity of this judgment of Rome. The blood flows in a river as high as a horse’s bridle and 1600 stadia or furlongs long, which is about two hundred miles long.

The intent of this image is to frighten, and it does a very good job! This coming judgment will be terrifying. As Egypt lost horse and rider in the Red Sea, so

will Rome be engulfed, but this latter sea of blood will be much redder than the Red Sea!

Verse 20 causes a fair bit of trouble for the literalists. A river of blood two hundred miles long, a modest one hundred feet wide, and five feet deep would contain about four billion gallons of blood, which is enough blood to fill up over three billion people. Literal? Of course not. Terrifying? Definitely.

Why 1600 furlongs? Is there some symbolic significance in the number 1600?

It is probably not a coincidence that 1600 is the square of a very familiar Biblical number, forty. We have seen figurative references to the exodus all throughout our study, and even here we see a reference back to the plague that turned the Nile into blood. How long was the wilderness wandering? Forty years (Psalm 95:10). So the number forty may depict a tribulation, with the squaring of the number being used to depict a great tribulation. That is one possibility.

Another possibility comes from the symbolic number four, which we know represents the created world. The number ten denotes completeness, and so forty could be used here to depict the complete judgment of those who dwell on the earth (which, as we know, in this book means Rome). Why then square that number to get 1600? Perhaps there we see yet another symbolic use of the number two to represent Rome, as we have already seen numerous times in this book.

Which view do I favor? It's a very close call. The first view has a connection with this plague of blood, but the second view fits very well with Rome. I slightly favor the second view.

Sometimes the worst judgment that God can inflict on someone is to give that person what he wants. Rome wanted blood. Rome was bloodthirsty, and in fact Rome will be explicitly shown as a bloodthirsty harlot drunk on the blood of the saints when we get to Chapter 17. Rome wants blood? Fine. How about a two hundred mile long river of blood!

Finally, verse 20 tells us that the grapes are trodden "without the city." What does that signify, and what is this city?

We really have only two choices in identifying a symbolic city in this book. It is the same choice we have seen over and over again in this book. It is the same choice that is a major theme, perhaps the major theme, of the book: Caesar or Christ? This city is either the city of God (the church) or the city of Caesar (Rome).

So which is it? I think this city is the church. Why? Because of the verses we read a moment ago from Isaiah 63. In those verses God tread the winepress alone. At the end of the previous chapter in Isaiah, in Isaiah 62:12, the prophet refers to God's people as "a city not forsaken." God stepped out of that city to take care of Edom. I think God is doing the same thing here — stepping out of his city, the church, so that he can take care of Rome.

It is all symbolic, of course. God did not literally leave the church. But the image is a powerful one. God leaves his people in the safety of their city so that he can go out alone and take care of this terrible enemy of his people. And boy does God take care of them! When it's all over all that is left is a river of blood 200 miles long!

So where are we at the end of Chapter 14? Before the seals were opened we had a vision of heaven assuring us that the true throne was in heaven and not in Rome. Before the trumpets were sounded we were shown a period of silence in heaven, and we were told that the coming judgment was occurring due to a call for justice by the saints. Chapter 15 will show us a third vision of heaven, and this vision occurs before the bowls of God's wrath are poured out in Chapter 16.

This book has a truly beautiful structure! We need to make sure that we step back occasionally and view the book from afar so that we don't miss anything. Yes, we must do a word by word and verse by verse study, but we must always be checking ourself to make sure that our interpretation also makes sense when the book is viewed from a wider perspective.

John did not send the churches a box of fortune cookies with a verse inside each cookie. John sent the churches an entire book inspired by God, and we need to keep that in mind as we study each verse and each word in this beautiful book.

Lesson 35

So where are we at the end of Chapter 14? Before the **seals** were opened we had a vision of heaven assuring us that the true throne was in heaven and not in Rome. Before the **trumpets** were sounded we were shown a period of silence in heaven, and we were told that the coming judgment was occurring due to a call for justice by the saints. Chapter 15 will show us a third vision of heaven, and this vision occurs before the **bowls** of God's wrath are poured out in Chapter 16.

Chapter 15

Revelation 15:1

1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

So far, the judgments against Rome have been partial and have allowed for repentance. The judgments of the seven bowls are total and final, and repentance is no longer an option.

Yes, God is longsuffering, but at some point the door swings shut. At some point, the time for repentance comes to an end, and judgment awaits.

With a person, that door shuts with finality at the person's death. But even before death, the door can be almost entirely closed.

Romans 1:24 — *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.*

Romans 1:26 — *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections.*

Romans 1:28 — *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.*

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 — *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

I think that when God gives a person up that is God's final attempt to convince that person to repent. Perhaps that person, like the prodigal, will come to his senses in that pig pen. God does not do these things because he wants the person to perish — God does these things because he wants the person to be saved. But some day the door will close forever on that opportunity.

And what about a society? Does God give a **nation** up so that perhaps the entire society will come to its senses? At what point does a nation's opportunity for repentance comes to an end?

Nineveh repented at the peaching of Jonah, but Rome did not repent at the preaching of Peter and Paul. And what amount of preaching would it take for our own society to turn from the path it is on? At some point, a society becomes so far gone that all that remains is judgment.

Hailey: "If proclaiming the good news of redemption does not cause men to fear before God, and if partial judgments do not turn them from humanism and materialism to repentance, then such an unregenerated society forfeits its right to continue. A destruction by judgment is inevitable and just."

Rome had reached that point. Rome had fulfilled its role in the plan of God to establish his eternal kingdom, and now Rome was actively persecuting God's kingdom. The gospel had been proclaimed to Rome, and Rome had been given opportunity after opportunity to repent, and yet Rome had not repented. Instead, the terrible persecution under Nero was about to begin again under Domitian. God had had his fill of Rome, God's wrath had risen to the brim of the bowl, and now the bowls of God's wrath were about to be poured out on Rome.

But remember that what we are seeing here is a **spiritual** judgment, just as the deliverance of the church was a spiritual deliverance. We know that the deliverance of the Christian occurred at that Christian's death.

Revelation 2:10 — *Be thou faithful unto **death**, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Revelation 14:13 — *Blessed are the **dead** which die in the Lord from henceforth.*

That is also when the spiritual judgment of the Romans occurred. Yes, some of the judgments may have involved some physical aspects (such as the gruesome deaths of Nero and Domitian), but the focus of this book is on the *spiritual* deliverance of the church and the *spiritual* judgment of Rome.

How do we know that for sure? We know that for sure because the time for repentance is over. That occurs at the time of death, not before. That repentance is no longer an option confirms that we are looking here at a spiritual judgment.

Verse 1 tells us that, with these seven last plagues, the wrath of God is **filled up**. The ESV says that “with them the wrath of God is **finished**.” The RSV says that “with them the wrath of God is **ended**.”

Filled up? Finished? Ended? Doesn't that mean that we have at last reached the end of the world? No. It does not.

Once again, we should turn elsewhere in the Bible to see how similar language is used. Let's look at Matthew 24, for example.

Matthew 24:13-14 — *But he that shall endure unto **the end**, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall **the end** come.*

That sure sounds like the end of the world, doesn't it? Is that the end of the world? No. We know it is not. How do we know for sure? Because of verse 34.

Matthew 24:34 — *Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*

The “end” in Matthew 24:13-14 is the end of the Christian's life (verse 13) and the end of Jerusalem (verse 14). It can't be the end of the world because that end did not occur during that first century generation.

Let's look at another example.

Ezekiel 7:2-3 — *Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; **An end, the end** is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is **the***

end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations.

Was that the end of the world? No. That was the judgment and exile of God's own people.

So what can we conclude from those examples? Just this — when we see the word “**end**” we shouldn't automatically assume that the end of the world is being discussed, but instead we need to look at the context to see what is being discussed. That is hardly an earth-shattering conclusion — but if more people followed it, there would be much less confusion about what this book is teaching!

The Greek word *teleo* translated “filled up” here simply means to carry out, accomplish, perform, or fulfill, and that is exactly what is happening in this chapter with regard to Rome.

So what then does verse 1 mean? Verse 1 means just what we would expect it to mean, having studied the previous 14 chapters. Verse 1 means that this is God's final word with respect to Rome, the great enemy of God's people on which this entire book has been focused. God has had enough. The bowls of his wrath are about to be poured out on Rome. Rome ignored the seals. Rome ignored the trumpets. Let's see if Rome can ignore the bowls.

Revelation 15:2-4

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. 3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. 4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy

name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

James describes someone who is a hearer and not a doer of the word as someone who looks into a mirror and then forgets what he looked like. How can we keep that from happening? James tells us in the very next verse.

James 1:25 — But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

What James is telling us is that if we want to see what we really look like, we shouldn't look at ourselves in a physical mirror, but instead we should look at ourselves in the mirror of God's word, the perfect law of liberty. Our reflection in Scripture is what we really look like. Only there can we see the flaws that matter — not our physical flaws, but our spiritual flaws.

But the good news of the gospel is that when we see ourselves in God's mirror, we can, through the blood of Christ, see a spotless image staring back at us. Remember what we read in the previous chapter.

Revelation 14:5 — For they are without fault before the throne of God.

That's my kind of mirror! And that's the mirror we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why do I raise this point now? Because not only can an individual Christian use the perfect law of liberty as a mirror, so can the church as a whole. The church can look into God's word and see itself. And when we do, we will not see ourselves as the world sees us (as if we were looking in a physical mirror), but we will see ourselves as God sees us.

So how do we look? Well, first, we have to acknowledge our faults in failing to live up to the ideal that God has given us. We see that, for example, when we look into the mirror of Revelation 2-3.

But, second, we see that, despite those faults, God's church is a glorious eternal kingdom washed clean by the blood of Jesus. And in the mirror of God's word, we can see how God views the blood bought people of his Son. And what a

beautiful image we can see! If we are ever tempted to doubt the beauty and power of the church, we need to look at ourselves in the mirror of this beautiful book of Revelation. And we should thank God every day for this wonderful gift.

The next time you say your prayers, please remember to thank God for giving us this beautiful book of Revelation that contains so many wonderful descriptions of the Lord's church! Jude is also a wonderful book — but I'm glad the New Testament didn't end with Jude! Revelation is the perfect ending for the word of God. It began in the Garden, and it ends with the people of God rejoicing in the eternal kingdom of Christ.

The first thing we see in verse 2 is a sea. As we have mentioned, the restless sea is a common figure for the nations of the world, but here we do not see a restless sea; we see a sea of glass. Once again, God has calmed the restless sea! But this sea of glass is mingled with fire. What does that mean?

The most common suggestions are that it refers either to the fiery judgments that were about to fall on Rome or that it refers to the fiery trials through which the Christians had emerged victorious. I much prefer the second option based on the context. The focus here is on the faithful people of God. They have endured fiery trials. They "had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name."

In the KJV, verse 2 says that they are standing "on the sea of glass." The ESV says that they are standing "beside the sea of glass." I think that "beside" is likely the better translation, but if they are standing "on" the sea of glass, then perhaps verse 2 is telling us that the saints have moved closer to the throne through their suffering. If the proper translation is "beside the sea," then, as Swete says, these martyrs have come safely through the sea of martyrdom to arrive at the shore of heaven.

What incredible examples that have left for us to follow! Whenever we think we have it bad or when we are facing some persecution or trial, we should look back to their example and consider what they endured. As Hebrews 12:4 reminds most if not all of us today, we "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Verse 2 also says that they have the harps of God. What are the harps of God? Doesn't verse 3 answer that question? "And they **sing!**" The harps of God are the harps made by God — the human vocal chords. They are not playing the harps of man. In fact, Acts 17:25 tells us what God thinks of the harps of man.

Acts 17:25 — Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

The kingdom of God is made without human hands, and those who worship God in the kingdom made without human hands must not use instruments made with human hands, but instead must use the harps of God — the human voice made without human hands.

Remember that what we are seeing here is symbolic. This language is figurative. In the same verse where we see harps, we also see a sea of glass mingled with fire and a beast along with its image and the number of its name. These harps are symbols for praise, just as elsewhere incense is used as a symbol for prayer. And the pattern in the New Testament is that we praise God with the harps that he made — the human voice. And that is exactly what we see happening in the next verse.

In verse 3, the church **sings** the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.

We can read the song of Moses in Exodus 15. That song celebrated a tremendous victory of God over Egypt, the great enemy of God's people. Here the song of Moses celebrates another tremendous victory over another great enemy of God's people, Rome.

The song of the Lamb celebrates the same victory because it is only through the Lamb that such a victory was possible. This deliverance is a spiritual deliverance, and there can be no spiritual deliverance over Rome or over anyone else absent the cross of Christ. It is only through the blood of Christ that faith is the victory. We are victorious in death only because of Jesus' death.

Why are both songs sung? I think the fact that we see both songs here confirms what we said earlier — the church consists of the faithful people of God under both the old covenant and the new covenant. Together all of God's faithful people are united in Christ as one redeemed people.

We have seen many comparisons in this book between the deliverance from Rome and the deliverance from Egypt during the exodus, and here we see yet another comparison with the song of Moses. But there is a key difference between the two events: The deliverance from Egypt was a **physical** deliverance while the deliverance from Rome was a **spiritual** deliverance. The deliverance over Rome was a **better** deliverance than the deliverance over Egypt.

When we see the word “better,” we should think of another New Testament book — Hebrews. The purpose of that book is to explain how the new covenant is better than the old covenant. One way in which the new is better than the old is related to the two songs that we see here: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Hebrews 3:1-3 — *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.*

Moses could *physically* deliver his people, but Moses had no spiritual deliverance to offer. Moses could do nothing for a dead Israelite. Moses’ power to help his people ended at their deaths. Not so with the Lamb. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth” (Revelation 14:13). “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Listen as the book of Hebrews explains the difference.

Hebrews 2:14-15 — *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Moses could deliver his people from Egyptian bondage, but Moses was powerless against the bondage of death. No so with the Lamb!

The singers in verse 3 give no glory to themselves. Instead they sing, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”

If we are looking for a pattern to follow for the songs that we sing in worship, this would be a good place to start. Almost every phrase of this hymn is taken from the Old Testament.

Psalms 111:3 — *His work is honourable and glorious.*

Amos 4:13 — *The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name.*

Deuteronomy 32:4 — *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

Jeremiah 10:7 — *Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?*

Swete says that the singers here seem to be so lost in the joy of being before God that they completely forget what they have been through to attain this position.

In the presence of God the martyrs forget themselves; their thoughts are absorbed by new wonders that surround them; the glory of God and the mighty scheme of things in which their own sufferings form an infinitesimal part are opening before them; they begin to see the great issue of the world-drama, and we hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works.

And we are reminded of a song we often sing — “Sing On, Ye Joyful Pilgrims.” How does that song end? “My heart is filled with rapture, My soul is lost in praise!”

Is Revelation all about heaven and the end of the world? No. But does this book tell us a great deal about what heaven will be like? Absolutely. Some day we too will be lost in the joy of being before the throne of God. Some day we too will sing these great songs of deliverance in heaven.

In verse 3, the KJV has “King of saints.” Other translations have “King of the ages,” while still others have “King of the nations.” Which is correct? The commentaries are nearly unanimous that the KJV is not correct here. As for the other two possibilities, the ancient manuscripts are divided, but “king of the nations” seems to fit the context better. In any event, Jesus is King of kings, which means he is the King of the ages and the King of the nations.

What does it mean in verse 4 that “all nations shall come and worship before thee”? I think it means two things.

First, it means that the church would come and worship before God, which in fact is exactly what we are seeing in these verses. The church consisted of people from all nations, so in that sense all nations would come and worship God. That is what had been prophesied long before when God promised to

bles, not just Israel, but the entire world through Jesus Christ. Remember the great prophecy of the church in Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:2 — And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And remember the great Messianic Psalm 2.

Psalm 2:27-28 — All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations.

But, second, I think verse 4 is also telling us that God's power and God's righteousness would be made manifest before all nations — something that was particularly true when it came to the triumph of the Lord's church over the mighty Roman empire. I think verse 4 is telling us that all nations would one day come to understand who the real King is and which kingdom is the eternal kingdom. We saw an example of this with King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.

Daniel 4:37 — Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

What prompted that change in attitude from the great Babylonian king? Not his piety, but instead it was prompted by a display of God's great power in causing the king to live like an ox for seven years! After all, what is the explanation given here in verse 4 for the worship by the nations? "For thy judgments are made manifest." That is the same reason why Nebuchadnezzar found himself praising God in Daniel 4.

Revelation 15:5-8

5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: 6 And the seven angels came out of

the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. 7 And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

The “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” in verse 5 is not the temple that Solomon built but is instead the tent that was erected by Moses in the wilderness. Moses was mentioned just a few verses ago, and much of what we are seeing here is modeled after the exodus.

*Numbers 9:15 — And on the day that **the tabernacle was reared up** the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, **the tent of the testimony**: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.*

*Acts 7:44 — Our fathers had **the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness**, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.*

This tent was called the tent of the testimony or the tent of witness (Numbers 17:7, 18:2) because it held the two tablets brought down from Mt. Sinai by Moses and placed in the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:5).

Why is this tabernacle shown here? Several reasons.

First, this tabernacle keeps the focus on the exodus, which in turn keeps the focus on the deliverance of God’s people, which is what this book is all about. Every time we see a reference back to the exodus we should think about deliverance.

Second, this tabernacle was the inner sanctuary where God dwelt. What that tells us is that these final judgments against Rome are coming from the very presence of God. Yes, angels are coming out of the tabernacle, but God is not *delegating* this judgment; God is *doing* this judgment. These angels are coming from his very presence. The judgment they are bringing is coming directly from God.

Back in Revelation 6:10 we saw that the coming judgment against Rome was a divine judgment brought about by the prayers of the saints. That point is emphasized here by what these seven angels are wearing. They are wearing priestly clothing—white linen and golden girdles. Such a girdle was worn by a priest only when he was officiating on behalf of the people. These angels dressed as priests come directly from the presence of God to wage a holy war of judgment against Rome. It is a very powerful image.

We discussed the four beasts or the four living creatures back in Revelation 4:6-8. They protect God's reputation and demand punishment of the ungodly. It is one of these four living creatures who passes out the bowls of wrath to the seven angels in verse 7. Remember what these four living creatures do.

Revelation 4:8 — And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Notice the three sets of three in that verse: Holy Holy Holy; Lord God Almighty; Which was, And is, And is to come. These four living creatures show the creation (symbolized by the number four) worshipping the Godhead (symbolized by the number three). They are about to send seven angels (symbolizing a perfect judgment by the perfect number seven) to judge Rome (symbolized by the number two, a number that falls short of the divine number three). **This book is truly beautiful when we understand the symbols!**

The Greek word used here for “bowl” occurs only in Revelation (where it appears twelve times). It denotes a broad shallow vessel or a deep saucer. It is similar to some of the bowls used in the Old Testament for sacrifices and rituals.

What is the purpose of these seven bowls that are full of the wrath of God? The purpose of the seven **seals** was to **reveal**. The purpose of the seven **trumpets** was to **warn**. The purpose of the seven **bowls** is to **execute**.

The smoke in verse 8 is yet another reminder of the judgment that is about to be unleashed. The smoke comes from the glory of God and from the power of God. Mt. Sinai was covered with smoke with God descended upon it in Exodus 19:18. A cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of God filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34. The temple of heaven was filled with smoke in Isaiah's great vision in Isaiah 6:4.

The smoke may also be a reminder of the prayers of the saints, which ascended as smoke to God in Revelation 8:4.

Why does verse 8 say that no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were fulfilled? Likely because these plagues were a manifestation of the glory of God upon which no one can look. We see something similar in 1 Kings 8 where, at the dedication of the temple, the priests could not enter the house of God because of a cloud of smoke.

1 Kings 8:10-11 — And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.

There is another possible reason why we are told that no man could come into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been completed. That prohibition may be a symbolic statement that no one could appeal to God to stop the coming judgment. The time for talking and for intercession was over. God's hand could not be stayed from the judgement about to be unleashed on Rome.

What's next? Chapter 16 describes these seven bowls, which together depict a total and complete judgment against Rome.

That Christians are not to take vengeance on their persecutors does not mean there will be no vengeance. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). The time for payment had arrived for Rome. The day of vengeance was here.

Introduction to Chapter 16

Before we start our verse-by-verse study of Chapter 16, let's pause to ask ourselves what we expect to see in this chapter. So far, this entire book has been building up to a great judgment, which, if we are correct, is a great judgment by God against the first century Roman empire.

The Roman emperors thought that they were gods, and the Romans worshipped the emperors as gods and persecuted the church for refusing to worship the emperors. Rome was itself a royal priesthood, but Rome had come up against another royal priesthood that was infinitely more powerful — the church. Rome was fighting against the prophecy of Daniel 2 — and Rome stood no chance at all in overcoming God’s word.

God had decreed the victory of the church over Rome six centuries earlier, and that victory is about to happen in Chapter 16. That is what this book has been building toward, and that is what we expect to see here.

Is that what we will see in Chapter 16? Absolutely. We are about to see the seven bowls of God’s wrath poured out onto Rome.

Will we be seeing the **physical** destruction of Rome? No. We will not be seeing that anymore than we will be seeing the physical victory of the church. The church’s victory in this book is spiritual — it happens at the **death** of the faithful. Likewise, the judgment of Rome will be a spiritual judgment.

So what does that say about the events in this chapter? What it says is that we should not try to match each event up with some physical calamity that struck ancient Rome. That exercise is doomed to failure because that is not what is happening in this chapter.

So what is happening here? To what will these terrible events apply? They will apply to the judgment of those ungodly emperors and ungodly Romans who were persecuting God’s people and who refused to repent and obey the gospel. If the blessings of the faithful began at their death (as we have been told repeatedly in this book), then I think we should expect the judgment of their persecutors to occur at the same point — at their deaths, when their door of opportunity closed with finality.

Can there be any judgment more horrible than that? Can anything be more horrible than dying outside of Christ and knowing that the door of the kingdom is forever closed to you? Is anything more horrible than that? That horror is what Chapter 16 shows us with vivid apocalyptic images.

Milligan: “No attempt to determine the special meaning of the objects thus visited by the wrath of God — the land, the sea, the rivers, the fountains of the waters, and the sun — has yet been, or is ever likely to be, successful; and the general effect alone appears to be important.”

I agree — and, as will see, the general effect is staggering. Wave after wave of plagues come against Rome in this chapter. Earlier we saw the blessings that await the faithful dead from henceforth. Here we see the plagues that await the unfaithful dead from henceforth.

People die every day. Some die in Christ; many more die out of Christ. Do we see those deaths as we should? Do we see them as God sees them? If not, then this is the book for us because this book shows us how God views the death of the faithful and how God views the death of the unfaithful — particularly those unfaithful who in this life were actively opposed to God's eternal kingdom.

But shouldn't we expect to see all of these plagues literally fulfilled like the plagues of Egypt were literal? No. That wasn't the case with the original Babylon, and we shouldn't expect it to be the case with the first century Babylon, Rome.

Listen to Isaiah as he describes the fall of ancient Babylon.

Isaiah 13:19-22 — And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

That prophecy paints a picture of horror and utter desolation. Did it **literally** occur? No. History tells us that Babylon fell without a shot. The priests opened the gates and let Cyrus in after Belshazzar was assassinated. The Bible describes what happened with just two short verses.

Daniel 5:30-31 — In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

But Isaiah said that Babylon would fall as Sodom fell, that no one would ever live there again, and that no one would ever pass through there again. None of that was **literally** fulfilled. Alexander the Great headquartered there. People still live there today.

What then was meant by such language? The language paints a picture of God's wrath against the ungodly. The language shows us the terrors that await those who are opposed to God. The language shows us what God thinks about those nations that set themselves up against God's people and God's kingdom.

But some will say that these things never happened to Rome. Some will say that Rome never suffered in this way. Is that right?

Rome may never have suffered physically in this way, but spiritually? That is the question. And I suspect that if we could speak today with those first century Roman persecutors, they might tell us that this language does not even come close to all that they have suffered.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 — In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Could any language ever be an overstatement when it comes to describing that punishment?

Lesson 36

Chapter 16

Last week we ended with some introductory comments about Chapter 16. In that chapter we will see the seven bowls of God's wrath poured out on the Roman empire. As we discussed last week, that judgment of Rome was a **spiritual** judgment, just as the victory of the church over Rome was a **spiritual** victory.

Each event is occurring at death. For the Christian, death marks the point of spiritual victory — the point at which the Christian receives a crown of life (Revelation 2:10) and the point at which the Christian is blessed (Revelation 14:13). For the Roman, death marks the point of spiritual defeat — the point at which judgment occurs, which in Chapter 16 is figuratively described as plagues.

Do these plagues **literally** occur? No. These plagues are figurative of what occurs to the Roman after death. This judgment of Rome is total — it is denoted by **seven** bowls of God's wrath. There is no coming back from this judgment. I think that fact alone is enough for us to see that this judgment is happening at death, just as the Christian's victory is happening at death.

But some might ask, "Is that all?" After all the evil that Rome had done and after all that the church had suffered, is there no punishment for Rome in this life? Does Rome really get to live on happily and unconcerned in this life? Where is the fire and the brimstone that consumed Sodom and Gomorra? Where is the destruction of their great city as happened with the judgment of Jerusalem? It may seem to some that Rome got off pretty light!

If we are tempted to see things that way, then I think we need to adjust our spiritual eyeglasses! As we have seen over and over in this book, God wants us to see things as He sees them — and that includes how we see our life on this earth.

There is a constant temptation for us to see this life as all that there is. After all, we can **see** these things around us — we can't see spiritual things. And

these things that we can see around us seem so permanent. But how does God view them? What does the Bible say?

2 Corinthians 4:18 — *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

How can we look at the things which are not seen? We do that by looking at things as God looks at them, and the only way to do that is to look at things through God's word. Only then can we see that what we are tempted to think is permanent is really just temporal, and that which we can't even see is what is permanent and eternal.

So how is that relevant to the judgment of Rome? Simple. **Eternity is all that really matters.** This life matters only because it determines where we will spend eternity. Absent eternity, this life doesn't matter at all. Isn't that what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15?

1 Corinthians 15:19 — *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

1 Corinthians 15:32 — *If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.*

It is hardly a coincidence that the rise of hedonism and nihilism in our own society is occurring simultaneously with the collapse of organized religion.

Most men today think that this life is all that really matters, and they think that this life is all there is. They say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4). They agree with Carl Sagan: "The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be." Is that how God sees this universe? Is that how God sees our life? No. (And I suspect Carl Sagan has a different view of things now that he has been dead for 22 years.) God is telling us in his word that there is something else, something beyond this life. And that something else is all that really matters.

James 4:14 — *For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

A vapor? That doesn't seem very permanent. That doesn't seem like something that lasts very long. Is that really what our life on this earth is like? Yes — because that is how God sees it, and if we want to know what something is really like, then we must see that thing as God sees it. God sees our life on this earth like a vapor.

What happens when we see our life on this earth as God sees it? What happens is that suddenly everything makes sense. Suddenly we understand why Christians went to their deaths confessing Christ. Suddenly we can understand the solution to the so-called problem of pain that plagues the philosophers. Suddenly we can understand verses like this one:

Matthew 10:28 — And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Does that verse make any sense if this life is all there is? And how about this verse:

Matthew 16:26 — For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Does that verse make any sense if this life is all there is? But isn't that the bargain that Rome made? Didn't Rome gain the whole world (Luke 2:1)? But what did it profit them? **Nothing, because the price was their soul. They are paying that price here in Chapter 16.** That is what this chapter is all about.

Revelation 16:1-2

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.
2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

The previous verse at the end of Chapter 15 told us that no one could enter the temple until the judgments were fulfilled, so perhaps the great voice here in verse 1 is the voice of God commanding the bowls to be poured out.

The first bowl in verse 2 contains foul and evil sores that afflict those who worship the image of the beast — those who worship the image of Caesar.

This first bowl parallels the sixth plague against Egypt in Exodus 9.

Exodus 9:8-9 — And the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.

The word used for “sore” in verse 2 (and later in verse 11) occurs elsewhere only in Luke 16:21, where it denotes the sores on Lazarus the beggar. Perhaps the message is that what the faithful suffer in this life is what the unfaithful suffer in the next.

We have been seeing frequent allusions back to Egypt and the exodus — why? Because those comparisons remind us of how God dealt with past enemies of his people.

Everyone knows how the conflict with Egypt ended — the conflict with Rome will end the same way: as a total victory for God’s people. With this first bowl, God uses a symbol that reminds us of an Old Testament judgment against a great enemy of his people.

But there is a **difference** between these bowls in Chapter 16 and the plagues of Egypt or even the seven trumpets that we saw earlier in this book. It was not until the sixth Egyptian plague and the fifth trumpet that men were affected **directly**, but here in Chapter 16 men are affected directly starting with the very first bowl of wrath. From the very beginning we see that these bowls are more serious than anything we have seen before.

So were the Romans **literally** afflicted with these terrible sores? No. (I know I keep asking that question and I keep giving the same answer, but many misguided commentators try to literalize the symbols in this book, and by doing so they miss the whole point of the book.)

These bowls and the punishments they bring are symbolic. Yes, the sores in Egypt were literal as was the fire and brimstone in Sodom. But those **literal** sores and that **literal** fire and brimstone afterward became **symbols** for those earlier judgments. We have seen the same language used that way by the Old Testament prophets, and that is how the same language is being used here. If the sores in verse 2 are literal, then what about the beast in verse 2? Is it a literal beast?

The sores in verse 2 are not literal sores, but you know what? The Romans would no doubt have greatly preferred them to be literal sores! The spiritual punishment they received was infinitely worse than physical sores!

Revelation 16:3

3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

The second bowl turns the sea into blood. Again we are reminded of a past display of God's wrath against Egypt.

Exodus 7:19 — And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.

We know the plague against Egypt was literal, but again this second bowl is not literal. Its purpose is to remind us of how God dealt with Egypt.

We have seen the sea several times already in this book. The first beast arose from the sea, which represented the unsettled and wicked nations of the world that gave rise to Rome. This blood may depict, as one commentary described it, "the utter putrefaction of a dead society." Another called it "a revealing illustration of the true nature of the spiritually dead."

Hailey: "A society abandoned to idolatry and its consequent morals, as was the Roman empire of John's day, is spiritually dead."

In such a society, morals decline to the lowest level; the family collapses, schools breed anarchy and rebellion, business ethics are forgotten, entertainment becomes base and sordid, and printing presses exude smut and filth, until the whole is strangled in its own death blood and suffocated by its own stench.”

Similar figurative language is used in Zephaniah to describe a judgment against Judah.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 — I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea.

The language in Zephaniah was figurative, as is the language here in Revelation 16.

Revelation 16:4-7

4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. 7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

The second bowl in verse 3 turned the **sea** into blood, and this third bowl here in verse 4 turns the **fresh water** into blood. So, between them, **all of the water** has become blood.

Again, we are reminded of God’s wrath against Egypt and the first plague, which turned the Nile into blood. But this plague is worse than what happened

to Egypt. Exodus 7:24 tells us that the Egyptians could obtain water by digging, but that does not seem to be the case with these two bowls of wrath.

As with the first two, we should not take this third plague literally. These seven plagues are intended to paint a vivid picture of terrible judgment and utter devastation. And I think we would agree that having every drop of water turned into blood very vividly paints such a picture.

Does *anyone* teach that these passages should be taken literally? Yes. Hal Lindsey, who has sold millions of books on the subject, has the following to say about these verses:

As if the bloodied sea wasn't enough, the third angel poured out his bowl of judgment into the rivers and springs of waters, and they became blood also. It gets pretty grim when there is no fresh water to drink anywhere on earth. There's going to be a big run on Coca-Cola, but even this will give out after a while!

How ridiculous! How trivial! It is a crime when this beautiful book of Revelation is butchered by the likes of Hal Lindsey! And why does Lindsey resort to such sensationalism? Because it sells! **It should be a big warning sign when your commentary on Revelation comes with a movie deal!** I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 2:17 (ESV) — “For we are not, like so many, **peddlers** of God’s word.” There were many such peddlers then, and there are still many such peddlers today.

The “angel of the waters” in verse 5 is most likely the third angel from verse 4. In verses 5-6, this angel reminds us why these bowls are being poured out onto Rome: “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.”

Verse 5 is a general statement that we are seeing these bowls because of the righteousness of God and because of God’s eternal power. Verse 6 then gives us a more specific reason — Rome wanted blood, and so God gave them blood. Rome was blood thirsty. In fact, in the very next chapter Rome will be depicted as a blood thirsty harlot drunk on the blood of the saints! Perhaps having every drop of water turned to blood will satisfy Rome’s lust for blood!

The “prophets” in verse 6 are the New Testament prophets, including John the Baptist who was murdered by a Roman puppet, as well as Peter and Paul, who were also prophets and who were murdered by Nero.

The end of verse 7 is **chilling** — “for they are worthy.” Rome deserved everything that it received from God. These judgments are many things, but one thing they are **not** is too harsh. God is the perfect judge, and God makes perfect judgments. No one can ever say that God is unjust or too harsh. Rome was getting exactly what Rome deserved. We are reminded of what God said to Edom in Obadiah.

Obadiah 15 — *For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.*

What happens next? In verse 7, a voice cries out from the altar to declare the justice of God — “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.” We have seen this altar before.

Revelation 6:9-10 — *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

The end of verse 7 here in Chapter 16 ties what we are seeing here with that earlier statement from Chapter 6, which is one of the key statements in the entire book. That cry for justice from Chapter 6 was what prompted this display of God’s wrath, and that cry from Chapter 6 came from the martyrs gathered under the same altar that is shown here in verse 7.

It is likely that the voice of approval in verse 7 is the voice of those martyrs in Chapter 6. Why? Because their prayers have now been answered. In Chapter 6 they prayed for what is now happening in Chapter 16. The altar in verse 7 is wonderful link between Chapter 6 and Chapter 16.

Rome should have repented. Had they done so, they would not be drinking blood here in Chapter 16. Instead, they would be drinking something very different.

Isaiah 12:3 — *Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

John 4:14 — *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water*

that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

The faithful children of God have a life-sustaining drink that was utterly unknown to the pagans that surrounded them and that were drowning in a sea of blood and filth. The same is true today. Our mission is to bring people to Christ so that they can “draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Sadly, for Rome it was now too late — but it is not too late for those we can still teach today.

*John 7:37-38 — In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, **If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.** He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Revelation 16:8-9

8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

The fourth bowl is poured out onto the sun, and it scorches men with fire, apparently by causing the heat of the sun to intensify. Thus, to a waterless world filled with blood we now add the blazing sun. (This is all starting to sound like west Texas!)

The source of light that was created by God to guide and to warm has instead been turned into an instrument of pain. We are reminded of several passages.

Psalm 104:4 — Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.

Isaiah 47:13-14 — Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and

save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

And once again the Romans are getting back just what they gave. Remember how Tacitus described Nero's persecution of the church: "[The Christians] were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, **when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.**"

The Romans wanted blood, and so God gave them oceans of blood and rivers of blood. The Romans wanted light, and so God turns up the heat of the sun until they are scorched by its light.

And what about the church? Remember the beautiful description of God's people given that we studied in Revelation 7.

Revelation 7:16-17 — *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

Rome is swimming in blood, but the church is drinking from springs of living water. Rome is burning from the heat of the sun, but the sun shall not strike the church.

In these verses, the condition of the faithful is the precise opposite of the condition of the unfaithful. But that was true before as well — in life, Rome seemingly had everything while the church seemingly had nothing. **But things are not what they seem! And now the tables have turned!**

And note the response of the ungodly in verse 9 — they blasphemed the name of God, and they repented not to give him glory. They seem to have taken the advice of Job's wife to just curse God and die (Job 2:9). We are reminded of Paul's description of evil men in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21 — *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Verse 9 says that they repented not. Does that mean that repentance was still an option? Not necessarily.

The rich man in Luke 16 seems to have developed a repentant attitude, or at least a regretful attitude, but it was too late for either. In fact, that rich man in Luke 16 seems to have undergone a tremendous change after it was too late. Suddenly that rich man had a real interest in religious matters! Suddenly that rich man had a proper view of his own material wealth! Suddenly that rich man was willing to admit his own mistakes! Suddenly that rich man had a genuine concern for the lost! But it was all too late.

I think that there will be a great deal of repentance after the final door swings shut — **but it is telling that these Romans are so far gone that they fail to repent even in the face of the these terrible plagues.**

We are once again reminded of the exodus and of Pharaoh's hardened heart. I don't think that verse 9 is telling us that the door remained open for these Romans. Instead, I think verse 9 is just telling us how far gone these Romans were. Even in the face of their own death and their own well-deserved judgment they still refused to acknowledge God.

And I fear those hardened first century Romans have many modern counterparts. We live in a society that has cast sin and shame away, along with the word of God. Jeremiah described such people long ago.

***Jeremiah 8:12** — Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.*

As did Paul.

***Romans 1:31-32** — Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

Hebrews 3:13 warns us not to “be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” **Hardened people are unreachable people, and there is no sadder condition than that.** Jesus knocks on their door, but they have turned that door into a wall. Such it seems was the case with Rome.

Revelation 16:10-11

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

The fifth bowl pours darkness on the seat or the throne of the beast and on the kingdom of the beast. The seat or throne of the beast is Rome, and the kingdom of the beast is the Roman empire.

This bowl parallels the ninth plague against Egypt.

Exodus 10:21 — And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.

It seems that the darkness here can also be felt — verse 10 tells us that it causes men to gnaw their tongues in pain, and verse 11 tells us that it causes pain and sores, although perhaps some of that may have been caused by the previous plague.

We also saw darkness back in Chapter 9 where, as you recall, smoke from the bottomless pit darkened the sun and sky. There we suggested that the darkness may represent the moral darkness of the Roman society, and that may be the case here as well. Moral decline is itself a punishment.

The Bible has much to say about darkness. In fact, the first recorded words from God were “Let there be light!”

Spiritual darkness is often described in the Bible as a judgment from God, and darkness is pictured as the domain of Satan.

Psalms 69:23 — Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not.

Isaiah 9:19 — Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened.

John 3:19 — *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

Romans 1:21 — *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

1 John 2:11 — *But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.*

Ephesians 6:12 — *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Colossians 1:13 — *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

2 Corinthians 4:6 — *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Romans 13:12 — *The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*

It was through the work of Satan that this world was plunged into darkness, and it is through Christ that the light shone once again in that darkness. **In fact, both the Old Testament and the New Testament begin with a light from God shining in darkness.**

John 1:5 — *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

John 8:12 — *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

As with the previous plague, Rome does not repent, but instead continues to blaspheme God. You know that people are really hardened in their sin when not even the fires of hell are enough to convince them of the errors of their ways! Such seems to have been the case with Rome.

Revelation 16:12

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

The sixth bowl causes the water in the great river Euphrates to dry up to prepare the way for kings from the east. (By the way, if these bowls are describing **literal** plagues, then where did all of this water come from? Wasn't it all turned to blood just a few plagues ago?)

The first five bowls would be terrifying to anyone, but perhaps this sixth bowl is the most terrifying so far to the average Roman.

The “kings of the east” in verse 12 are the same kings we discussed for the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9. They are the Parthian kings, whom Rome feared would attack from the east. In fact, Rome had an irrational fear of Parthia. One false rumor that was spread after the death of Nero was that Nero had not really died at all, but had instead gone to Parthia to raise an army to attack Rome. William Barclay writes:

The greatest enemies of Rome, the one nation she could not subjugate, were the Parthians who lived beyond the Euphrates. Their cavalry was the most dreaded force of fighting men in the world. For the cavalry of the Parthians to come sweeping across the Euphrates was a thought to strike terror in the bravest heart.

Did Parthia literally conquer Rome? No. Was an attack from Parthia something that Rome feared and that could be used to figuratively depict a great judgment against them? Absolutely, and that is how it is used here.

None of the previous bowls literally occurred and this bowl is no different. The purpose of the bowls is to paint a picture of complete and total destruction and judgment, and that is exactly what this bowl conveys.

With the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9:13-19, we saw 200 million troops crossing the Euphrates river to march against Rome. But the war of the sixth trumpet was only a partial judgment — only a third were killed. The war of that sixth trumpet was horrifying, but how much worse must be this war of the sixth bowl!

As we saw in Chapter 9, crossing the Euphrates was a vivid portrayal of the threat of military power. In the Old Testament, the Assyrians and the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. Rome feared an invasion from the Parthians across the Euphrates. The Euphrates symbolized a barrier or a deterrent to an external invasion, and that barrier had now been removed by the sixth angel.

The drying up of the waters is a common sign of God's power.

- In *Exodus 14:21*, God showed his power by drying up the Red Sea.
- In *Joshua 3:17*, God showed his power by drying up the Jordan river.
- In *Jeremiah 51:36*, God threatened to destroy Babylon by drying up her sea.
- In *Zechariah 10:11*, God threatened to destroy Egypt by drying up the Nile.

It is also possible that this image depicting the threat of invasion is recalling an actual historical event. As we know, in Revelation, Babylon — a **past** enemy of God's people — is used to depict Rome — the **current** enemy of God's people. And here we see a dried up river being used to defeat figurative Babylon. Ancient Babylon was once conquered by a dried up river.

History tells us that Babylon fell to the Persians without a shot being fired, and we certainly don't see any shots being fired in Daniel 5:30-31 where the fall of the city is described. Instead, there is evidence that certain priests of the false god Marduk thought the current rulers in Babylon were impious and preferred instead the Persians under Cyrus. The people, led by the priests, opened the gates to Cyrus, who was then greeted by them as a great liberator.

But according to Herodotus, there is even more to those strange events. He tells us that when the Persians captured Babylon they did so by drying up the Euphrates river, which flowed right through the center of Babylon. They diverted the river into a lake and entered the city through the dry channel of the river. There were huge brass gates in the walls that flanked the river Euphrates in its passage through the city, and these gates provided access to

water for the citizens and could be closed as a defense if needed. But it was these gates that were deliberately opened, which allowed access to the Persian troops after Cyrus had reduced the water level of the river. Just as the **actual** city of Babylon had fallen by a **literal** drying up of the Euphrates, the **figurative** Babylon would fall by a **figurative** drying up of the Euphrates.

As we study these judgment against the first century “Babylon” (which is exactly what Peter called Rome in 1 Peter 5:13), it is helpful to study the judgment against ancient Babylon, from which Rome got that inspired nickname.

Those who argue that the judgments in Revelation must literally occur need to explain why the same judgments pronounced against ancient Babylon did not literally occur. For example:

***Jeremiah 50:3** — For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast.*

***Jeremiah 50:39-40** — Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.*

***Jeremiah 51:1-2** — Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.*

***Jeremiah 51:25-26** — Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the Lord.*

Jeremiah 51:36-37 — Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant.

Jeremiah 51:42-43 — The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby.

None of that literally occurred — but it did all occur. The language in Jeremiah is a vivid, apocalyptic description of God’s judgment of an ancient enemy of God’s people. The same language is used for the same purpose in the book of Revelation — all that has changed between the two books is the great enemy. In Jeremiah it is Babylon; in Revelation it is Rome.

But if none of these prophecies in Jeremiah literally occurred, then is there then a historical contradiction in the Bible? Not at all! In fact, Isaiah prophesied exactly how Babylon would literally fall in Isaiah 45:1, and he even gave the name of the conqueror, Cyrus, long before Cyrus was even born!

Isaiah 45:1 — Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.

That is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the entire Bible, and of course that is exactly how it literally occurred, down to the name of the person who did it! And it is that same event that Jeremiah describes with vivid figurative language. The Bible describes the same event from different perspectives, one literal and the other figurative.

The key verse in understanding Jeremiah 50-51 is Jeremiah 51:64 — **“Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.”** From an earthly perspective, the end of Babylon may not have looked like much, but that was not at all how it looked from God’s perspective. **“Thus shall Babylon sink!”** And what did we see Revelation 14:8? **“Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city!”** God’s people will be victorious over their enemies! We see that

with Babylon in Jeremiah, and we see that with Rome in Revelation. And the message for us is that we will see that with every enemy of God's people.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

Lesson 37

Last week, when we ended, we were looking at the prophecies of Babylon's fall in Jeremiah and Isaiah, and we were comparing those prophecies with what we see here in Revelation 16.

What we found was that Isaiah and Jeremiah had two prophecies of Babylon's fall. Isaiah literally described how the city would fall, even to the point of naming the king who would conquer the city long before that king was even born. Jeremiah, on the other hand, figuratively described the fall of the city using vivid apocalyptic language that was not intended to be taken literally.

How do we know for sure that Jeremiah was not intended to be taken literally? Because Isaiah and Jeremiah are describing the same event! They both can't be taken literally. To do so would create a contradiction. Also, when we read Jeremiah 50-51 we recognize the apocalyptic language of judgment that we see elsewhere in the Bible, such as in Matthew 24 (where we also know for sure that the language was not intended to be taken literally).

We are seeing the same thing here in Revelation 16. This vision is describing the judgment of Rome in vivid apocalyptic language just as Jeremiah used the same language to describe the fall of ancient Babylon.

We started looking at the sixth angel in verse 12 last week. As you recall, that angel's bowl dried up the Euphrates to make way for an invasion force from the east. Verse 13 continues that description.

Revelation 16:13-15

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of

God Almighty. 15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Rome thought it was eternal, but it was not. The Roman emperors thought they were gods, but they were not. The Roman empire thought it was the true royal priesthood, but it was not. All throughout this book we have seen the contrast between what is true and what is false. We have seen the contrast between Caesar and Christ, between the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of Christ. Nowhere is that contrast more starkly described than right here in verse 13. In contrast to the eternal Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we see three unclean spirits that look like frogs!

The “false prophet” mentioned in verse 13 is also mentioned later in 19:20 and 20:10. Who is this false prophet? We have already talked about him. Back in Chapter 13, when we looked at the second beast from the earth, we saw how that beast was described as a false religious figure. That second beast from the earth in Chapter 13 represented the false religious side of Rome, and that second beast is who is referred to here as the false prophet, and again later in Chapters 19-20. And the beast with the false prophet in verse 13 is the first beast from the sea that we saw back in Chapter 13. That beast represents the royal side of Rome, and together the two beasts show Rome as a royal priesthood.

And who is behind the scenes running the show and pulling the strings of the two beasts? The dragon. In verse 13, we see all three: the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth (who is here called the false prophet). These three stand assembled against God and against the kingdom of God. Together they form a hideous contrast to the trinity of the Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is one characteristic of the dragon and the two beasts that really shines through in the book of Revelation, and that characteristic is this: they have big mouths! We have seen much come from the mouths of the dragon and his minions.

- In 12:15, we saw a flood come from the mouth of the dragon.
- In 13:5, we saw blasphemies come from the mouth of the first beast.

- In 13:14, we saw deceit come from the mouth of the second beast.

Here we see an unclean spirit like a frog come from the mouth of each of the three. In verse 14, these unclean spirits perform miracles and assemble the whole world for battle. We talked about the miracles back in Chapter 13 — these are false signs, just like the false signs performed by Pharaoh's magicians back in Exodus. These miracles are the "signs and lying wonders" of 2 Thessalonians 2:9. These false signs are part of God's judgment.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 — And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

They didn't believe the true miracles — let's see what they do with false miracles. That is what these unclean spirits perform.

Why are the unclean spirits compared to frogs?

Frogs are famous for their empty and continuous croaking. Even today we have the idiom of having a frog in your throat. The sound of a frog is a symbol for meaningless speech, and such speech characterized the speech of the dragon and the two beasts.

Once again, there may be a historical allusion here. After Nero's death, one ancient writer said that Nero was nearly reincarnated as a viper, but mercifully was instead allowed to come back as a frog so he could continue his singing!

Frogs are mentioned in only three other places in the Bible — the second Egyptian plague in Exodus 8 and twice in the Psalms (78:45 and 105:30). In Egypt, God sent a swarm of frogs, but here we see only three frogs.

How bad was the plague of frogs against Egypt? Psalm 78 tells us that the frogs in Egypt "destroyed" the Egyptians. That's how bad it was. Even so, when Pharaoh was given the opportunity to have them removed, what did he say?

*Exodus 8:9-10 — And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only? And he said, **Tomorrow.***

That is truly one of the classic answers in the Bible! A famous gospel sermon by brother Marshall Keeble was based on those verses and was entitled, “Another Night with the Frogs,” and sadly Pharaoh was not the last person to reject the favors of God so that he could spend another night with the frogs! Rome’s failure to repent tells us that they too wanted another night with the frogs, and in fact they were about to spend an eternity with these frogs.

Some commentators note that in Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion, frogs were the bringer of plagues and an agent of the power of darkness. So they argue that this symbol may have been attached to the symbol of the kings from the east, but I don’t think so. I think these frogs are instead taking us back to the plagues of Egypt.

What is “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” in verse 14? Who are “the kings of the earth and of the whole world”? We’ll discuss those questions when we get to verse 16.

In verse 15, a voice (almost certainly Jesus) says that he comes as a thief! What does that mean?

Well, first, how do thieves come? Do they leave signs of their coming ahead of their arrival? Or do they come unannounced? Do you expect their coming, or does their coming occur as a surprise and at an unexpected time? Assuming our thief is not auditioning for “World’s Dumbest Criminals,” we know the answers to these questions! A thief comes without signs and catches you by surprise.

What else comes without signs and catches us by surprise? Two events. One is the final judgment of the world. That is how Jesus described that event in Matthew 24.

***Matthew 24:42-44** — Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

But there is another event that can also come as a thief — another event that can come unannounced and that can come as a surprise. What is that event? Our death.

There are two reasons why we must always be ready to meet God. One is that the world may come to an end, but the other is that our life on this earth may come to an end. With either event, our door of opportunity will close forever.

Which event is in view in verse 15? Doesn't the time frame of the book help us answer that question? If the book is focused on first century Rome, and if the world did not end in the first century, then what remains? In what other way besides their death and the judgment that followed did Jesus come in judgment against these persecutors in the first century?

And doesn't the beatitude at the end of verse 15 also help us answer that question? "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Doesn't that sound much like what Jesus said in 2:10 — "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"?

The message of verse 15 is that Rome had no idea what was coming. Rome would never have dreamed that they were going to lose. Rome thought it was the eternal kingdom! To Rome this judgment was not only a mystery, but it was a surprise! They were not prepared for it.

But the Christians could be prepared for it. Even though it might come at an unexpected time (such as by a knock at the door in the middle of the night when the authorities came to arrest you), those who were watchful and who kept their garments clean could be ready. And that has not changed at all in the intervening two thousand years.

Titus 2:11-14 — *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live **soberly**, righteously, and godly, in this present world; **Looking for that blessed hope**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

1 Thessalonians 5:2-6 — *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a **thief in the night**. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day*

should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

Did you notice in those verses what is linked with our watchfulness? **Sobriety**. “Let us watch and be sober.” There’s an entire sermon in that verse just waiting to be preached! But we must move on now to the Battle of Armageddon!

Revelation 16:16

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

If Revelation 13:18 with its cryptic 666 reference is the most well known verse in Revelation, then verse 16 here must be in second place.

If you ask the man on the street about Armageddon, you will most likely hear that it marks the location of the great battle at the end of the world. But where did anyone ever get the idea that there will be a battle (great or otherwise) at the end of the world? That is when every knee will bow to Jesus Christ. There will be no fighting when Jesus returns to claim his own and punish the wicked. The Bible tells us what to expect on that last great day — and a giant battle between good and evil is not on the list!

So what is Armageddon? The name Armageddon or Har-Magedon means the Mount of Megiddo. Megiddo in Hebrew means “place of troops,” which provides a big clue as to what this symbol means.

The Bible speaks of “Megiddo and its three heights” in Joshua 17:11 (ASV), “Megiddo and her towns” in Judges 1:27, “the waters of Megiddo” in Judges 5:19, and “the valley of Megiddo” in 2 Chronicles 35:22 and Zechariah 12:11.

Megiddo is located at a height near the edge of the Jezreel Valley, also known as the Plain of Esdraelon (Esdraelon being the Greek version of Jezreel). The site is located almost exactly halfway between Haifa on the Mediterranean coast to the west and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee to the east.

From its advantageous location, Megiddo controlled one of the most important roads in the ancient world, the Via Maris, which was an international military and trade route that ran between Egypt in the south and Syria, Phoenicia, and

Mesopotamia in the north and east. This location gave Megiddo great strategic significance.

From the most ancient times to the time of Napoleon and to the present day, Megiddo has been one of the great battlegrounds of the world. One author states that “the area surrounding the ancient site of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley has seen more fighting and bloodshed over an extended period of time than virtually any other spot on earth.”

- It was at Megiddo that Thutmose III fought in 1479 BC what one scholar has called the first battle known in recorded history anywhere in the world (although he also suggests that Pepi I instead may have had that honor as early as 2350 BC).
- It was at Megiddo that the Mongols lost their first major battle ever during their sweep across Asia and the Middle East.
- Megiddo was the plain where Barak and Deborah overthrew Sisera and his chariots in Judges 4.
- Megiddo was in the valley where Gideon’s 300 men defeated the Midianites in Judges 7.
- Saul and Jonathan were killed at the eastern edge of the Megiddo valley in 1 Samuel 31.
- Megiddo is where Ahaziah died by the arrows of Jehu in 2 Kings 9.
- Megiddo is where Josiah perished in battle with Pharaoh Necho in 2 Kings 23.

That last example with Josiah was particularly important because this delay of Necho allowed Babylon to defeat the Assyrians and become the leading power of that time. Josiah’s defeat and death paved the way for the Babylonian exile of the Jews beginning in 586 BC

Napoleon once remarked that all of the armies of the world could make battle at Megiddo. In his book, *The Battles of Armageddon*, Eric Cline describes thirty-four battles fought at the city of Megiddo or its surrounding valley. About a dozen of those battles occurred in Biblical times. Here is how he describes the area:

For four thousand years, this region has suffered almost constant warfare. Indeed, one may seriously ask if there has ever been a time when the rulers of the area, whether local or for-

eign, were not at war. The turbulent history of all Israel, and Judah, Canaan, and Palestine, is reflected in microcosm in this blood-soaked little valley, for virtually every major invader of Israel has had to fight a battle in the Jezreel Valley. Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Hasmoneans, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, Palestinians, French, Ottomans, British, Australians, Germans, Arabs, and Israelies have all fought and died there.

So why is Armageddon mentioned here in verse 16? Because God chose for this great scene the most famous battlefield on earth so that on that battlefield he could depict the complete judgment and utter destruction of Rome.

Are those pictured here in verse 16 as assembling at Armageddon preparing to fight a **literal** battle? No. This battle is no more literal than the war in heaven we studied earlier in Chapter 12.

Hailey: “To look for a physical military battle between human armies to be fought in northern Palestine [with carnal weapons] at some future date is completely without scriptural support and foreign to the spirit and purpose of Revelation.”

Is Armageddon a vivid image for a figurative battle? Definitely. There could be no more vivid location for a great figurative battle than Armageddon. It was then and remains to this day the most famous battlefield in the world.

So who is fighting in this great figurative battle? Well, verse 14 tells us that on one side we have **God Almighty**. God is the “he” in verse 16.

God may be using the “kings of the east” from verse 12 as a tool in this judgment of Rome. We saw that earlier when we talked about the Parthians, and the irrational fear they provoked in Rome. But they are just a tool — Parthia is not judging Rome, God is judging Rome.

Before we see who is on the other side — let me ask this question: **does it matter who is on the other side?** If God Almighty is on one side, then whoever is on the other side does not stand a chance! The battle is over before it is even fought. And guess what? **That is message of verse 16!** There is no suspense in the outcome of this battle. Even before we identify who is on the other side, we know whoever it is will lose. Romans 8:31 — “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

But who is on the other side here? Who is “them” in verse 16? It certainly includes “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” in verse 14, and it likely also includes the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet from verse 13.

We know who the dragon is — Satan. We know who the beast is — the beast from the sea, the royal side of Rome. And we know who the false prophet is — the beast from the earth, the perverted religious side of Rome.

So who are “the kings of the earth and of the whole world”? **Rome and everybody else! Rome and anybody else! Rome and all of Rome’s big ugly friends!**

Having grown up in Katy, Texas in the 1970’s with a calculator strapped to my belt and as a proud member of the slide rule club and the marching band, I know a few things about bullies. And believe me — that was decades before anyone had ever heard of such a thing as an anti-bullying campaign! So let me tell you this as an expert on the subject: **Rome was a bully!** And the message here is that God is going to take care of that bully. But God isn’t just going to take care of just one bully in the schoolyard. Instead, God is gathering all of the bullies together in one place to take care of all of them at one time. God is telling the first bully to meet him for a fight — and God is telling that first bully to bring all of his bully friends with him! God is telling them all to meet him at Armageddon. Why? **So God can mop the floor with them!**

When the early church first heard this part being read aloud to them in the seven churches of Asia Minor, I suspect that this is the part where they all stood and cheered! (I can guarantee you that this is where the slide rule club would have stood and cheered! And for those of you who have never heard of a slide rule — we went to the moon with them, and we haven’t been back since we stopped using them.)

Where is the church during this battle? We will see the answer to that question when we get to Chapter 19, which will give us some more details about this great battle.

Revelation 16:17

17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

This seventh bowl in verse 17 pours its contents into the air. We are not given any details about what was in the bowl, but the great voice (almost certainly the voice of God) let's us know what that seventh bowl accomplished — “It is done!”

“It is done!” This is the end. But the end of the what? The end of the world? No. The end of Rome. The judgments poured out on Rome have ended. Rome has been judged. The church has emerged victorious.

How do we know that this isn't the end of the world? For starters, our time frame is still firmly in place. We saw it in the very first verse of the book, and we will see it again in the closing verses of the book. But, also, in a few chapters we will see descriptions of the church that can apply only to the church on earth. Rome is gone, but the church continues, as does the great mission of the church. In fact, one reason that Rome was judged was because Rome had gone from being a help to the church to instead being a great hindrance to the church. With Rome gone, the church could be more easily carry out its great mission. We are not seeing the end of the world with the church going to heaven. Instead, we are seeing the end of Rome with the church going out to spread the gospel.

Was Rome the eternal kingdom? Hardly! At this point Rome's fate is sealed and its fall is inevitable. The verdicts of historians notwithstanding, the book of Revelation makes it clear that Rome fell because Rome persecuted Christians. Rome's fall was a divine judgment from God. The most powerful empire the earth had ever seen went up against the church and lost. Rome was swept away by the eternal kingdom of God just as Daniel had foretold seven centuries earlier.

Note that this seventh bowl is poured into the air. What does the air depict? Ephesians 2:2 tells us that Satan is the prince of the power of the air.

The defeat of Rome was a great defeat for Satan. Yes, Rome was part of God's plan to bless the world through Christ, but Satan used Rome as a tool for his own purposes. Just think about how Satan had used Rome:

- In Matthew 2, Satan used the Roman puppet king Herod in an attempt to kill Jesus in his infancy.
- In Acts 2:23, wicked Roman hands were used to crucify Jesus.
- Satan used Nero to persecute the early church, including the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.

- With Nero now dead, Satan was preparing to use Domitian to carry on the persecution of the church.

Satan used Rome to attack Jesus in his infancy, and Satan used Rome to attack the church in its infancy. Satan failed! Yes, Satan had a tremendously powerful tool in Rome, but that tool proved powerless against Christ and against the church of Christ.

Satan was the power behind Rome, and Satan failed when Rome failed. Satan's complete defeat with regard to Rome will be described in detail when we get to Chapter 20.

Revelation 16:18-21

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

As usual, a great judgment by God is accompanied by voices, lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. We have seen these images before used for the same purpose as they are used here, to heighten the dramatic effect.

This earthquake was "such as was not since men were upon the earth." That means that this judgment was different from the previous judgments we have

seen earlier in this book. The earlier judgments were partial, but this judgment was total and complete. Since the world had never seen an empire like Rome, the collapse of Rome created an earthquake like the world had never seen.

But doesn't this description of the earthquake mean that this bowl must correspond to the final judgment at the end of the world? No. Similar language is used elsewhere to describe other past judgments that were not the end of the world.

For example, Ezekiel describes a judgment against Judah at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

***Ezekiel 5:9** — And I will do in thee that which I have not done, **and whereunto I will not do any more the like**, because of all thine abominations.*

And compare the description of God's judgment in AD 70 against Jerusalem.

***Matthew 24:21** — For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, **no, nor ever shall be**.*

The earthquake in verse 18 is figurative, and the hyperbolic language in verse 18 simply stresses the intensity of the earthquake. In short, when Rome fell there was a mighty crash!

Verse 19 says that the great city was divided into three parts. What does that mean?

First, the great city in verse 19 is Rome. It is called Babylon in the same verse, and we know that Babylon refers to Rome, both in this book and elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Peter 5:13). And, of course, we know that from the context as well.

So what does it mean that the great city was divided into three parts? There are many opinions on that question, but, as usual, I think the best approach is to go back to the Old Testament to see how similar language is used there. Here is how Ezekiel describes another judgment.

***Ezekiel 5:2** — Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt*

scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them.

There a division into thirds is used to depicts the total destruction of a city (in Ezekiel's case, Jerusalem). But there is another (and, I think, better) possibility that comes from our earlier study of Zechariah.

Zechariah 13:8-9 — *And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.*

As we studied earlier, those beautiful verses are describing God's rescue of his people both from the destruction of Jerusalem and from the persecution by Rome. I think the division into three parts here in verse 19 is intended to remind us of that great promise from Zechariah 13.

Verse 19 also tells us that Rome did not fall alone. The other cities of the nations fell with her. The entire pagan world is pictured as collapsing together. These cities had all drunk the wine of Rome's fornication, and now they were suffering the consequences. Verse 19 is a reminder on a national scale that we should be careful of the company that we keep!

What does the end of verse 19 mean? "Great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." It is simply restating what we have already seen stated before — Rome got what Rome deserved. Rome fully deserved the cup it was not receiving. And more than that, verse 19 is a reminder of a central theme of this book: God knows! God is remembering here what Rome had done, and God is holding Rome accountable for it. Later in 18:5, we will read: "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." That situation is very different from the blessings of those who are in Christ: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17).

In verse 20, the islands flee away and the mountains cannot be found, and in verse 21, huge hailstones fall from heaven. What does that mean?

The islands flee and the mountains cannot be found. That means there is no place to hide and no place of escape.

The hailstones remind us of the seventh plague in Exodus 9:18 and also of the great stones that fell in Joshua 10:11.

The language we see in verses 20-21 often accompanies judgments in the Old Testament.

***Micah 1:3-4** — For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.*

***Nahum 1:5** — The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.*

***Psalms 18:7-13** — Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. ... 12 At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.*

***Ezekiel 26:18** — Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure.*

As before, Rome's response in verse 21 is to dig in even deeper by blaspheming God.

With this seventh bowl, God's judgment against Rome is completed. The fall of the great city will be described in more detail in Chapters 17 and 18, the battle of Armageddon will be described in more detail in Chapter 19, the defeat of Satan will be described in more detail in Chapter 20, and the victory of the church will be described in more detail in Chapters 21-22.

Introduction to Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 are an obituary for the great city of Babylon, which is Rome. In Revelation 14:8, we were told: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Chapters 17 and 18 provide the details of that fall.

A primary character in these next two chapters is a great harlot named Babylon the Great. Here are the descriptions we will see about her. Do they sound familiar?

- She is powerful (17:1, 3).
- She is wealthy (17:4).
- She is royal (17:4).
- She is immoral (17:4).
- She is bloodthirsty (17:6).
- She is arrogant and proud (17:5).
- She sits on seven hills (17:9).
- She rules the world in John's day (17:15, 18).
- She is a terrible persecutor and murderer of God's people (17:6; 18:24).
- She is the leading commercial power on earth (18:3; 18:11-19).
- She is supported by a great military force (17:3, 7).
- She is destroyed in part by her own military power and inner strife (17:16-17).

The Roman Empire is the only nation that fits each of those descriptions. Babylon is Rome — and Babylon is fallen!

Lesson 38

Let's begin today with a question. Satan is just as active today as he was in the first century, and Satan has very powerful tools today just as he did then. The Internet, for example, is a very powerful tool for Satan. Why isn't God doing today with Satan's modern tools what he did with Rome in the first century?

My response is what makes us think God is not doing today what he was doing with Rome in the first century. Certainly we are not receiving a vision as John did, but we don't need another vision — we already have the vision we read about in Revelation.

A key purpose of this book of Revelation is to tell the church how God deals with the enemies of his people. And, as we have seen, this book is describing a **spiritual** deliverance of God's people and a **spiritual** judgment of the enemies of God's people. That is still how things work today, two thousand years later. We are not awaiting a **physical** deliverance from our problems, and neither are we anticipating a **physical** judgment of the church's enemies.

If we remain faithful unto death, we will receive a crown of life just as the first century Christians did. Those who die as enemies of God will receive wrath and indignation just as the Romans did in the first century when they died.

Why didn't God miraculously deliver his people from the mouth of the Roman lion? Why didn't God miraculously rain fire and brimstone down upon Rome? Perhaps it was because, in that final book of the Bible, God wanted the church to know how God was going to deal with his people and with the enemies of his people *after* the age of miracles came to an end, which happened shortly after this book was written.

But Rome did eventually fall. Yes, and nations rise and fall today as well — but that does not happen due to random or earthly forces.

***Romans 13:1** — Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.*

God raises up earthly powers as God sees fit, and God removes earthly powers as God sees fit. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:25). That has always been true, and that is not the miraculous in action, but rather that is God's providence in action.

Perhaps the greatest lesson we can take from this wonderful book of Revelation is the lesson of how God deals today with the church and with the forces of evil opposed to the church. The church is to remain faithful unto death; the world is to repent and obey the gospel or face eternal death; the nations and rulers of this world are to align themselves with the principles in God's word or face the consequences. That is how things worked with Rome — and isn't that exactly how things still work today?

Chapter 17

Revelation 17:1-2

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: 2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

In verse 1, one of the seven angels tells John that he will show him “the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.” This harlot, like Jezebel in the Old Testament, has been actively seeking to murder God's people. But, also like Jezebel, this harlot has now been judged, and we are about to see the details of that judgment. Who is this great harlot?

Do you remember taking math classes in school where some of the answers were given in the back of the textbook? Usually it was the answers to the even numbered problems or the odd numbered problems. Why did the author of the textbook do that? So you could work those problems and test yourself to see if you were on the right track. Having the answers to the even numbered problems helped you learn the material and it helped you work the odd numbered problems, and have confidence in your answers.

For the symbols in verses 1-6, we have the answers right here in the text. They are not at the end of the book, but rather they are at the end of the chapter. We don't have to work out what these symbols mean because the inspired text tells us exactly what they mean.

Before we look in the back of the chapter, however, we should look at the symbols ourselves and ask what we think they mean. If what we think they mean matches with what the text tells us they mean, then that is a pretty good indication that we are on the right track with the many symbols that are not explained in the back of the book!

One more thing — Chapter 17 confirms without any doubt that this book contains symbols. This chapter confirms without any doubt that the approach of the so-called “rigid literalists” is dead wrong. The first half of this chapter shows us symbols, and the second half of the chapter shows us what those symbols mean — many of which are used all throughout this book.

So back to our question: Who is this great harlot? And, also, what does it mean in verse 1 that she is seated upon many waters?

Again, without yet checking the inspired answers to those two questions, wouldn't we expect this harlot to be Rome? Wouldn't we expect the judgment of this great harlot to be the judgment of Rome? Hasn't this book been describing the judgment of Rome up to this point? Are we expecting a sudden change of subject?

And as for the waters, haven't we already seen the restless nations of the world represented by the sea? Wouldn't it make sense for the waters here to mean the same thing? We'll see in a moment whether those two answers are correct. An angel sent from God is about to grade our homework!

Verse 2 tells us that the kings of the earth have committed fornication with this harlot. What that means is that these kings have been her customers. These kingdoms have joined in with Rome and are on Rome's side — some voluntarily, but others not.

In the Old Testament, disobedient cities were often called harlots.

- In *Isaiah 23:17*, we read that Tyre “shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth.”
- In *Nahum 3:4*, Nineveh's sins are described as “the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms.”

- In *Isaiah 1:21*, Jerusalem is described this way: “How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.”
- *Ezekiel 16:15* says this of Jerusalem: “But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by.”

Here the city that is being described is not Tyre, Nineveh, or Jerusalem, but is Rome. Rome, like those Old Testament examples, had made treacherous and deceitful relationships with other nations and with false gods all aimed at harming God’s people.

Rome was very much like a harlot. Rome was deceitful and immoral, and, as with a harlot, Rome not only sinned, but Rome caused other people to sin as well. That is what the second half of verse 2 tells us: “the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” If sin was the disease, Rome was a carrier intent on infecting the entire world.

Rome had become a great force for evil in the world. Rome, like a harlot, sold its merchandise of sin and evil all throughout the world, causing many people to sin. And was Rome the last nation to specialize in exporting evil all throughout the world? Hardly. I bet we can think of a modern example. The United States exports many things, some good and some not. We need to make sure that the church continues to export the gospel. That is what the world needs to receive.

Revelation 17:3-6

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: 5 And upon her forehead was a name

written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

In verses 1-2, the angel told John what he was about to do. In verse 3, the angel does it — he carries John away in the spirit into the wilderness so that John can see the judgment of the great harlot.

What does the phrase “in the spirit into the wilderness” mean? We saw the phrase “in the spirit” all the way back in Revelation 4:2, and it just means that John is seeing a vision. John is not physically being carried away; he is being spiritually carried away.

Why in the wilderness? That reference to a wilderness in verse 3 is a reminder of something we see often in the Bible. Over and over again, we see men such as Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist meeting God in the wilderness. There in the wilderness the distractions go away, and the people of God are able to focus on the things that matter. Jesus frequently withdrew into the wilderness, leaving a perfect example for his people. If our lives are too busy and too noisy to hear the voice of God in his word, then perhaps we need to go out into the wilderness to commune with God (which might just mean simply turning off our TV and our phone for an hour or so!).

Another reason to mention the wilderness in verse 3 is to remind us of another woman we have seen in this book. In Chapter 12 the people of God were depicted as a woman chased into the wilderness by an angry dragon. The woman John sees here in Chapter 17 is also in the wilderness, but this woman in Chapter 17 is totally different from the woman in Chapter 12.

Once we again, we are presented with a great contrast between that which is true and that which is false. Caesar or Christ? The great harlot or the bride of the Lamb? The royal priesthood of Rome or the royal priesthood of God? That is the choice that has been ringing all throughout this book. Choose ye this day! That very well may be the primary theme of this book!

The woman in verse 3 is the great harlot from verse 1. In verse 3, we see that she is not just sitting on many waters, but she is also sitting “upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.”

What are the seven heads and the ten horns? We will receive inspired answers to those questions later in this same chapter, but we already know that they represent something having to do with royalty and with kings. We have seen this image twice before in this book, and each time we have delayed our discussion until we got to Chapter 17.

***Revelation 12:3** — And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and **seven crowns** upon his heads.*

***Revelation 13:1** — And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns **ten crowns**, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.*

Those earlier descriptions link these seven heads and these ten horns with royalty. Also, verse 3 tells us that this beast is “scarlet coloured,” and verse 4 tells us that the harlot is dressed in purple and scarlet. Those are the colors of royalty. In fact, Matthew 27:28 tells us that when the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus as king, they “put a scarlet robe on him.” John tells us that the robe was also purple (John 19:2). Those Roman soldiers are about to find out who really wears the crown! And it is not a crown of thorns!

Also, the description we just read from Revelation 13:1 confirms that the beast we are seeing here in Chapter 17 is the beast from the sea. That explains how the harlot can be sitting both on the waters and on the beast. And, as we said back in Chapter 13, this beast from the sea represents the royal side of Rome.

In verse 4, we see that the harlot is not only dressed in purple and scarlet, but she is also arrayed with gold, jewels, and pearls. These images denote her power, her wealth, her royalty, and her beauty — at least in earthly terms. And all of that was true of Rome from an earthly perspective. Rome was powerful in earthly terms. Rome was royal in earthly terms. Rome was rich in earthly terms. Rome was beautiful in earthly terms. But Rome’s account in heaven was overdrawn!

If a kingdom such as Rome held out a golden cup to the rest of the world, then surely that golden cup must be full of blessings, right? Wrong! Verse 4 tells us

that Rome's golden cup was "full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication."

But do you know what? If the people of that day had wanted to find a kingdom that was truly powerful, and truly wealthy, and truly royal, and truly beautiful — they could have easily found such a kingdom. But that kingdom was not Rome or any other earthly kingdom. That kingdom was and is the eternal kingdom of Christ, the church of Christ. The church was infinitely more powerful than Rome, infinitely more wealthy than Rome, infinitely more royal than Rome, and infinitely more beautiful than Rome. Rome didn't see things that way, but things are not always what they seem! What matters is not how the world sees Rome and the church. What matters is how God sees Rome and the church, and that is what this book is all about.

The golden cup in verse 5 is an allusion back to a description of ancient Babylon found in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 51:7 — Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

God made Babylon a world power so that God could use Babylon to further his own purposes on this earth. Likewise, God made Rome a world power so that God could use Rome to further his own purposes on this earth. In that way, God gave each of them a golden cup with which they could bless the world. Rome (unintentionally, no doubt) used its golden cup that way for a time as the Roman peace allowed the gospel to spread across the known world, but by the time of this book Rome was using its God given golden cup for something entirely different — Rome was using its God given position to spread abominations and filthiness all across the world.

Were Babylon and Rome the last nations to receive great blessings from God, but then to use those great blessings to spread abominations and filthiness across the world? No. Again, I bet we can think of a modern example of such a nation.

In verse 5, we see that the harlot wears a name on her forehead: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

The first thing this name tells us about this harlot is that she had absolutely no shame in what she was doing. She was proud of what she was doing. So

proud in fact that she wrote it on her forehead so that everyone could read it. If she had ever known how to blush, those days were long gone.

There is a historical connection with this description of the harlot. A Roman prostitute in a public brothel wore a frontlet upon her forehead that displayed her name to the customers. That way she could get their return business.

In fact, there may be an even more specific historical allusion here. The Roman Empress Messalina was the wife of the Emperor Claudius, who preceded Nero. Have you ever met someone in authority and wondered how he got there — and then you met his wife and you understood? That may have been the case with Claudius. The historian Suetonius described Claudius in this way: “His knees were weak and gave way under him and his head shook. He stammered and his speech was confused. He slobbered and his nose ran when he was excited.” From that description of Claudius’ weakness, we might conclude that Messalina must have been very powerful and influential to keep them both in power, which was true — up until the time Claudius had her killed for plotting against him.

In any event, Juvenal tells us that at night Messalina would go down to the public brothels and serve there as a common prostitute. Pliny the Elder wrote that Messalina entered and won a contest in a brothel to see who could service the most customers. This description in Chapter 17 of Roman royalty as a harlot would have rung an immediate bell of recognition with anyone in Rome.

What does the name in verse 5 mean? “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” Let’s start with the third part of the name: “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” This is not an ordinary harlot; this is the mother of harlots. This woman runs the entire brothel! And she is intent on spreading her corruption all throughout the earth. So far, this description fits Rome perfectly.

But in case there is any doubt, we have the second part of the name: “BABYLON THE GREAT.” We know that Babylon was a code name for Rome in the first century church. How do we know that for sure? We know that from this book itself, and we also know it from First Peter.

*1 Peter 5:13 — The church that is at **Babylon**, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.*

But maybe that is **literal** Babylon in First Peter, and maybe this is **literal** Babylon here in Revelation 17. Could that be the case? No. The Greek historian Siculus in the first century BC tells us that only a small part of ancient Babylon was inhabited in his day. Strabo the Greek geographer who died in AD 19 describes Babylon as being “in great part deserted.” Pausanias the Greek traveler and geographer of the second century declares that nothing remained of Babylon except the temple of Belus and the walls of the city. Lucian, the second century Greek sophist and satirist, said that Babylon would soon have to be searched for like Nineveh, of which not a trace remained in his day.

Is that the great city John is writing about? Of course not! It could not possibly be. In fact, Babylon in the first century fits none of the descriptions of the great city that we read about in this book.

And that simple, indisputable historical fact (that ancient Babylon is not the great city in this book) establishes beyond any doubt that no one can take everything in this book literally. The name Babylon must be intended as a symbol for something else. And once we agree that this book contains images and symbols, then under what theory do we say that Babylon in Chapter 17 is figurative but the 1000 years in Chapter 20 are literal? Babylon the Great is Rome.

What about the first part of the name — “MYSTERY”? Depending on the translation you are using, that may not even be written as part of the name. The ESV, for example, has: “And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.’” I think that is likely a better translation than the KJV. In any event, the mystery here is simply that Babylon means Rome. Mysteries in the Bible are things that were once not understood but that have now been revealed, and this mystery is no exception.

Verse 6 is a vivid and graphic description of Rome. “And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Rome was a blood thirsty monster, and that blood thirsty monster had its sights set on the church of Christ. That monster had murdered Peter and Paul along with countless other faithful Christians. In fact, it was by bloody Roman hands that God’s son had been nailed to the cross.

And was Rome ashamed of what it had done? Was this great harlot ashamed? Hardly! She proudly displayed her name and her sins on her forehead, and she was drunk on the blood of the faithful Christians she had killed! (And there we have another lesson on sobriety to go along with the one we saw last week!)

ROME'S TIME WAS UP! ROME'S DAY WAS OVER! Rome, like ancient Babylon, had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Can anyone doubt it? "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

We should pause here to note that as bad as Rome is pictured in this book, Rome was pictured just as bad by the pagans who lived there. Tacitus called Rome "the place into which from all over the world all atrocious and shameful things flow and where they are most popular." Seneca called Rome "a filthy sewer."

Barclay: "This was the civilization into which Christianity came; and it was out of this that men were converted to chastity. We may well speak of the miracles of the Cross."

Yes, our own nation has taken a very sharp turn toward immorality and away from God, but we are nothing like Rome, at least not yet. We are on the path toward becoming like Rome, and we will likely get there, perhaps soon, but we are not there yet. What should we as the people of God do to slow our nation's sad decline?

1 Timothy 2:1-4 — I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

We must pray for those in authority, and we must continue to proclaim the gospel. That is what Paul told Timothy with regard to Rome, and that is what Paul is telling us today as well. We need to pray and proclaim.

What does the last part of verse 6 mean? "And when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." That is not a great choice of words in the KJV. The ESV is much better: "When I saw her, I marveled greatly." The ASV is also much better: "And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder." In short, John is amazed at what he has just been shown, as would anybody have been amazed at receiving such a vision. John is not *admiring* this harlot.

But John, no doubt, had many questions about what he had seen. If only an angel would appear to answer those questions and explain what the vision

means! “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” And so we have verse 7.

Revelation 17:7

7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

The angel asks John why he is so amazed, and then he tells John that he will explain the mystery of the woman to him and of the beast that is carrying her, with its seven heads and ten horns.

As with the mystery we saw earlier, this mystery is a mystery no longer after the angel reveals the meaning of the symbols. In fact, the angel’s question at the beginning of verse 7 suggests that maybe this woman was not that great of a mystery to begin with. After all, we seem to have done pretty well in figuring out what she represents even before studying the angel’s explanation. And I think John also by this time likely had a pretty good idea what this vision was generally all about.

Remember that this entire book started with a blessing in Revelation 1:3 for those who read and keep the words of this prophecy. This book was meant to be understood, and this book can be understood. That is a promise from God, and it is not an empty promise. God does not make empty promises or promise empty blessings. And that promise from God applies to the entire book — not just to the part of the book that is explained by this angel.

Throughout our study of Revelation we have been using the standard rule in understanding apocalyptic language: we assume the language is figurative unless we are compelled to understand it otherwise. For the remainder of Chapter 17 we are going to **reverse** that rule and interpret these verses as we do most verses in the Bible: we assume the language is literal unless we are compelled to understand it otherwise.

Why the reversal? Because this angel is explaining the apocalyptic language. This angel is stepping out of the vision to explain to John the meaning of the symbols that he is seeing. John sees seven heads — what do those heads de-

pict? The angel will tell us, and we should interpret that inspired explanation literally unless we are compelled to do otherwise.

And one more thing — we should agree with what this angel has to say! You would think that point would not need saying, but then you would be surprised by the number of commentaries on Revelation that disagree with what this angel has to tell us! When your answer differs from the answer in the back of the book, the prudent student goes back and checks his work!

Revelation 17:8

8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

We have already talked about the bottomless pit and the book of life. And we have already talked about what it means for names to be written or not to be written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. We have also already discussed this beast, which is the beast from the sea, representing the royal side of Rome. We looked at all of these symbols earlier in the book, and what we said before still applies.

Verse 8 says that the beast was and is not. And the verse tells us that the Romans wonder when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. What does all of that mean?

We talked about that before, also. The time when “the beast was” is the time of persecution under Nero. The time when “the beast is not” is the temporary lull in persecution that occurred after the death of Nero. The time when “the beast is to come” is the resumption of persecution that occurred under Domitian.

Domitian was called a limb of the bloody Nero, and was even falsely thought by some to be Nero returned from the grave. Juvenal said that Rome under

Domitian was enslaved to a “bald-headed Nero.” Tertullian called Domitian “a man of Nero’s type of cruelty” and “a sub-Nero.” Domitian renewed the persecution against Christians that Nero had started.

In verse 8, the angel is just restating what John has seen, and what we have seen earlier in the book. The angel’s explanation begins in verse 9.

Revelation 17:9-11

9 And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. 10 And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. 11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

Verses 9, 10, and 11 of Chapter 17 are three of the most important verses in the entire book. In fact, when it comes to really understanding what this book of Revelation is all about, these three verses may be the most important verses in the book.

These three verses confirm with absolute certainty that this book is about Rome, and these three verses tell us when this book was written. These three verses also provide a vital link for us back to the prophecies of Daniel. As you can imagine, with that introduction, we are going to spend some time talking about these three verses!

Let’s start with some important principles of interpretation that we can glean from these verses.

First, these verses confirm that the book of Revelation contains figurative language. You wouldn’t think that statement would be controversial, but sadly it is. Some people approach this book with what they call a “rigid literalism.” These verses confirm what we already knew — that literal approach is the wrong approach. This book is filled with symbols and figurative language.

Second, these verses tell us that sometimes a symbol has two different meanings. In verse 9, we see that the seven heads are seven mountains, and in verse 10 we see that the seven heads are also seven kings. That may support the notion that other symbols in this book also have dual meanings, but we can't say for sure when the text doesn't tell us.

Third, these verses tell us that sometimes a number that is used as a symbol also has a literal meaning. For example, we have seen the number seven used all throughout this book as a symbol for perfection. But here we see the angel refer to seven mountains and seven kings, which we should take as a literal seven mountains and literal seven kings unless we find some compelling reason to understand it otherwise. Does that mean every number in this book has both a figurative and a literal meaning? No. All it means is that **some** of the numbers in this book have **both** a figurative and a literal meaning. Let's make two observations about that point.

First, this point is not new. We have seen it before. The Babylonian captivity was seventy years — and that was a literal seventy years. But God chose that number seventy for a reason — seventy denotes the perfect (seven) and complete (ten) period of time for the people of God to learn the lesson that God was teaching them.

And second, that number seventy and this number seven are not chosen at random. God chose the length of the captivity, God determined the number of these kings, and God created the seven mountains. Sometimes, and perhaps often times, when God chooses literal numbers, God chooses literal numbers that have a symbolic significance.

How can we tell when a figurative number in this book also has a literal meaning? The easiest way to tell when that happens is for us to be told by God when it is happening, and that is exactly what is happening in these verses. When we are not told that there is also a literal meaning for a number, then we should just understand the number figuratively as usual for apocalyptic language.

Lesson 39

Verse 9 begins with the phrase, “And here is the mind which hath wisdom.” That simple statement is a warning sign that we are about to read something that is not that simple. It is a warning that we are about to read something that is going to require some very careful interpretation. Why do I say that? Because we have seen phrases like that used elsewhere in the Bible.

In Matthew 24:15, when Jesus referred back to Daniel, Jesus said, “whoso readeth, let him understand.” There Jesus talked about the “abomination of desolation” in Daniel, and, as we know from our study of that book, there are two different abominations of desolation in Daniel. I think Jesus was alerting his hearers that they needed to be extra careful in interpreting those prophecies to make sure they were looking at the right abomination of desolation.

And remember the symbol of 666 that we saw in Revelation 13:8? How did that verse begin? It began with the phrase, “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding.” Again, that symbol was one that required some extra attention to detail, and so it came with a warning sign.

I think we have another warning sign at the beginning of verse 9. We always need to be very careful when we study the Bible, but when we reach a verse with a warning sign, we need to be extra careful and cautious, and we need to slow down to make sure we don’t miss anything.

We know that the symbols we are seeing here in Chapter 17 are particularly important — why? First, because we have seen them so many times. This is our third time to see the seven heads and the ten horns. And second, we know these symbols are particularly important because an angel steps out of the vision to explain what they mean. God did not want there to be any doubt or any confusion as to their meaning. We are told what they mean by the inspired text.

So let’s take our time and look at verses 9, 10, and 11.

Verse 9: “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.”

Rome is not mentioned by name anywhere in the book of Revelation, but verse 9 comes about as close as possible to mentioning Rome by name without actually doing it!

Verse 9 would be like someone asking what state you live in, and then you responding, “I live in the Lone Star State.” True, you didn’t mention Texas by name, but everybody knows you are referring to Texas. That is precisely the situation with verse 9’s reference to the “seven mountains.” The “seven mountains” are to Rome what the “Lone Star State” is to Texas. They are both identifiers.

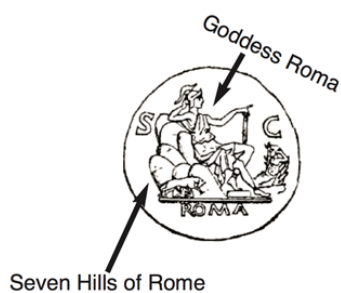
Rome has for millennia been known as the city that sits upon seven hills. That was true in the first century, and it remains true in the twenty-first century. Rome has throughout its history been known as the city that was built upon seven hills.

The identification in verse 9 of the seven mountains would have been immediately clear to any first century reader. The commentaries are virtually unanimous in their agreement on this point.

Mounce: “There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills.”

Swete: “No reasonable doubt can be entertained as to the meaning of these words.”

Gentry: “Perhaps no point is more obvious in Revelation that this one: Rome is the one city in history that has been distinguished for and universally recognizable by its seven hills. ... Suetonius and Plutarch record for us that in the time of Domitian the festival of Septimontium (“the feast of the seven hilled city”) was held annually in December to celebrate the seven hills enclosing Rome. ... This point is well nigh indisputably certain. Indeed, *‘there is scarce a poet that speaks of Rome but observes it.’*”



Look at the coin shown to the left and on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com. That coin was minted during the reign of Vespasian, which (as will see when we get to verse 10) was the time this book was written. In fact, Vespasian’s face is shown on the front of the coin (which is not shown on the handout). The reverse of the coin (which has been redrawn on the handout to make the details easier to see) shows the Roman goddess Roma sitting upon the seven hills that surrounded the city of Rome.

And near the bottom of those seven hills, also below the sitting woman, we see a beast suckling the mythic Roman founders, Romulus and Remus.

A woman sitting on seven hills? A woman sitting on a beast? Where have we seen that before? Isn't that exactly what we saw at the beginning of Chapter 17? Isn't that the precise image we were shown?

Just think about this coin for a moment, and put yourself in the place of someone living in Asia Minor who is a member of one of the congregations who originally received this book.

- You are living in the Roman empire.
- Everyone you know lives in the Roman empire.
- You receive this book from John, who you know had been exiled to Patmos by Rome.
- You, too, are being persecuted by Roman authorities, and you fear every knock at your door.
- Nero died about a decade ago, but rumors abound that Nero did not really die at all, but that instead Nero is coming back to finish what he started, both in destroying Rome and in destroying the church.
- You have in your pocket the coin shown on the handout. And that's not all — you know (as does everyone else) that a very common image for Rome is the goddess Roma sitting on seven hills. You see that image all the time. If you want to see it now, you can just reach into your pocket and pull out that coin, which also shows that woman sitting atop a beast, which depicts the mythological founding of Rome.
- John's book arrives, and you anxiously await hearing it read aloud at the next worship service. When that day comes, you are hearing it read for the very first time, as is everyone else around you.
- When that reading gets to Chapter 17, you hear the reader speak of a blood thirsty harlot sitting atop a beast and sitting on seven mountains.

Put yourself in that person's place. **Who do you think that woman is?** Who do you think this book talking about? China? Russia? The Papacy? The European Economic Union? Jerusalem? No. No. No. No. No. There can be no doubt what you would think when you heard this description from Chapter 17 — this book is talking about Rome.

Back in Lesson 5 we looked at ten ways to completely miss the boat when it comes to interpreting this book. We looked at ten things we should do if we want to make sure we get this book absolutely wrong. Remember the first item on our list?

Make sure that our interpretation has no particular message for the initial readers of the book who were suffering persecution and praying to God for deliverance. Ideally, our view of this book should create panic rather than provide comfort.

Here is where we really put that warning into operation. I have to wonder how can anyone read this description in Chapter 17, and consider that description in the context of its initial audience, and then conclude that anything other than Rome is in view here?

How would someone with this coin in his pocket understand the blood thirsty harlot sitting on seven mountains in Chapter 17? If anyone ever tells you this book is about some other city (such as Jerusalem, for example), they need to explain to you how a first century reader living in Rome and with that Roman coin in his pocket would have understood this image in Revelation 17 to mean anything other than Rome.

If our interpretation of this book would not have made any sense to its first century audience, then our view is wrong. If our view of this book would not have brought comfort the suffering first century church, then our view is wrong. You can take that to the bank!

And just to completely remove every shred of doubt, we have verse 18 at the end of this chapter: “And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”

Who else other than Rome could that possibly be? Was there any sense in which the city of Jerusalem reigned over the kings of the earth? None at all. When this book was written Jerusalem was rubble, and prior to its destruction Jerusalem was not reigning over anything but was instead itself being reigned over by Rome. **The great city here is Rome.**

Verse 10: “And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.”

If anyone ever asks you *when* the book of Revelation was written (or, more precisely, when this vision was received by John), you should direct them right here to verse 10 in Chapter 17. This verse describes seven kings, and it tells us

that **“one is.”** What that means is that of these seven kings one of them was presently ruling when the vision was received. **If we can identify that king, then we will know, at least approximately, when the book was written.**

So who are these seven kings? Well, if one of them was presently reigning, then we know that we are looking for first century Roman kings.

Oh, but someone might say, Rome didn't have kings — Rome had emperors. Really? What did the Jews say in John 19:15 when Pilate asked them if they wanted him to crucify their king? They responded, **“We have *no king but Caesar.*”** Yes, Rome had kings. And yes, that is what they were called by their first century subjects — they were called kings because that is what they were.

So the seven kings are seven Roman emperors — but which seven Roman emperors?

First, should we be looking for a **literal** seven emperors, or should we view this number seven **figuratively**? To which I answer, **yes and yes!**

In the angel's explanation, the seven mountains were a literal seven mountains, so let's start by looking for a **literal** seven kings. But I think what we will find after we have identified those seven kings is that the number seven in that list of seven kings will have a very profound **symbolic** significance, and especially as it pertains to the **eighth** king that will follow.

So our task then is to see if we can locate seven emperors of Rome that make sense given the clues in verses 10-11. So what are those clues? What are we looking for? Look at verses 10-11.

- We must find five kings who have fallen.
- We must find one king (the sixth king) who is.
- We must find another king (the seventh king) who is yet to come but who will remain only a little while.
- We must then find an eighth king who is of the seven and who goes into perdition.

Who are those eight kings? Please look at the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com. There you will see a list of the twelve Caesars from the famous book of that name written by the ancient historian Suetonius. You can see that those twelve caesars are divided into four groups.

The **first group** contains the most famous Caesar of all, Julius Caesar. He is so famous that his family name became a synonym for ruler, both in the first cen-

tury and in modern times. The modern designations of Kaiser and Czar both come from the name Caesar.

But Julius Caesar was not a king. He wanted to be a king, and that desire was what got him killed, but he was not a king. Julius Caesar led a republic rather than an empire. We'll say more about him later.

The **second group** is the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which began with the first emperor of Rome, Augustus, and ended with the death of Nero in AD 68.

The **third group** contains the three civil war kings who reigned and died within the single year AD 69. That year has been called the year of four emperors, and just that description alone tells you how much turmoil was occurring in the Roman empire at that time. Can you imagine the turmoil in our own country if we have four presidents in a single year? That is what was happening in Rome about a decade before this book was written.

The **fourth group** is the Flavian dynasty, which consisted of Vespasian and his two sons, Titus and Domitian.

So in that list of twelve Caesars we have eleven emperors, with three of those eleven hardly qualifying as emperors.

The two dynasties in that list (there's that number two again!) give us eight emperors: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero in the first dynasty, and Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian in the second dynasty. (That makes **eight** kings. Maybe we're on to something here!)

So how do we go from twelve Caesars to eight kings? To begin, we have two big decisions to make: First, where do we start on the list? And second, what do we do with the three civil war kings?

Where do we start? We really have only two options — we either start with Julius Caesar or we start with Augustus. And what do we do with the three civil war kings? Again, we really have only two options — we either include them or we ignore them.

For the mathematicians among us, that strategy gives us four possibilities. We start with either Julius Caesar or Augustus, and then we count out eight kings, either including or ignoring the three civil war kings. Those four possibilities are shown on the handout as Options A, B, C, and D (each of which is a list of eight Caesars).

- Option A starts with *Julius Caesar* and *includes* the three civil war kings.

- Option B starts with *Julius Caesar* and *excludes* the three civil war kings.
- Option C starts with *Augustus* and *includes* the three civil war kings.
- Option D starts with *Augustus* and *excludes* the three civil war kings.

Some argue for additional options that would arise if we separate the eighth king from the others in time to permit intervening kings between the seventh king and the eighth king. But why then would we be told that the reign of the seventh king would last only a short time? That detail suggests that the eighth king follows immediately after the seventh king.

So which of the four options is the right choice?

Right from the start I think we can rule out Option B. Why? Because Option B places **Vespasian** in the role of the seventh king who was to reign only a short time, and Vespasian reigned for eleven years. In Roman emperor terms, eleven years is not a short time.

What about the other three options? Can we exclude any of them on that same basis? No. **Galba** (the seventh king in Option A) reigned seven months, **Otho** (the seventh king in Option C) reigned ninety-five days, and **Titus** (the seventh king in Option D) reigned twenty-six months. Those kings all reigned a short time, so we can't rule out any of the other options on that basis.

But Options A and C have at least two other problems.

First, recall that the sixth king is the king "who is" reigning in verse 10. With Option A, the sixth king would be **Nero**, and with Option C, the sixth king would be **Galba**. What that means is that Options A and C would push the date of this book back to the reign of Nero or shortly thereafter, which in my opinion is too early. We talked about that issue in our introductory lessons.

Second, Options A and C provide poor candidates for the eighth king, who goes into perdition. With Option A, the eighth king would be **Otho**, and with Option C, the eighth king would be **Vitellius**. Neither of those two emperors fits the descriptions of the eighth king. In fact, neither of those two kings had time to do much of anything. Otho committed suicide following his three month reign, and Vitellius reigned only eight months before being beheaded and having his head paraded through the streets of Rome.

Another problem with Option A is that it starts with **Julius Caesar** as the first emperor. Rome was a republic under Julius Caesar, not an empire.

Yes, Julius Caesar was a powerful leader, but he was not a king. The Roman republic originally entrusted the government to two consuls so that the citizens of Rome would be protected against the tyrannical rule of a single man. But it was soon felt that circumstances might arise in which it was important for the safety of the state that the government should be vested in the hands of a single person, who should possess absolute power for a short time, and from whose decisions there could be no appeal to any other body. That person was called a dictator, and Julius Caesar held that office for five terms, eventually being declared “Dictator in Perpetuity.” (For a modern analogy, think Putin.) Now, there may be a fine line between a Roman emperor and a Roman dictator in perpetuity, but there is a line. Julius Caesar was not a king.

And if we include Julius Caesar on the list of Roman emperors, then on what basis do we include **only** Julius Caesar? Why not also include Crassus and Pompey? They ruled with Julius Caesar in the First Triumvirate. And why not include Lepidus and Marc Antony, who ruled with Augustus in the Second Triumvirate? And why not include Sulla, whose own dictatorship in 82 BC set the precedent for Julius Caesar’s dictatorship and the eventual end of the Republic under Augustus?

In short, if we open the door for Julius Caesar, it will be hard to close the door for many others. And yes, it is true that some ancient historians include Julius Caesar on lists along with Augustus and his followers, but that points more to the fame of Julius Caesar than to his office. And, yes, it is true that Suetonius included Julius Caesar on his famous list of twelve Caesars, but no one is arguing that Julius Caesar was not a Caesar! What we are saying is that Julius Caesar was not a king and that the first Caesar who was a king was Augustus. And historians say the same thing.

But is that the only reason to start with Augustus? No. I think there is an even better reason to use Augustus as the starting point. The New Testament starts with Augustus on the throne.

Luke 2:1 — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Augustus was the emperor who was around to welcome the King of kings into this world, and whether or not Augustus saw that star in the sky, his empire would never be the same again. So, in addition to being the **historical** starting point, Augustus is the **natural** starting point for a student of Scripture. Between Augustus and Domitian we have the entire first century New Testament

period. So it should not surprise us at all if these prophecies are focused on Augustus, Domitian, and the kings in between.

So where does that leave us? By the process of elimination we are left with Option D.

Does Option D fit the evidence? Yes, Option D fits the evidence very well. In fact, Option D fits the evidence so well that we could likely have ruled out the other options on that basis alone.

But Option D completely ignores the three civil war kings: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. What is the basis for doing that? There are at least two bases for ignoring those three kings — one basis from secular history, and a second basis from the the book of Daniel.

Let's look first at the basis from secular history for ignoring the three civil war kings — the three civil war kings were hardly kings at all. In fact, as one commentary explains: "the provincials never recognized them as having been emperors. From the provincial standpoint Vespasian succeeded Nero." And remember — this book was initially addressed to the provincials living in Asia Minor. If you asked them which emperor came after Nero, they would likely have answered Vespasian, and for all practical purpose they were right.

In addition to that basis, the book of Daniel gives us another basis for ignoring the three civil war kings.

***Daniel 7:7-8** — After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

***Daniel 7:23-25** — Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten*

kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

What an amazing and wonderful historical prophecy! Remember — Daniel was written **six centuries** before the events we are studying here in Chapter 17. And yet right there in Daniel 7 we read this prophecy: “I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were **three of the first horns plucked up by the roots.**” And we read: “And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, **and he shall subdue three kings.**”

We know that Daniel 7 is talking about first century Rome. Rome was the fourth beast in Daniel 7:7 that followed the first beast (Babylon), the second beast (Medo-Persia), and the third beast (Greece). And Daniel 7 (just like Revelation 17) is telling us about the kings of Rome in the first century. In Daniel 7, there are ten kings, followed by an eleventh, called a “little horn” in Daniel 7:8. And what does Daniel tell us about three of those eleven kings — Daniel tells us they are “plucked up by the roots” — they are uprooted! They are subdued!

Daniel was written around 539 BC. The year of four kings occurred in AD 69. That’s a difference of over six centuries! As surprising as a year with four kings must have been to the Romans, the inspired prophet Daniel had written about it over six hundred years earlier — and Daniel had told us **when** it would happen! The three uprooted kings in Daniel 7 are none other than Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.

By why are they uprooted in Daniel 7? Why are they ignored in Revelation 17? Why not just include them and have eleven kings rather than eight kings? Let’s hold those questions until we get to verse 11.

So where are we in verse 10?

Who are the five kings who have fallen? They are the first five Rome emperors: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. These are the same five emperors who span the time from the birth of Christ to the death of Paul.

Those five emperors were all dead by the time this book was written — they had fallen.

Who is the king who is? The king who was reigning at the time of this vision was Vespasian, who reigned from AD 69 to 79. The book of Revelation was written during his reign, and likely late in his reign. As we discussed in the introduction, the sad states of some of the congregations in Revelation 2-3 suggests a later rather than an earlier date for the book. So perhaps the book was written close to AD 79, near the end of Vespasian's reign.

Who is the king who is yet to come but who will remain only a little while? That king is Titus, Vespasian's eldest son who reigned for twenty-six months. As we discussed in the introduction, Titus was most likely murdered by his younger brother, Domitian. No one (other than Domitian!) would have guessed that Titus would reign only a short time. He was only 39 when he became emperor, and the people all expected him to reign for a very long time. But God knew otherwise.

And so who then is the eighth king in the next verse who goes to perdition? None other than Domitian, Vespasian's younger son, who began where Nero left in persecuting the church.

As I said, Option D is a very good fit! Let's next take a closer look at Domitian.

Verse 11: "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition."

Evil number eight — Domitian! If we are on the right track here, and I think we are, then the eighth king in verse 11 is Domitian, Vespasian's younger son and Titus' brother.

A moment ago we asked some questions about the three uprooted kings: Why are they uprooted in Daniel 7? Why are they ignored in Revelation 17? Why not just include them and have eleven kings rather than eight kings? I think we can now answer those questions.

Those three kings are uprooted and ignored because God wanted Domitian to be counted as number **eight**. That's why. The number eight is the symbolic number of renewal and resurrection — the eighth day starts a new week. Domitian was the one who **renewed** Nero's attack on the church. And Domitian was the one who some falsely believed was the **resurrected** Nero come back to life.

Yes, there are seven **literal** kings at issue here, but that number seven was not chosen at random — that number seven was chosen so that Domitian would be number eight. The **literal** seven was chosen for a **symbolic** reason.

Listen to what Milligan had to say about the number eight:

The number six itself awakened a feeling of dread in the breast of the Jew who felt the significance of numbers. It fell below seven just as eight went beyond it. [The number eight] denoted more than the simple possession of the Divine. As in the case of circumcision on the eighth day, of the great day of the feast on the eighth day, or of the resurrection of our Lord on the first day of the week, following the previous seven days, it expressed a new beginning in active power.

The Year of Jubilee, when everyone got the chance to begin all over again, followed seven sevens of years (Leviticus 25). The leper who had been excluded from the congregation was given a new beginning on the eighth day (Leviticus 14:10). Male children were circumcised on the eighth day.

And there's another reason why God wanted Domitian to be represented by the number eight — because Domitian was a **false eight!** And maybe that's yet another reason why the three kings are ignored — to show that Domitian's depiction by the number eight was **contrived**. Domitian was not a true eight, he was a false contrived eight.

Why does that matter? Because it once again stresses the contrast between what is true and what is false. **Jesus is the true eight!** If eight is the number for renewal and resurrection, then no one is more of an eight than Jesus! In early Christian literature, Jesus was sometimes referred to as 888. **Jesus is the perfect eight!**

John 11:25 — I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

Domitian could never make that statement or make that promise. Domitian was not God. But Jesus is God, and Jesus could and did make that statement and that promise. **Christ or Caesar?** That central theme is on display here when it comes to the number eight!

We have already looked at the link between the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, and we looked very closely at that link when we studied Daniel verse by verse a few years ago.

We just saw a fascinating link between the two books when it comes to the three civil war kings. But there is perhaps no more fascinating link between Daniel and Revelation than that provided by the Roman emperor Domitian. John wrote about Domitian a few years before he came to power. Daniel wrote about Domitian six centuries before he came to power!

Daniel 7:8 — *I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another **little horn**, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

Daniel 7:19-22 — *And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of **the other which came up**, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.*

Daniel 7:24-26 — *And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and **another shall rise after them**; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.*

Paul also told us about Domitian in Second Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there*

*come a falling away first, and **that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition**; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

Do those descriptions fit with what we know from history about the Emperor Domitian?

Was Domitian a braggart? Listen to what Suetonius had to say about him in his book, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*:

From his youth he was far from being of an affable disposition, but was on the contrary presumptuous and unbridled both in act and word.

Did Domitian claim to be deity? That is what Daniel 7:25 is saying when it describes Domitian as someone who would think to change the times. (In Daniel 2:21 we read that God changes the times.) Did Domitian put himself in the place of God? Listen to Suetonius:

With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, 'Our Master and our God bids that this be done.' And so the custom arose henceforth of addressing him in no other way even in writing or in conversation.

But how was Domitian "different from the former ones" as Daniel 7:24 says? William Barclay wrote:

But with the coming of Domitian there came a complete change. Domitian was a devil. He was the worst of all things — a cold blooded persecutor. With the exception of the mad Caligula, he was the first Emperor to take his divinity seriously, and to demand Caesar worship.

Domitian was the first to make it a policy of the empire that all who refused to worship him be persecuted. Also, Domitian began an empire policy of persecution against Christians that lasted for years after he died.

But did Domitian "subdue" the three civil war kings as Daniel 7:24 says he would do? Yes, through his family and his father Vespasian, who became em-

peror of Rome after the three civil war kings died in AD 69. And Domitian and Titus, Vespasian's sons, also played a role in those events.

Domitian's dynasty took over after Nero's dynasty ended. And the two great persecutors of the church, Nero and Domitian, each marked the end of their respective dynasties. They did not pass their kingdoms on to their children, but rather their dynasties died when they died.

Lesson 40

Last week, we looked at verses 9-11, and we saw how the seven heads followed by an eighth fit perfectly with the first seven emperors of Rome followed by Domitian, where we ignored the three short-lived civil war kings. We looked back in Daniel, and we saw where Daniel had said that three kings would be uprooted six centuries before it happened in AD 69.

It all seems to fit like a glove, but we need to be careful with regard to Domitian. Some argue that Domitian was not actually a great persecutor of the church, but that he was later turned into one by those who wanted to make him fit the description of the eighth king. Is that a fair criticism? Yes and no.

Yes, in the sense that some commentators have overstated the evidence for Domitian to perhaps make him a better fit for their theories. One such statement describes Domitian as “the emperor who bathed the empire in the blood of Christians.” We have such evidence for Nero, but not for Domitian. Is it possible that Domitian persecuted the church to that extent? Yes, and perhaps even likely. Do we *know* from the evidence that Domitian persecuted the church to that extent? No.

But saying that we do not know whether Domitian bathed the empire in the blood of the saints does not mean that we cannot know whether Domitian was a persecutor of the church. I think we can know that, and I think Domitian was a persecutor of the church. And I would point to three sources of evidence: circumstantial evidence, extra-Biblical evidence, and Biblical evidence (**not** listed in order of importance!).



We have already examined some **circumstantial evidence** for a Domitian persecution of Christians. In Lesson 27, we looked at a Roman coin that showed Domitian’s infant son pictured as a divine child reaching for seven stars and that described Domitian himself as a son of a god. **How could such a person not come in conflict with the church?**

We also know that Domitian was very paranoid about his position, and that he paid attention to every rumor he heard about any potential threat to his position. How could such a person not be concerned with a group in his empire that worshipped a king other than himself and that refused to bow down to him?

In the beginning of his reign, Suetonius tells us that Domitian spent hours alone each day by himself in private, during which time he did nothing but catch flies and stab them with a sharp pin. When some one once asked “whether any one was with the emperor,” Vibius Crispus answered, “not so much as a fly.”

I think we will all agree from that description that Domitian had some serious mental health issues — which made him even more dangerous. Perhaps a modern day example of Domitian would be Kim Jong-un, the “dear leader” of North Korea, and we might even be able to think of another modern day example or two.

Suetonius gives us some examples of Domitian’s cruelty.

- He got so mad at one Roman writer for something he had written that he had the man put to death, and he crucified all of the slaves who had transcribed the work.
- He had a governor of Britain executed because the man had allowed a new type of lance to be named for him.
- He had a playwright killed because the man had written a play that Domitian felt could be seen as a criticism of his own divorce.
- He had one of his own cousins killed because a herald had mistakenly proclaimed him as Emperor rather than as consul.

And his arrogance?

- After his father and his brother were dead, Domitian would boast that it was he who had made them both emperors, and that they had now returned to him what was his.
- He demanded that he be addressed as “our Lord and our God” both in speech and in writing.
- He renamed the months of September and October after himself!

I think the Senate’s reaction to the news of his assassination also tells us something about the type of person he was. Here is how Suetonius describes their reaction.

The Senators however were filled with joy and rushed to the House to denounce the dead Emperor, shouting out bitter insults, and calling for ladders so that his votive shields could be torn down and his statues toppled to the ground before their

eyes. Then they decreed that all inscriptions mentioning him should be effaced, and all record of him obliterated.

And although Suetonius does not tell us that Domitian persecuted the church, he does tell us that Domitian persecuted the Jews and “those who lived as Jews,” which could be a reference the church.

I think the **circumstantial evidence** is very strong in pointing to Domitian as a persecutor of the church.

As for the **direct extra-Biblical evidence** for persecution, there is quite a bit (but admittedly not nearly as much as we have for Nero).

When Pliny wrote to the Emperor Trajan in AD 111 for advice on how to conduct trials for Christians, he said that some Christians had defected “as much as twenty-five years ago.” That would have been during the reign of Domitian.

When Melito, a bishop of the church in Sardis, wrote an apology to the emperor Marcus Aurelius in AD 175, Eusebius tells us he wrote that “Nero, and Domitian, alone, stimulated by certain malicious persons, showed a disposition to slander our faith.”

Tertullian was an attorney in Carthage, and in his apology to Septimius Severus in AD 197, he wrote: “Consult your histories. There you will find that Nero was the first to rage with the imperial sword against this school in the very first hour of its rise in Rome,” and “Domitian too, who was a good deal of a Nero in cruelty, attempted it ... soon stopped ... restored those he had banished. Such are ever our persecutors.” Tertullian speaks of Nero as “the first emperor who dyed his sword in Christian blood, when our religion was but just arising at Rome,” and he called Domitian “a limb of the bloody Nero.”

Eusebius quotes Tertullian to the effect that John returned from exile on Patmos during the reign of Domitian and lived in Ephesus until the reign of Trajan. Eusebius also writes that Domitian “finally showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us.”

Hegesippus, who lived between AD 117 and 189, writes of Christians who were called before Domitian and examined by him. Upon hearing them, “Domitian despising them, made no reply; but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease.”

So the extra-Biblical evidence clearly points to a Domitian persecution. Perhaps it was not as bad as Nero's and perhaps it was intermittent at times, but it could still be very, very bad and not be as bad as what Nero had done.

As for the **Biblical evidence**, we have looked at it already. It comes from the Old Testament and the New Testament. It comes from the pen of Daniel, the pen of Paul, and the pen of John, all writing by inspiration from God. There is a reason Christians have been seeing Domitian in the pages of Revelation for millennia.

If our interpretation is correct, then both Daniel and John were prophesying that there was to be a renewed persecution by an "eighth king" who would come to power after the death of Nero. Who else could that be but Domitian? What other dynastic family took over after Nero died and after the dust cleared?

The Bible is our best evidence on this subject, and it does just about everything in pointing to Domitian other than mention Domitian by name. (But Nero is never mentioned by name in the Bible, either.)

I think the evidence is clear that Domitian persecuted God's people. To those who would argue otherwise, I would respond as did Tertullian: "Consult your histories!" And I would add: **Consult your Bible!**

But that extra-Biblical evidence raises another potential problem: how can we date the book during the reign of Vespasian when much of that extra-Biblical evidence dates the book during the reign of Domitian?

We dealt with that issue at length during our introductory lessons, where you will recall we suggested that John may have been exiled by Domitian before Domitian became emperor but while he was acting as emperor when Vespasian and Titus were away from Rome. Also, the book may have been written during the reign of Vespasian, but then not circulated until John was released, perhaps during the reign of Domitian. Also, dating the writing of this book during the reign of Vespasian fits with Revelation 17:8, which suggests that Revelation was written during a lull in the persecution, which was the case when Vespasian was on the throne.

Revelation 17:12-18

12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. 13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. 14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. 15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. 16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. 17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. 18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

Who are the ten horns? Even with the angel's explanation, there remain many different opinions as to the identity of these ten horns — so we need to proceed very carefully. I will tell you what I think they mean, along with why I think that, but I will also give you some other choices to consider. Let's start with the clues we are given.

In verse 10, the angel tells us that the ten horns are ten kings. Which kings? Verses 10-17 provide a number of clues as to their identity.

- Verse 12 tells us that they “have received no kingdom as yet.”
- Verse 12 tells us that they “receive power as kings one hour with the beast.”
- Verse 13 tells us that they “have one mind.”
- Verse 13 tells us that they “shall give their power and strength unto the beast.”
- Verse 14 tells us that they “shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them.”
- Verse 16 tells us that they “shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.”
- Verse 17 tells us that God “hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”

We have a lot of clues about these ten horns! In fact, the angel tells us more about these ten horns than he does about anything else — which makes it all the more surprising how much disagreement there is as to the identity of these ten kings.

Let’s start with this question: Is the number ten *literal* or *figurative* in the angel’s explanation?

The number seven was literal — seven mountains and seven kings — but we also saw that the number seven was chosen for a symbolic reason — to make Domitian the **eighth** king. The angel does not explain every detail of what John saw, and so perhaps the symbolic number ten is one of those unexplained details. On the other hand, the number ten may also have a literal meaning, as we saw with the number seven. So let’s keep our options open as we look at various possibilities for the ten kings.

Let’s begin with what I believe is the correct view about the identity of these ten kings.

View 1: The ten kings are the first ten Roman emperors.

Under this view, the ten kings and the seven heads are really representing the same set of kings. The difference is that the ten horns includes the three civil war kings, while the seven heads do not. Under this view, the symbolic number ten also has a literal meaning, just as we see with the symbolic number seven.

What evidence supports this view?

First, this view fits well with the prophecies we read from Daniel 7. In that chapter, Daniel also looked at the first century emperor of Rome, and Daniel referred to them as “ten horns” ... “before whom three fell” (Daniel 7:20). Those ten **horns** in Daniel 7 are the seven **heads** in Revelation 17 after those three horns in Daniel 7:20 have fallen. This view of the ten kings in Revelation 17 would link the ten horns of Revelation with the ten horns of Daniel 7.

This view would mean that the three uprooted kings aren't ignored in Revelation at all — they are included among the ten kings, even though they are not included among the seven kings.

If we don't adopt this view, then how then do we explain the switch from horns in Daniel 7 to heads in Revelation 17, with the horns in Revelation 17 referring to something other than the horns in Daniel 7? That's not hard. We already know that the same symbol can apply to different objects. Also, the symbols of “heads” and “horns” are common symbols for kings — and that is what those symbols mean both in Daniel and in Revelation. The only question is which kings?

The real question is whether the Roman emperors fit the textual clues that we are given about the ten horns. With some there is a very close fit, but seemingly less so with others. Let's look at each of the textual clues.

Verse 12 tells us that they “have received no kingdom as yet.”

Shouldn't we stop the bus right here? Isn't this a show stopper when it comes to this first view of the ten kings? How can it be said that they have received no kingdom yet when eight of them have ruled over Rome and died, and the ninth one is presently ruling over Rome? Most commentaries at this point immediately move on to the next possibility, but perhaps they have been too quick to dismiss this first view. Let's look at a bit closer at it.

They “have received no kingdom as yet.” What could that mean?

For starters, we might ask another question — why would Daniel have used horns for these kings, with Revelation using both heads and horns for the same kings? Perhaps it was just because Revelation wanted us to keep one foot in Daniel 7 while we were studying Revelation 17. **Perhaps the ten horns in Revelation 17 are viewing the kings from Daniel's perspective, while the seven heads are viewing the kings from John's perspective.**

If that is the case, then verse 12 is explained. When Daniel prophesied six centuries earlier, then ten kings had not yet received a kingdom, and in fact they had not yet been born!

Two different perspectives on Rome? Have we seen that before? Yes. We just saw Rome represented by two different perspectives — a beast from the sea (the royal perspective) and a beast from the earth (the religious perspective). Perhaps the seven heads and the ten horns are once again showing us Rome from two perspectives — Daniel’s perspective six centuries earlier and John’s perspective.

What else could the word “yet” mean in verse 12 mean? Is there a way we can make sense of that word even if we decide that the horns and the heads are not from two different historical perspectives?

If the word “yet” in verse 12 is not from Daniel’s perspective and if it means that these kings never had that royal power prior to when they received it here, then the ten horns and the seven heads can’t be looking at the same Roman kings from the same historical perspective. Why? Because by this time, eight of them had already been king.

But saying that something has not happened **yet**, does not mean that it has never happened before. I have not eaten lunch yet, but I have eaten plenty of lunches before today. Likewise, it may be that some of these kings had already been a king. In fact, doesn’t the text suggest that? “The ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet.” The verse does not say that the ten horns are **ten men** who are not yet kings; the text says that the ten horns are **ten kings** who have not yet received a kingdom. That sounds to me like they were already kings prior to whatever is about to happen in verse 12.

So, it may be that some of these kings had already been a king, had lost that kingship when they died, but are now being shown as receiving their kingship again for a short time. Why would the vision of the harlot have shown that?

What happens at the end of a play? What usually happens is that the entire cast comes out onto the stage — even those cast members who died during the play. They all come out and take a bow. Maybe that is why we have the 10 kings in Revelation 17. God wants them to be around to see what happens to Domitian and to Rome. God wants them to have a front row seat for the judgment — not to take a bow, but to bend a knee!

This whole section reminds me of Isaiah 14. In that chapter, the king of Babylon is judged and cast into hell. And guess who he meets there? All of the previous kings, just waiting to greet him and to mock him.

*Isaiah 14:9-10 — Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; **it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.** All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?*

Perhaps that is why we see the ten prior kings of Rome being paraded out once again in verse 12. In this way, they are all present to see what is about to happen.

As embodied in Domitian, those earlier ten kings (although all now dead) received a kingdom and royal power when Domitian did. Domitian came from them and through them. Domitian was here now because they had been here before. As verse 13 says, they “have one mind.”

Verse 11 told us that the eighth king (Domitian) “is **of the seven.**” That is, Domitian came from the earlier kings and he embodied the earlier kings. Revelation is setting Domitian up as the personification of the emperors who preceded him. Daniel 7:8 describes the little horn in similar terms: “behold, there **came up among them** another little horn.”

The phrase “one hour” in verse 12 just means a time of critical importance, and in fact this point of the vision is a key point of focus in this book and a key point of focus in Daniel.

So what I am saying? What I am saying is that we shouldn’t (as many commentaries do) automatically dismiss the view that the ten horns are the first ten kings of Rome just because of verse 12. There are at least two ways to understand verse 12 so that it does not rule out the ten kings being the first ten emperors of Rome. Either the 10 horns are the ten emperors from Daniel’s perspective six centuries earlier, or the ten horns are the now dead emperors being ushered back onto the stage to witness the end of the play and the judgment of the harlot. I favor the second option, but either can explain verse 12.

Didn’t we see the same thing in Daniel 7, not with regard to the ten kings but with regard to the three kingdoms that preceded Rome?

***Daniel 7:12** — As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.*

God wanted them to be around to see Rome's fall, and that may have been the case with the ten kings as well.

And won't this also be true at the end of all time? We know what the dead in Christ will be raised on that last great day, but why will the dead out of Christ be raised? One reason is so that they can bend their knee to Jesus and confess to God (Romans 14:11). God wants them around on the last day to see the vindication of the church. Perhaps these prior Roman emperors are just catching the early show!

Is there any support for this view elsewhere in Revelation? Yes, perhaps. Think back on the two earlier times that we saw these same symbols in the book.

***Revelation 12:3** — And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and **seven crowns** upon his heads.*

***Revelation 13:1** — And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns **ten crowns**.*

Did you catch it? The first time we saw the seven heads and ten horns, the text told us there were **seven crowns**. The second time we saw the seven heads and ten horns, the text told us there were **ten crowns**. Is the text perhaps letting us know that we are really just looking at the same set of kings in those two verses and in the symbols of the heads and the horns?

What about the other textual clues? Do they fit the Roman emperors?

Verse 12 tells us that they “receive power as kings one hour with the beast.”

If the ten horns are the ten emperors from Daniel's perspective six centuries earlier, then the time of critical importance in verse 12 is the first century, in which they all reigned as king.

If the ten horns are the now dead emperors being ushered back onto the stage to witness the judgment of the harlot, then the time of critical importance in verse 12 is the reign of Domitian in which the judgment of Rome would see its fulfillment.

Verse 13 tells us that they “have one mind.”

If the ten horns are the ten emperors from Daniel’s perspective six centuries earlier, then that one mind is that of the office of emperor that each held. They were united in their view that Rome was the eternal kingdom and that no other kingdom could ever be allowed to take precedence over Rome.

If the ten horns are the now dead emperors being ushered back onto the stage to witness the judgment of the harlot, then that one mind is the mind of Domitian in which all of the previous emperors were now embodied.

Verse 13 tells us that they “shall give their power and strength unto the beast.”

The beast here is the beast from the sea, which represents the royal side of Rome. The emperors’ power and strength came from the beast and was in turn given to the beast. Each depended on the other for survival.

Verse 14 tells us that they “shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them.”

Caesar or Christ? The Lamb or fill in the blank with the name of the current emperor? That was the choice. It was choice that God was calling on everyone to make, and it was a choice that Rome was calling on everyone to make. You had to choose one or the other, and you could not choose both. And when you chose one side, that meant you were the enemy of the other side. In short, it was war! The emperors were making war with the Lamb!

And the outcome? We have seen the outcome in every chapter of this book. There is no doubt about the outcome. The Lamb shall overcome them! The mighty Roman empire and the all powerful Roman emperors were defeated by what? By a Lamb!

And have no doubt about it — the Lamb shall overcome them no matter who “them” refers to! If the Lamb overcame the Roman empire, then the Lamb can overcome anybody or anything. Nothing can stand in the way of the Lamb and the kingdom of the Lamb.

Daniel 2:44 — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Matthew 16:18 — *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Hebrews 12:27-29 — *And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things **which cannot be shaken** may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom **which cannot be moved**, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.*

There is but one Lamb, and there is but one eternal kingdom, the church of the Lamb. All earthly kingdoms and earthly rulers will fall.

Verse 16 tells us that they “shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.”

Wait a second! Whose side are these emperors on? Verse 14 told us they were against the Lamb, and now verse 16 tells us they are against Rome? How can that be?

Proverbs 28:15 — *As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.*

Why was the harlot being judged? Why was she falling? Why was she desolate and naked? Because of the evil Roman emperors who persecuted God’s people and who demanded that people worship them as gods. The emperors were why Rome was being judged!

But the emperors loved Rome, right? How can it be said that they hated the harlot? Haven’t we already talked about how the emperors were liars? Haven’t we seen their lying wonders described in this book, and haven’t we seen how they are being led by Satan, who “is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44)? What does the Bible tell us about liars?

Proverbs 26:28 — *A lying tongue **hateth** those that are afflicted by it.*

So, yes, the emperors did hate Rome.

But did the emperors eat her flesh? Yes, they were leading Rome down the path of destruction. They were corrupting Rome, and they were taking from Rome. They were like the leaders described by Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 22:27 — *Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves **ravening the prey**, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.*

Ezekiel 34:10 — *Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; **neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.***

Yes, the emperors were eating the flesh of those they led.

But did the emperors burn Rome with fire? Yes — both literally and metaphorically! Nero almost burned the entire city down in AD 64! It was that fire that led to Nero's great persecution of the church after he placed the blame on them to divert attention from himself.

Verse 17 tells us that God “hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”

Verse 17 is explaining verse 16. Verse 17 is telling us why the 10 kings were hating the whore, and making her desolate and naked, and eating her flesh, and burning her with fire. Why? Because they were fulfilling the words of God. What words of God? The words of God spoken by Daniel for starters.

Daniel had written all about these kings, and Daniel had described what they would do. They were now doing it. Those kings thought they were in charge, but they were not. God had told us what they would do, what they would be like, and even how many of them there would be six centuries before they arrived! When Daniel wrote those prophecies, Rome was a tiny trading settlement. No one would ever have dreamed that someday that settlement would rule the known world — but God knew. God made it happen!

But did Daniel say somewhere that the Roman emperors would hate Rome and eat Rome's flesh and leave Rome desolate and naked? Yes, Daniel said that Rome would devour everything!

Daniel 7:23 — *The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, **and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.***

And that's not all. Do you remember the giant statue representing four kingdoms that Nebuchadnezzar saw in Daniel 2? Here is how Daniel described the fourth kingdom, which was Rome.

Daniel 2:40-43 — *And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.*

You mean that Rome had feet of clay? Yes, and in fact that is where that saying “feet of clay” came from! But mighty Rome was all-powerful — how did it have feet of clay?

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* lists four reasons why Rome fell: external invasion, inner decadence, inner strife, and the injury of time and nature. Notice those middle two: **inner** decadence and **inner** strife. There's the feet of clay!

Writing six centuries earlier, not only did Daniel know that that dusty trading settlement on the Tiber river would one day rule the known world, but Daniel also knew that that mighty kingdom would be full of rot and strife and decadence. Daniel knew it would look like it was made of iron, but it would have feet of clay. How did Daniel know these things? Let's let Daniel answer that question.

Daniel 2:29 — *O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.*

Daniel and Revelation are bookends. On one end we have Daniel, looking forward through four mighty kingdoms of this earth ending with Rome, and on

the other hand we have Revelation looking back across time at those same earthly kingdoms starting with Rome. In Daniel, Rome was a mighty nation only in the mind of God, but in Revelation, God's plan has come to pass and Rome has played its part in that plan, but Rome's part is over. And it is time for Rome to experience what happened to Babylon, Persia, and Greece.

And what happened between those two bookends? The plan of redemption. Jesus, the long promised Messiah, came to this world and gave his life so that all might be saved. He gave up his life on the cross, having been nailed there by Roman hands, he rose from the dead, and he ascended back to the Father. And just a few days later God established the eternal kingdom of Christ in Acts 2. The kingdom that Daniel told us about in Daniel 2, the kingdom that Isaiah told us about in Isaiah 2, and the kingdom that Joel told us about in Joel 2. A kingdom that "shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

That is the first possible view for the identity of the ten kings — the ten emperors of Rome, with the three civil war kings included.

Lesson 41

Last week we looked the ten horns in Revelation 17:12-18. We considered a first possible view as to their identity — that the ten kings are the first ten emperors of Rome.

Under this view, the seven heads and the ten horns are looking at the same Roman emperors, the difference being that the ten horns includes the three civil war kings while the seven heads excluded those three emperors.

We spent a lot of time looking at verse 12, which says that the 10 horns are ten kings which have received no kingdom as yet. On the surface that verse might suggest that these ten heads could not be the former kings of Rome, but we looked at two possible explanations for that verse.

First, verse 12 could be directing us to view the ten heads from Daniel's perspective six hundred years earlier, at which time none of them were yet kings. Second, verse 12 could be telling us that these kings had lost their kingship but would be given it back for a short time so that they could, together with Domitian, witness the judgment of Rome. That second option tied in nicely with a similar description of ancient Babylon in Isaiah 14.

Today, we will say a few more things about this first possible view of the 10 heads, and then we will look at a few other possibilities as to their identity.

The handout this week (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) shows the convoluted family tree for the first Roman dynasty: the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. The first five emperors of Rome came from that dynasty, and they are highlighted in yellow on the handout: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The dynasty came to an end with the death of Nero in AD 68. Its namesake, Julius Caesar, is highlighted by the red box at the top. He was not an emperor, but he wanted to be, which is why he was assassinated.

This chart came from Wikipedia, and as with all things from the Internet in general and from Wikipedia specifically, it may have some errors. I spotted one — Claudius was not Agrippina's second husband; he was her third husband.

And speaking of Agrippina, she is the person who is highlighted by the red box at the bottom. She provides a very good example of what this family was like. And although I'm sure we would all agree that every family has its prob-

lems, I don't know any families that have problems like this one did! For example, here are some facts about Agrippina.

- She was the daughter of Germanicus, who was all set to be emperor himself until he was (most likely) murdered by his uncle Tiberius.
- She was a distant niece of Julius Caesar.
- She was the great-granddaughter of Marc Antony.
- She was the great-granddaughter of the emperor Augustus.
- She was the granddaughter of the emperor Tiberius.
- She was the sister of the emperor Caligula.
- She was the mother of the emperor Nero.
- She was the wife of the emperor Claudius.
- She was also the niece of the emperor Claudius.
- She was the mother-in-law of Nero's wife, Octavia.
- She was also Octavia's step-mother.
- She was exiled by her brother Caligula.
- She was murdered by her son Nero.

As they say, every family has its ups and downs! And these were the people in charge of Rome! And these were the people that Daniel wrote about six centuries before they were born. And, as we discussed over the last two weeks, I think these emperors, along with the others who ruled later in the first century are the seven heads and the ten horns of Revelation 17.

Under that first view of the ten horns, the ten kings are the first ten emperors of Rome. What that means is that the number ten has a *literal* meaning. Does the number ten also have a *symbolic* meaning under that first view? Absolutely, and it is the same symbolic meaning that we have been seeing all throughout this book — completeness.

Yes, God brings back these ten kings to see what is about to happen to Rome — but I think the message is that God brings back ALL of the prior rulers of the earth to witness this event. I think that is what Daniel 7:12 is telling us. Babylon, Persia, and Greece — they were prolonged so that they could see what becomes of earthly kingdoms. God wanted them all around to witness the truth of Daniel 2:44 and the fulfillment of Daniel 2:44.

As I said last week, in my opinion, this first view is the correct view. The ten horns in Revelation are the same as the ten horns in Daniel — they are the first ten emperors of Rome. And God brings them back onto the stage so that they along with Domitian can witness the judgment of the great harlot.

What are some other possible views?

View 2: The ten kings are the kings from the east.

Earlier, we talked about the false rumor that was spread after Nero's death that Nero had not really died at all, but had instead fled to Parthia so he could raise an army to return and destroy Rome. Or, more precisely, return and **finish** destroying Rome since he had already managed to burn down a large part of it. This rumor was something that caused great fear and anxiety in the average Roman.

We have already seen several times in this book the Parthians used as part of a figurative image intended to frighten Rome. In Revelation 16:12, the Euphrates river was dried up so that these kings from the east could have easy access for their invasion. Historians tell us that the Parthian satraps were practically independent rulers, so they could accurately be referred to as kings. It is possible that the ten horns represents these kings from the east.

What evidence supports this view?

1. We saw these kings from the east in the previous chapter, so there is some contextual support.
2. The frightening image in verse 16 fits what we have seen previously about this force from the east. Plus, the reference to fire in verse 16 could be a reference to the false rumor that Nero himself would lead this army from the east back to finish what he starting in burning Rome to the ground.

What evidence is against this view?

1. It is very hard to see how these kings from the east could be said to “give their power and strength unto the beast” as we see in verse 13.
2. Likewise, their war with the Lamb in verse 14 seems to come from left field. So far, God has been using them as a tool to frighten Rome, but we have not seen them waging war against God.
3. And it is hard to see how they have given their kingdom unto the beast as described in verse 17.

4. Under this view, the number ten is purely symbolic. Unlike the seven mountains and the seven kings, there would not be a separate literal understanding of ten under this view. Why? Because we are told by historians that there were fourteen Parthian satraps.

In my opinion, the negatives far outweigh the positives for this view. I do **not** think that the ten horns represent the kings from the east.

View 3: The ten kings are the client kingdoms and federates of Rome.

This is the third and final option we will consider for the ten heads. In my opinion, this view comes in second place, with the first view we looked at being I think the best explanation.

Under this third view, the ten horns represent the client kingdoms and federates of Rome. Who were they? Michael Grant in his book *History of Rome* (page 196) gives us this description of the Roman client king system:

The client kings were tied to the service of Rome in order to defend its frontiers and serve as listening posts to the outside world. In return, they were supported by the Romans against internal subversive movements and allowed a free hand inside their own countries. Thus Rome was spared the trouble and expense of administering these territories; and the formula worked well.

Herod the Great was a client king. He was named “king” by the Romans in 42 BC, and his sons Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip tried to retain that title after his death, but none of them was allowed to do so. Only his grandson Agrippa I (AD 37) and great-grandson Agrippa II (AD 49) were named kings.

Once again, depending on how we interpret the word “yet” in verse 12, that verse may suggest that **later** client kings are in view here. As we will discuss in a moment, verse 16 also suggests that client kings later than the time of Herod are in view here.

That explains the client kingdoms of Rome. What were the federates of Rome? Michael Grant describes the rise of the federates in another of his many books, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (pages 8 and 125):

In 382 Theodosius I took the revolutionary step of allowing whole German tribes to reside in Imperial territory as separate,

autonomous, allied or federate units, committed to serving in the Roman army, though under the command of their own chieftains. Thereafter the practice continued and increased, until such federates became a regular and widespread feature of the life of the Empire.

The Visigoths were the first such group to receive “federate” status and were allowed to live under their own laws and ruled on the condition that they provide soldiers and agricultural workers for the Romans.

Those descriptions explain how they received power as kings one hour with the beast (verse 12), how they give their power and strength to the beast (verse 13), and how they give their kingdom unto the beast (verse 17). Also, by fighting with Rome, we see how they could be said to have made war against the Lamb (verse 14).

But what about verse 16? Did these client kingdoms and federates hate the harlot, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire? Yes. In fact it was these groups that eventually caused the fall of Rome.

The city of Rome was sacked in AD 410 by Alaric, a Visigoth. It was the first time in eight hundred years that the city had been taken by a foreign invader. Rome fell in AD 476.

That seems to fit pretty well. Are there any downsides to this view? Yes.

The first downside is that this view stretches our time frame a bit. Under the first view, our time frame remains in the first century, but under this view we have to go to the fifth century to explain verse 16.

This problem is not insurmountable. Yes, Rome fell in the fifth century, but Rome’s judgment and fate were determined the first century. As far as God was concerned, Rome fell when Domitian fell. Didn’t we see something similar in our study of Daniel? In Daniel 8 and 11, Daniel breaks off his consideration of the Seleucid kingdom with the fall of Antiochus Epiphanes who came to power long before that kingdom ended in 64 BC. As far as God was concerned, the Seleucid kingdom fell when Antiochus fell.

The second downside with this third view is that, as with the second view, the number ten under this view is purely symbolic and (unlike the seven heads) does not have a literal component. Under this view, the ten horns likely represents *all* of the client kingdoms and federates. It may also refer to the fact that these ten kings, in a sense, drove the final nail into Rome’s coffin—they *completed* the judgment.

As I said, this view comes in second place in my opinion. I think the best view of the ten horns is the first view we considered: they are the first ten emperors of Rome brought back by God to witness the judgment of their empire. That view fits well with the parallel prophecy in Daniel, it fits well the Isaiah's description of the king of ancient Babylon, and it maintains the dual symbolic/literal understanding of 10 that we saw earlier with seven.

The only hurdle for the first view is verse 12, but we looked at two different ways in which we can clear that hurdle. But if you don't like that first view, then this third view is a very good alternative.

Whatever the ten horns represent, verse 14 tells us something very important about them: "the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus would overcome those 10 kings, and when Jesus did that the church would be with him to watch it happen. Whether the ten kings are the ten emperors or the client kingdoms of Rome, verse 14 is just restating what Daniel said six centuries earlier.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Roman emperors thought that is what they were, but they were very badly mistaken. They thought they had no Lord or King above them, but they were wrong: Jesus was their Lord and their King.

Now here is a question: Did Jesus' victory over these ten horns **make** Jesus Lord of lords and King of kings? No. We are told in verse 14 that Jesus conquered them **because** he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Jesus' victory over Rome and Rome's minions did not make Jesus king. Jesus was already king!

And there is a lesson in that for us. How often do we hear denominational preachers tell people that they need to make Jesus Lord of their life? How often do we sing songs in which we say that we are crowing Jesus king? ("King of my life, I crown thee now" comes to mind. When I sing that song, I say "King of my life, to thee I bow.") There is not a shred of support in the Bible for such a notion.

When Peter was asked “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” in Acts 2:37, Peter did not tell them they needed to make Jesus Lord of their life. In fact, that would have made absolutely no sense. Why? Because Peter had just told them in Acts 2:36 that “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Jesus was already their Lord. Instead, Peter told them that they needed to obey their Lord; they needed to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Jesus is Lord of lords, which means that Jesus is everyone’s Lord. Jesus is King of kings, which means that Jesus is everyone’s King. We do not obey the gospel to make Jesus Lord and King — we obey the gospel because Jesus is already Lord and King! When we obey the gospel, we do not make Jesus anything. Instead, we recognize what Jesus already is, and we become his faithful subject. Jesus is the fixed point (Hebrews 13:8), not us. The movement and change are on our side, not on his.

And we should remember this principle as proceed toward the closing chapters of this book. **Nowhere in Revelation does Jesus begin to rule over something new.** Jesus has all authority when the book begins, and Jesus has all authority when the book ends. Jesus reigns over the entire universe when the book begins, and Jesus reigns over the entire universe when the book ends. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords when the book begins, and Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords when the book ends.

Do we see new expressions of Jesus’ reign in this book? Yes. But do we see in this book Jesus reigning over something or over someone that he did not previously reign over? No.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the reign of Christ, and much of it comes from misunderstandings about the book of Revelation.

Sadly, many denominational interpretations of this book belittle the church and belittle Christ. To them, the church is just a mistake and just an afterthought. They tell us that Jesus failed to set up his kingdom during the first century, and that he is not ruling now. Here is how the *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology* describes that view:

It is held that the Old Testament prophets predicted the re-establishment of David’s kingdom and that Christ himself intended to bring this about. It is alleged however, that because the Jews refused his person and work he postponed the estab-

lishment of his kingdom until the time of his return. Meanwhile, it is argued, the Lord gathered together ‘the church’ as a kind of interim measure.

How anyone could read the Bible and believe that Jesus failed in anything he intended to do is inconceivable! How anyone can read the Bible and conclude that the church is a mistake or an afterthought or “a kind of interim measure” is just as inconceivable!

We’ll have more to say about this terrible and dangerous heresy when we get to Chapter 20.

Verses 15 and 18

We have talked about verses 12-14 and 16-17 in studying the ten horns. What about verses 15 and 18?

Earlier we looked at verse 18 and we saw how that verse can only be a description of Rome. In John’s day, there was no other great city that reigned over the kings of the earth.

The same can be said about verse 15. “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.”

First, we should note that the angel’s explanation in verse 15 fits what we said earlier about the beast from the sea. That sea represents the restless nations of this world, from which Rome came and over which Rome ruled. And there was no other city in John’s day about which that could be said.

Second, as we have seen before, Rome is being described here using Old Testament descriptions of ancient Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:12-13** — Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the Lord hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. **O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.

In fact, that description was both figuratively and literally true of ancient Babylon. The river Euphrates ran through the city, and it had irrigation canals extending out in every direction.

But verse 18 says that this great city would reign over the kings **of the earth**. Rome didn't rule over the entire earth. So doesn't that mean that verse 18 is looking toward the end of the world when there will be one world power? Not at all, and once again the solution is to just let the Bible interpret itself.

No, Rome did not literally rule the entire world. But Rome's dominion was so large that it was commonly described in such terms. In fact, that is how the inspired word of God describes it.

***Luke 2:1** — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.*

***Acts 11:28** — And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth **throughout all the world**: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

***Romans 1:8** — First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of **throughout the whole world**.*

So, yes, Rome did reign over the kings of the earth.

Before we finish Chapter 17, let's pause to address a potential problem with our interpretation of this book. Throughout our study, when we have seen a number, we have looked for the symbolic significance of that number. And yet here, when the angel explains this part of the vision, the angel does not say that seven mean perfection and ten means completeness. Instead, the angel seems to say that seven means seven and ten means ten. How do we explain that?

We **know** that number in this book are used figuratively. We have seen it all throughout our study. How else can we explain the use of 144,000 to describe a people that we know from elsewhere in the Bible must be the church? How else can we explain how this entire book is structured around the number seven, depicting perfection? How else can we explain the repeated use of the number twelve to describe God's people? And we could go on and on.

The use of symbolic numbers in this book is so clear and so evident that it did not need to be mentioned by this angel. John was not confused about what the number seven or the number twelve or the number ten was depicting. Believe me, if we can figure it out in AD 2018, John could figure it out in AD 79!

Numbers in this book are figurative. If on occasion we find a number in this book that also has a literal meaning, then that is the exception; it is not the rule.

Well, how do we know when that exception applies? Simple. An angel from God tells us, as just happened right here in Chapter 17.

And you know what? Maybe that explains why this angel appeared in Chapter 17. Maybe that explains why these verses received a divine explanation while other verses did not. Perhaps God wanted to let us know that here these two numbers *also* have a literal meaning. Elsewhere seven means perfection, but here seven also just means seven.

Chapter 18

In our introductory classes we said that the Old Testament is one of our very best guides in understanding the book of Revelation. And we have seen that statement demonstrated over and over in our study of the book so far. Several times when we might have been tempted to say that certain language can only be describing the end of the world, we have found the same language in the Old Testament describing something other than the end of the world.

The Old Testament has kept us grounded. Commentators that start talking about Chinese armies and atomic weapons are not grounded — they have left the word far behind in the flights of fancy. The Old Testament keeps us from doing that.

Perhaps nowhere is that link between the Old Testament and Revelation more clear than it is here in Chapter 18. Chapter 18 is a type of prophetic language called a “doom song.” And doom songs are a common feature in the Old Testament. Isaiah gives us a doom song for Babylon.

Isaiah 13:19-22 — And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful crea-

tures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

Isaiah also gives us a doom song for Edom.

Isaiah 34:11-15 — *But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.*

Zephaniah gives us a doom song for Nineveh.

Zephaniah 2:13-15 — *And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.*

In each case, the ruin of a great city is described in vivid, poetic language interspersed with apocalyptic speech. Here in Chapter 18 we have a doom song for Rome.

And for students of the Old Testament, this doom song for Rome comes as no surprise. In fact, all that we have been seeing in the book of Revelation about this great enemy of God's people has been modeled after Old Testament judgments against previous enemies of God's people. Chapter 18 is no exception. Let's study this doom song for Rome.

Revelation 18:1

1 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

Verse 1 reconfirms that the judgment we have seen and the message of doom we are about to see are from God. Daniel told us that Rome would not die a natural death, and we have now seen the truth of that prophecy. God judged Rome, and God is why Rome fell. But Rome is not alone. Daniel told us that such a fate is in store for all the kingdoms of this earth.

Verse 1 also reminds us of a prophecy from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 43:1-2 — Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

I like what Swete said about this verse. He said that this angel in verse 1 has "so recently ... come from the presence [of God] that in passing he brings a broad belt of light across the dark earth."

The servants of God spread light across the earth. The servants of Satan spread darkness.

Revelation 18:2

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Verse 2 is the beginning of the doom song, and it starts just the way we would suspect it would start — by mentioning birds! It seems that birds are a common feature of these doom songs.

Each of the “doom song” examples we looked at a moment ago referred to birds. Isaiah 13 talked about owls. Isaiah 34 talked about the cormorant and the bittern, screech owls, great owls, and vultures. Zephaniah 2 talked about the cormorant and the bittern. Here in verse 2 we see a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Why the focus on birds? They seem to be all that remains after the judgment, and all that can be heard is their screeching. It paints a very desolate picture.

Back in Revelation 14:8, an angel proclaimed, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Here in verse 2 that message is repeated, and once again the past tense is used to stress the certainty of that event.

Again, that is something else we see in the Old Testament. Over one hundred years before the actual fall of ancient Babylon, Isaiah also used the past tense to describe its fall.

Isaiah 21:9 — Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

We have seen that Revelation is a book of contrasts. It is a book of choices. Christ or Caesar? The city of God or the city of Rome? The kingdom of God or the kingdom of Rome? The power of God or the power of Rome?

Which should we choose? Revelation answers that question, but it does so by giving us very detailed descriptions of the two options.

What is the church like? You will not find a book in the Bible that tells us more about the church than this one, and we will see wonderful descriptions of the church as we proceed through the final chapters of this book.

What is Rome like? We're reading about it right here. It has "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit."

God is not asking us to make this choice blindly. God is telling us all about the two options. This book is called what? Revelation! Perhaps we could also call it "Full Disclosure!" God is revealing to us the choices we all have to make, and God is describing in great detail what those choices are. We don't have to grope around blindly wondering which path to choose. God has turned on the light!

But this choice is easy, right? Rome is where all of the happy people are, right? Rome is where the powerful live, right? The actors, the singers, the artists, the politicians, the movers and the shakers — all in Rome, right? And the other option, the church? Just persecution and misery, right? Just slaves, right? Just the poor, right? Rome or the church? Sounds like an easy decision!

But wait! It seems like we said earlier that to truly see something, we need to see that thing as God sees it. So maybe this earthly view of Rome and of the church has everything backwards. Maybe things are not what they seem!

Yes, and there's no maybe about it. That is what this book is telling us. That is why this book was written. God wanted us to see Rome as He sees Rome, and God wanted us to see the church as He sees the church.

You want power and permanence and beauty? Then you had better choose the church. Rome has none of that to offer.

Didn't Paul tell us the same thing?

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 — *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

Did you hear that, Rome? Did you hear that, Domitian? “That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

God has chosen things which are not to bring to nought things that are. That sounds to me like a battle between the seen and the unseen.

***2 Corinthians 4:18** — While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

You mean that unseen eternal will bring to nought the seen temporal? Yes, and it was happening to Rome just as Daniel has fortold.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, **but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand for ever.*

It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms. That is the things which are not bringing to nought the things that are. And that is still happening today! Daniel 2:44 did not come with an expiration date!

Lesson 42

Last week we started Chapter 18, and we saw that Chapter 18 is a doom song for Rome that is modeled after similar doom songs in the Old Testament. Each doom song describes the ruin of a great city using vivid, poetic language interspersed with apocalyptic speech. The doom song in this chapter is describing the fall of Rome. It began in verse 2, which we studied last week, and we will pick up with verse 3 this week.

Revelation 18:3

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

Rome was a great military and commercial power, and Rome enticed other nations to follow her wicked example. Rome was powerful and arrogant, and Rome openly boasted about her abominations.

We are reminded of Isaiah's description of the arrogant boasting and haughty pride of the king of Assyria.

Isaiah 10:13-14 — For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

And do you remember what Nebuchadnezzar said?

Daniel 4:30 — *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*

That boast almost sounds like it came from the front page of today's newspaper! But the next thing that great king heard in verse 31 was this: "The kingdom is departed from thee."

Rome had the same attitude as that Assyrian king in Isaiah 10 and as Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, and Rome suffered the same fate.

Proverbs 16:18 — *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

The reference in verse 3 to the "merchants of the earth" is important. As we like to say today, if you want to understand something, then just follow the money. And if you followed the money in the first century, you would end up in Rome.

It was Roman money that kept the emperors in power because it was Roman money that allowed the emperors to keep the army happy, and no emperor ruled very long when the army wasn't happy.

It was Roman money that fueled the fires of Rome's power and of Rome's persecution of the church, and so God is including the merchants of Rome in this judgment of Rome. Those merchants might have thought it was just business, but God did not see it that way.

Rarely in our own country have we seen such unbridled greed as we saw in the 1920's just prior to the Great Depression. In fact, that greed was in large part responsible for the Great Depression. And did you know that we can draw a straight line from that greed in the United States to the atrocities of Hitler in Germany? Hitler came to power because of the worldwide economic turmoil that followed the Great Depression.

1 Timothy 6:10 — *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

Men may think it's just business, but God does not see it that way.

James 5:1-6 — *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are mo-*

theaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

While faithful Christians were denying themselves, the persecuting Romans were denying themselves nothing.

Even today we sometimes hear the excuse that “it’s just business.” Christians sometimes try to compartmentalize their lives so that they can live one way on Sunday, another way on Saturday, and yet another way on the weekdays. And what does the Bible say about that?

Colossians 3:17 — And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Whatsoever ye do on a Sunday? No — whatsoever ye do — period. In word or in deed. A Christian is never off the clock when it comes to living a Christian life. And it’s never just business, or just anything else. Everything we do must be done in the name of Jesus, and that means it must be done in accordance with his will.

Revelation 18:4-5

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

This doom song is full of sermons!

Who is this other voice from heaven? I think this is the voice of God. The first command from this voice is directed to “my people.” And later in verse 6 we will hear this voice calling for vengeance against Rome, and we know that vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19).

In verse 4, God calls for his people to come out of the city lest they follow Rome’s evil example and share in Rome’s destruction. We see this same call many times in the Old Testament.

It was the call that Lot heard in Genesis 19:12-14, and it was the call that Moses heard in Numbers 16:23-26. “Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.”

It was the call that the exiles in ancient Babylon heard many times:

Isaiah 48:20 — Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans.

Jeremiah 50:8 — Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans.

Jeremiah 51:6 — Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord’s vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence.

Jeremiah 51:45 — My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord.

Was this call in verse 4 a call for the people to **literally** flee the city? No, and once again we should consider the example of ancient Babylon.

Were the exiles in Babylon being told to **literally** flee that city? No, and, in fact God told them in Jeremiah 29:7 to “seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”

And, although the Jewish exiles in Babylon did eventually return to their homeland, they did not flee to their homeland, and those returns happened **after** the judgment of Babylon by the Persians that Jeremiah wrote about in Jeremiah 50-51.

Likewise, the Christians in Rome are not being told to literally flee that city. And physically fleeing Rome would not have solved the problem — Roman evil was everywhere! They would have to flee the world to escape it.

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 — *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.*

What we see in verses 4-5 is a command for spiritual flight. The Christians were not to share in Rome's sins. They were to stand apart from the iniquity that surrounded them. They were to keep their garments clean.

Throughout this entire book, Rome has been referred over and over again as those who dwell on the earth, while the church has been pictured as already being in heaven. In these verses, God is simply telling the church to live that way.

Isn't that exactly what Paul told us?

Colossians 3:1-2 — *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

If you are risen with Christ, then live that way! William Barclay explains it well:

This cry and challenge [to come out] do not involve a coming out at a definite moment. They imply a certain "aloofness of spirit maintained in the very heart of the world's traffic." They describe the essential apartness of the Christian from the world. ... The Christian is not conformed to the world but transformed from the world (Romans 12:2). It is not a question of retiring from the world; it is a question of living differently within the world.

And of course we are immediately reminded of something else Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 6:16-18 — *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they*

shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

“Come out from among them and be ye separate!” That is a central message of this book, and it is a message that we desperately need to hear today. God is always calling upon his people to cut their connection with sin and to stand with him and to stand for him.

Dwight Hervey Small in his book *The High Cost of Holy Living* wrote:

Wherever the Christian finds himself, and whatever his calling in life, his life must stand as a radical protest against the world and its standards.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

Hope means a continual looking forward to the eternal world. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. ***If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.*** It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

The church has a lot of problems today. Why? Why are some today advocating leadership roles in the church for women? Because they think it pleases God, or because they want to please the world? Why are they bringing instruments into the worship? Because they think it pleases God, or because they want to please the world? Why are they watering down baptism? Because they think it pleases God, or because they want to please the world and be accepted by the world?

Is the church becoming more like the world, or is the world becoming more like the church? Is the world setting our agenda or is God? Perhaps as Wordsworth said, “the world is too much with us.”

Today, our greatest challenge is not **persecution** from the world, but rather it is **seduction** by the world. Can the world see where the church begins and the world ends? I like what Joel Beeke said about the world:

The goal of worldly people is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather than vertically. They seek after outward prosperity rather than holiness. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. If they do not deny God, they ignore and forget Him, or else they use Him only for their selfish ends.

Forward rather than upward. Horizontally rather than vertically. What have we said about this book of Revelation? We have said that one of its major goals, and perhaps its one major goal, is to get the people of God to look up rather than down. To see things from God's perspective. **That is the cure for worldliness!** When we do that we will not be changed by the world, but we will change the world. In fact, we will turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6)!

Verse 5 tells us that Rome's sins were heaped high as heaven, and that God remembered those sins. Yes, God is longsuffering, but at some point sin reaches a level that is intolerably high, and judgment falls.

***Romans 12:19** — Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

We are reminded of the situation that Ezra faced.

***Ezra 9:6** — O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.*

As a nation, we should pause to ask how high are our own sins? How close is our own country to that divine tipping point? How many are left in our own land who are ashamed and blush to lift their faces to God?

***Jeremiah 8:12** — Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.*

It has been said that history doesn't repeat; historians just repeat each other. But in this instance history does repeat, and we see that history over and over in the Bible.

Our own nation needs to repent just as Nineveh repented. But for that to happen, we need a Jonah to call our nation to repentance. And where will God

find a Jonah? From among his people. From among his church. We must be the Jonah calling the world to repent and obey the gospel. If not us, then who?

Revelation 18:6-8

6 Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. 7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. 8 Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

In these verses, God commands that Rome be punished and that vengeance be exacted. To whom is this command directed?

We know it is **not** directed to the church. Why? Because the church is commanded in Romans 12:19 to “avenge not yourselves.” And that has always been true for God’s people. In Deuteronomy 32:35, God said, “to me belongeth vengeance, and recompence.”

Some argue that these commands are directed to the ten horns in 17:16 who would “hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.” That would make some sense if the ten horns are the client kingdoms of Rome, but it would not fit well at all if the ten horns are the first ten emperors of Rome.

I think the best way to view these commands is to see them directed toward the angel we met in verse 1 of this chapter. God is commanding his angel to take vengeance on Rome.

Romans 12:19 — Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is

written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

That verse contains both a command and a promise. The verse that **commands** us not to avenge ourselves is the same verse that **promises** us that there will be vengeance.

We see the same thing in the Old Testament about ancient Babylon:

***Psalms 137:8** — O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.*

***Jeremiah 50:29** — Repay her according to her work; According to all she has done, do to her; For she has been proud against the LORD, Against the Holy One of Israel.*

The **double** punishment here in verse 6 may come from the double repayment that was often exacted under the old law.

***Exodus 22:7** — If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double.*

Why the double payment in the old law? It served two purposes: **restitution** to the victim and **punishment** to the perpetrator. It placed the perpetrator of the crime in the same position that the perpetrator had placed the victim. If I stole \$100 from you, then you would be out \$100. If I just had to pay back that \$100, then I would be in the same position at the end as I was before I stole the money. But if I paid back double, then I would be the one out the \$100 rather than you. In modern terminology, the second half of the double portion is the punitive damages.

We see similar descriptions elsewhere in the Old Testament.

***Isaiah 40:2** — For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

***Isaiah 61:7** — For your shame ye shall have double.*

***Jeremiah 16:8** — And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double.*

***Jeremiah 17:8** — Bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.*

Zechariah 9:12 — *Even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee.*

In verse 7, Rome boasts that she will never see the very thing that God promised she would see — “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” Rome’s unbridled self-confidence was fueled by its pride and its arrogance

Ezekiel 28 was directed to the King of Tyre, but it could have been penned about any of the Roman emperors we have considered.

Ezekiel 28:2-7 — *Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.*

I say that could apply to any Roman emperor, but there is one emperor in particular about whom that description fits the best. Did you notice the phrase we just read from Ezekiel 28:2? “Thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God.” How did Paul describe Domitian in 2 Thessalonians 2:4? “So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” One thing the world has never lacked is arrogant ungodly rulers!

Rome was full of pride and thought it would never and could never fall, and Rome was not the last nation to feel that way.

God’s punishment for pride in the Old Testament was to inflict extreme humiliation, and that is what God promises Rome. Rome would plummet from her glory to her destruction quickly and her destruction would be total and complete. Rome’s affluence, pride, and gaiety would be replaced by death, mourning, and famine.

The language here in verses 7-8 is also found in a very similar pronouncement made by Isaiah about ancient Babylon.

*Isaiah 47:7-11 — And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it. Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; **I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood:** they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.*

Both Babylon and Rome were filled with pride, and both later had to eat their boastful words. They thought they would never see sorrow or destruction, but they were wrong. They thought no one saw them, but they were wrong. They thought that there would never be a day of judgment, but they were wrong. They thought their happy carefree lives would continue on forever, but they were wrong. Why were they wrong? That answer is simple. It is the same reason that the prideful boasts of modern man are also wrong.

Hebrews 9:27 — And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

If that verse doesn't get your attention, then your attention cannot be got!

Is Revelation relevant today? Yes, very much so. And one way in which this book is particularly relevant is that it reminds us that history repeats itself. Egypt, Babylon, and Rome — all great enemies of God and of God's people, and all were judged by God. What other earthly powers have been added or will be added to that list?

Are we looking in verse 8 at the **physical** punishment of Rome, or are we instead looking at the **spiritual** punishment of the persecuting Romans? I think it is the latter. The punishment here in verse 8 comes suddenly “in one day,” and that punishment is being utterly burned with fire.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 — In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

We’ll have more to say on that topic when we get to the great judgment scene in Chapter 20.

Revelation 18:9-10

9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, 10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

In verses 9-19, we have descriptions of three dirges or funeral songs for Rome. The first dirge is here in verses 9-10, and it is sung by the kings of the earth. The second dirge will be in verses 11-16, and it is sung by the merchants. The third dirge will be in verses 17-19, and it is sung by the shipmasters and the sailors.

Why are the kings, the merchants, and the sailors so upset about the fall of Rome? Because they depended on Rome for their livelihood and their security. The groups in these verses had placed great faith in the military might and the power of Rome. They had placed their bets on Rome! How could they possibly lose betting on Rome? They are about to find out.

Are the descriptions in these dirges literal? No. We are still reading apocalyptic language, just as we have been throughout almost the entirety of this book. In fact, this apocalyptic language is modeled after doom songs from the Old Testament about Nineveh, Babylon, and Tyre, as we saw last week.

What then is the point here? The point is to show that the judgment of Rome would cause Rome to suffer, and it would also cause all who depended on Rome to suffer. The point of these dirges is the same point that Jeremiah made.

Jeremiah 17:5 — Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.

Notice the description in verse 10: “that great city Babylon, that mighty city.” Again, the only city that fit that description when this vision was received was Rome. There is no way to make Jerusalem fit any of the descriptions we see in this chapter.

The “smoke of her burning” in verse 9 is yet another reminder of fire, something we have frequently seen in these descriptions of Rome’s judgment. As before, this description would ring an immediate bell of recognition with the citizens of Rome, who had once literally seen the smoke of Rome’s burning after Nero almost burned the entire city to the ground. And the rumor was that Nero was planning to return and finish what he had started.

But was Rome really so wealthy and so powerful that the kings and the merchants and the sailors of the earth would stop and mourn its passing as we see them doing here? Are such descriptions of Rome historically accurate?

The Talmud says that of the ten measures of wealth that came down into the world, Rome received nine and all the rest of the world only one.

Rome’s wealth was concentrated in and controlled by the Roman emperors. Suetonius described Nero this way:

He never wore the same garment twice.... He fished with a golden net drawn by cords woven of purple and scarlet threads. It is said he never made a journey with less than a thousand carriages, with his mules shod with silver.

Suetonius says that Caligula would “drink pearls of great price dissolved in vinegar, and set before his guests loaves and meats of gold.”

Barclay says that “nothing John could say of Rome could be an exaggeration.”

Another commentator writes that “our most extravagant luxury is poverty compared with the prodigal magnificence of Rome.” “In the time when John was writing a kind of insanity of wanton extravagance, to which it is very difficult to find any parallel in history, had invaded Rome.”

From an earthly vantage point it seemed that Rome had everything and the church had nothing, but things were not what they seemed!

Remember what Jesus said to the church in Smyrna at the beginning of this book.

Revelation 2:9 — *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich).*

“Thou are rich!” Yes, they were in great poverty — a poverty caused by their devotion to Christ and their refusal to bow down to Caesar — but Jesus said they were rich. Their bank accounts in heaven were bursting at the seams!

And what about the end of verse 10 — what is the one hour of thy judgment? Isn’t that the same hour that came upon the fool in Luke 12?

Luke 12:20-21 — *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Rome thought they were rich, but Rome was wrong. Smyrna thought it was poor, but Smyrna was wrong.

The theme of this book is that we must see things as God sees them. Only in that way can we see things as they really are. Only through God’s eyes, can we see Rome for what it is and see the church for what it is. Only through God’s eyes, can we truly see ourselves. And how do we look through God’s eyes? We look at his word. God’s word tells us how God sees things.

You mean that God’s word lets us see things clearly as God sees them? Isn’t that what Paul told us?

1 Corinthians 13:10-12 — *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now*

I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Most people on earth do not look at things through God's eyes. Either they make no attempt to do so, or they twist God's word to their own destruction so that they have faulty vision. But one day everyone will see things through God's eyes. Everyone will have their eyes opened to their true condition and to the power of God. But for many that day will come too late.

Revelation 18:11-17a

11 And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: 12 The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, 13 And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. 14 And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. 15 The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, 16 And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and

decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! 17a For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.

This lament by the merchants is very similar to the lament over the city of Tyre found in Ezekiel 26-28.

Ezekiel 27:27 — Thy riches, and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy calkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war, that are in thee, and in all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin.

These verses in Chapter 18 describe the great commercial success of Rome, and verses 12-14 in particular describe the vast extent of Rome's trade. Aristides described it this way:

Merchandise is brought from every land and sea, everything that every season begets, and every country produces, the products of rivers and lakes, the arts of the Greeks and the barbarians, so that, if anyone were to wish to see all these things, he would either have to visit the whole inhabited world to see them — or to visit Rome; so many great ships arrive from all over the world at every hour, at every season, that Rome is like some common factory of the world, for you may see such great cargoes from the Indies, or, if you wish, from the blessed Arabias, that you might well conjecture that the trees there have been stripped naked; clothing from Babylon, ornaments from the barbarian lands, everything flows to Rome; merchandise, cargoes, the products of the land, the emptying of the mines, the product of every art that is and has been, everything that is begotten and everything that grows. *If there is anything you cannot see at Rome, then it is a thing which does not exist and which never existed.*

Why do the merchants weep? They weep because of their loss of business. Their lament is not for Rome but for their own lost profit. They have merchandise with no one to sell it to. Their concern for Rome totally motivated by self interest.

The merchants, like the kings, stand far off and watch the destruction. They do not attempt to help the great city. The kings believed that Rome was a stronghold destined to endure forever. The merchants believed that Rome was a market destined to endure forever. They were all wrong!

They each had made a decision to throw their lot in with Rome, and they had made the wrong decision. Caesar or Christ? Rome or the church? Which one is the eternal king? Which one is the eternal kingdom?

If the **central theme** of this book is that we should open our eyes to see things as God sees them, then the **central message** of this is book is this: **There is but one eternal kingdom!** And every other kingdom will fall before it, including even the mighty kingdom of Rome!

Lesson 43

Last week when we ended we had just read from verse 11 to the first half of verse 17 in Chapter 18. These verses are showing us the second of the three laments in this chapter — the lament of the merchants. They are weeping because of their loss of business.

In verses 12-13 there are twenty-seven different categories of products that were being sold by these merchants. Almost all of the products are self explanatory, but there are a few that deserve some special comment.

The cinnamon in verse 13 and the silk in verse 12 likely came from China, and the spices in verse 13 likely came from India.

The “thyine wood” in verse 12 was called citrus or citron wood by the Romans. The name “thyine” is derived from the Greek word meaning “to sacrifice,” and it was called that because it was burned in sacrifices on account of its fragrance. The wood of this tree was very valuable and was used for making furniture by the Greeks and Romans.

The phrase “slaves, and souls of men” in verse 13 is interesting. A better translation might be “slaves, even the lives of men.” There were some sixty million slaves in the Roman empire. It was not unusual for a man to own four hundred slaves, and those slaves were used for many different purposes. Some masters had slaves walk in front of them so they could return the greetings of friends when the master was too tired or disdainful to do so. Another had an educated slave stand behind him at dinners to supply him with witty quotations. Others used slaves to remind them when to eat and when to sleep.

As Barclay reminds us, “a society built on luxury, on wantonness, on pride, on callousness to human life and personality is necessarily doomed.” That was true then, and it remains true today.

Verses 16 and 17 are chilling.

*Revelation 18:16-17a — Alas, alas, that great city,
that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet,
and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!
For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.*

Much could be said of that statement and its relevance both then and now, but I will just quote Hailey:

What about the United States, which has been a land of plenty and great abundance? It has taken much for granted, wasting and squandering its resources. Is it approaching a time when it shall reach for the great abundance bestowed upon it by God, and find it gone for ever?

There is also a lesson here for the church. We must place our trust in God, and only in God. We must not trust in the arm of man, and we must not trust in uncertain riches. The only hand that will be there to lift us up at the end will be the hand of God.

2 Samuel 22:2-3 — The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.

Unlike the kings here in Chapter 18, King David knew where to place his trust. Let's follow that example. "The God of my rock; in him will I trust."

Revelation 18:17b-19

17b And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, 18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! 19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

This third lament is by the shipmasters and the sailors. They were the ones who carried all of the goods bought and sold by the merchants, and so they would also suffer when Rome fell.

Rome was a great economic power, and its fall would be felt by all who depended on Rome. In fact, we have a name for the time period that followed the *physical* collapse of Rome in AD 476 — we call the next five centuries the **Dark Ages**. These verses are describing what the dark ages would be like long before the dark ages occurred.

The city of Rome is pictured here as being made desolate in one hour. We have already discussed the phrase “one hour.” It denotes a time of critical importance. It also emphasizes the suddenness, the brevity, and the unexpected nature of the event. Nero’s fire raged a week and failed to destroy the entire city yet the fire that God sends destroys the city in one hour! Rome’s fall is total and complete and worse than anything Rome could imagine.

Some people look at this description of sudden destruction, and they see an atomic bomb. Is that what we are being shown here? Of course not! This language is figurative, just as we have seen all throughout this book. The judgment and the deliverance here are spiritual, not physical. The language is intended to show a swift and unexpected calamity, and that is something that will happen not just to Rome, but to all who stand opposed to God.

This dirge of the shipmasters reminds us again of Ezekiel’s lament for Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:28-30 — And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land; And shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes.

Although Rome was not on the coast, the merchandise of the world entered at its port in Ostia. And again, the shipmasters weep, not over the loss of the city, but over the loss of their trade. Their concern is for themselves, not for Rome.

We see in these verses the incredible materialism of Rome, and if we are looking for modern day parallels, that one is impossible to miss. We may still print “In God We Trust” on our money, but our nation’s actions speak much more loudly than our words.

The motto “In God We Trust” first appeared on our coinage during the Civil War. But did you know that there is one particular gold coin that does not include that motto? Teddy Roosevelt specifically asked that it not be put on the gold coins that were minted during his presidency. Why? Because he knew

the lifestyles of many of the men out West where those gold coins were most often circulated, and he did not believe that God's name should be used on coins that were spent in saloons, gambling halls, and brothels. The President expressed that view in a letter dated November 11, 1907:

My own feeling in the matter is due to my very firm conviction that to put such a motto [In God We Trust] on coins, or to use it in any kindred manner, not only does no good but does positive harm, and is in effect irreverence which comes dangerously close to sacrilege. A beautiful and solemn sentence such as the one in question should be treated and uttered only with that fine reverence which necessarily implies a certain exaltation of spirit. Any use which tends to cheapen it, and above all, any use which tends to secure it being treated in a spirit of levity, is from every standpoint profoundly to be regretted.

How times have changed! How far we have fallen!

Sadly, many today trust in their dollars rather than in God. They have everything that money can buy — but have nothing that it can't.

As one commentator noted, “like the uprooted vine that generated the self-consuming fire in Ezekiel 19:14, a culture that worships commercial success will strike the sparks that ultimately burn it to ashes.” We are seeing that here in Chapter 18 with regard to Rome.

Revelation 18:20

20 Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

We have made the point many times that this book refers to the faithless Romans as those who dwell upon the earth, and this book pictures the church as being in heaven even though many of them were still living on earth and suffering under the Roman lash. God pictures the church as being safe in heaven to comfort them and to assure them. Yes, to literally live in heaven eternally, those Christians must remain faithful unto death. But if they do that,

then their eternal destiny is assured — and Rome can do nothing to change that.

Verse 20 is proof of what we have been saying. Who is told to rejoice? Heaven, the apostles, and the prophets. What does that trio remind us of?

***Ephesians 2:20** — And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

In that verse Paul discusses the church, the apostles, and the prophets. Here we see a command to rejoice directed to heaven, the apostles, and the prophets. The three groups are the same in each verse — the difference is that in this book the church is pictured as already being in heaven, and so that is how the church is addressed here in verse 20.

The end of verse 20 gives us any more proof of that fact. The reason that heaven is told to rejoice is that God has avenged the church by God's judgment on Rome. That takes us all the way back to Revelation 6:10 where the martyrs asked God to avenge their blood on them that dwell on the earth. Elsewhere the book describes the prayers of all the saints coming before the throne of God (5:8, 8:3-4).

God is addressing the church here in verse 20, including its foundation. As before, the contrast shown here between Rome and the church is stark. While Rome and its allies mourn, the church is told to rejoice.

But I thought we were supposed to weep with those who weep. Aren't the Christians in verse 20 *rejoicing* with those who weep? Absolutely! But they aren't rejoicing out of personal bitterness. Their concern, like that of the four living creatures, is for the holiness and reputation of God. The church rejoices at the vindication of God and at the defeat of this great enemy of God and of God's people. These events are an answer to their prayer in Revelation 6:10! **How could they not rejoice?** God had answered their prayers!

And Rome deserved everything that Rome got! Rome had the church in its crosshairs, and Satan through Rome was intent on destroying the church. The Roman emperors were evil, godless men who were bathed in innocent blood. What is our best evidence for that fact? Ancient historians? Roman coins? No. Our best evidence is the Bible. Daniel, Paul, and John all describe those Roman rulers, and those inspired descriptions are our best evidence about what those emperors were like. I recently finished reading a biography of Nero that made him look more like Saint Nero the Chaste! According to the author, Nero perse-

cuted no one, killed no one (expect his mother!), and sought only the best for his beloved people. Not only does that portrait not fit with the secular historical record, it does not fit with the Bible, which refers to Nero as a beast that was slain, and who figuratively returned as Domitian. Yes, those secular historians (such as Tacitus and Suetonius) might have been biased (as that author argued), but the Bible was not biased. The Bible is truth (John 17:17).

Rome's judgment is a cause for great rejoicing. God's people requested justice, and God has delivered it. The righteous are victorious, and the evil have been defeated.

Rome was rejoicing in Chapter 11 when it appeared that the two witness had been defeated, but Rome's rejoicing was premature, and now the tables have turned. Again we find a parallel in the Old Testament judgment of literal Babylon, who also had the tables turned on it.

***Jeremiah 51:48-49** — Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith the Lord. As Babylon hath caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth.*

By this point it should go without saying, but here it is: If we want to understand the book of Revelation and what it says about Rome (which Peter calls Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13), we need to carefully study the Old Testament and what it says about ancient Babylon. Over and over again we see the same language used for both judgments, and in neither case is it describing the end of the world. "Babylon is fallen!" And for that reason the people of God rejoice.

Revelation 18:21

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

Here we see a great millstone that is thrown into the sea by a mighty angel to show how the great city of Rome would be thrown down and found no more.

A similar image is used in Jeremiah to describe the fall of ancient Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:63-64 — And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.

Rome, like Babylon, would fall never to rise again.

It is interesting (but not surprising) that premillennialists teach just the opposite! They say that the so-called Antichrist will rule from a **revived** Roman empire. Verse 21 leaves no place for a revived Roman empire! “That great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

Verse 21 reminds me of something Jesus said in Matthew 21.

Matthew 21:21 — If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

We usually describe that verse as hyperbole, but is it? Didn't the church ask in faith for Rome to be judged in Revelation 6:10? And don't we see God answering that prayer of faith by casting Rome as a millstone into the sea? And remember how it was described in Revelation 8:8 — “a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea.” Yes, when we utter a prayer of faith, God will move mountains on our behalf! And that is no hyperbole! We see it happening right here with the mighty Roman empire!

Revelation 18:22-24

22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; 23 And the light of a can-

dle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

Verses 22-23 show us five aspects of normal Roman life that would vanish with the judgment of Rome.

- The sound of musical instruments and rejoicing would go away.
- The sound of craftsmen plying their trade would never be heard again.
- The sound of the mill would disappear.
- No lights in the houses or in the streets would be seen again.
- The sounds of weddings would no longer be heard.

The picture being painted here is that Rome is to become a terrible **silent** and **dark** desolation. Rome, the city that had once set Christians aflame to provide light for Nero's drunken orgies, would be plunged into darkness and silence.

As before, we find similar descriptions in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 25:10 (concerning Judah) — *Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.*

Ezekiel 26:13 (concerning Tyre) — *And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard.*

Why did this happen? Verses 23-24 give us three reasons. First, it was because Rome's merchants were the great men of the earth. Second, it was because by Rome's sorceries all nations were deceived. Third, it was because in Rome was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon

the earth. In short, this happened because of Rome's greed, because of Rome's false evil religion, and because of Rome's persecution of God's people. Those are the three reasons given in verses 23-24.

These verses remind me of the reasons why God judged another evil city — Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 — Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

Was Rome a great nation? Yes, Rome was the greatest nation the world had ever seen from an earthly perspective. But Rome had not used that greatness for good. God had used Rome for good, but Rome had not used Rome for good.

Instead, Rome had used its greatness to deceive and mislead the world. Rome had made its material greatness the goal of its existence. Rome had used its great power to persecute and murder the people of God. Rome had caused all nations to adopt Rome's false standards and Rome's false worship.

Rome fell because Rome was covered with the blood of God's people, and, like Tyre in Ezekiel 24:6, Rome was truly a "bloody city." Verse 24 does not just say that Rome murdered Christians; that verse says that Rome also murdered all who were slain upon the earth. Rome was blood-thirsty, and that blood-thirstiness did not extend only to Christians. Rome murdered many others as well, and God is holding them to account for that as well.

And which is the worse crime from God's perspective (if either is "worse")? Murdering a faithful Christian who would then go to be with Christ, or murdering someone who had not yet heard the gospel but who might have heard it the very next day? Rome killed both.

Rome fell because Rome worshipped wealth and luxury. Rome fell because Rome lived a prodigal and wanton life. Rome fell because Rome found no pleasure except in materialism and perversity. Rome fell because Rome was lifted up with pride and felt it had no need for God. Rome fell because Rome murdered and persecuted God's children.

Waste? Materialism? Wantonness? Perversity? Pride? The shedding of innocent blood? Do we see any modern day parallels in that list?

Introduction to Chapters 19-22

Four chapters remain in the book of Revelation, and these final four chapters are some of the most debated and misunderstood chapters in the entire book. Before we dive in, I think it would be helpful to pause and consider 10 points that will be helpful to us as we study these closing chapters of the book.

1. The subject of the book has not changed.

There is no reason to think that we will have a giant change of subject between Chapter 18 and Chapter 19. We should expect that whatever we have been seeing the first eighteen chapters will remain front and center as we study the final four chapters. Revelation is a single book, and we need to continue to treat it as such. One reason some people have such strange ideas about the closing chapters of the book is that they went off the rails back in Chapter 1, and by the time they get to these final chapters they are so far off the rails that the train track is no longer even in sight!

2. The time frame of the book has not changed.

We saw the first century time frame of this book in the very first verse of the very first chapter. We saw it again a few verses later. We have also seen it scattered throughout the first eighteen chapters we have studied. There is no reason to expect a giant leap forward in time as we approach these final four chapters. In fact, the same time frame that we saw repeated twice in the first chapter of this book will again be repeated twice in the final chapter of this book.

3. The purpose of the book has not changed.

The purpose of this book was to provide comfort to the persecuted first century church. The purpose was to promise them victory if they remained faithful unto death. The purpose was to answer their prayers for vengeance against bloodthirsty Rome. There is no reason to suspect that the purpose of this book has suddenly changed in the closing chapters.

4. The cast of the book has not changed.

So far we have seen a rather limited cast of characters in this book. We have seen God the Father sending out judgments against those who dwell upon the earth, which we know are the faithless persecuting Romans.

And we have seen God the Son. In fact, Jesus is the star of this book. The first words of the book are “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” and from that point on we have seen Jesus playing the central role in everything that has happened.

In fact, Jesus is the reason that these things are happening. And Jesus is the reason why there is a promised blessing to those who remain faithful unto death.

But we have also seen some other characters. We have seen the church portrayed as a radiant woman. We have seen Rome portrayed as a bloodthirsty harlot. We have seen the Roman emperors portrayed as heads, as horns, and as beasts.

There is no reason to suspect that the closing chapters of this book are going to shift to a different cast of characters. If we haven't seen the Russians, the Chinese, or the Pope so far, I don't think we should look for them in the closing chapters.

5. This is no time to start ignoring the rest of the Bible.

All throughout our study we have carefully considered everything that the Bible has to say about the subjects we have studied. At no time have we studied a verse of this book in a vacuum. We have rejected views of this book that veer away from other easy to understand verses in the Bible. We need to continue operating this way as we study these final four chapters. Those who have done otherwise have come up with all sorts of strange ideas about what these chapters teach.

6. This is no time to start ignoring similar Old Testament language.

The Old Testament has grounded us in our study of Revelation. Any time we have been tempted to say that certain language can only mean the end of the world, we have seen the same or similar language in the Old Testament used in reference to some past judgment of an enemy of God's people. The Old Testament has kept us from seeing in these verses atomic bombs, Cobra helicopters, and hoards of Chinese soldiers.

7. We should continue understanding the language in these final four chapters as apocalyptic language.

Most of the language in this book is apocalyptic language. We saw some of it in the first three chapters, and then we saw a great deal of it once the main vision began in Chapter 4. There is no reason to expect that we will suddenly quit seeing it in these closing chapters. We must continue to understand this language as figurative language unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

8. The rule for understanding apocalyptic language is that numbers are figurative, and we should not depart from that rule now.

Yes, sometimes numbers are also literal, and we know that because an angel told us that in Chapter 17. But that was an exception to the rule, and likely the reason we received that divine explanation. Numbers are figurative, and we have seen many example. Two. Three. Three and a half. Four. Six. Seven. Eight. Ten. Twelve. We have seen all of those numbers used as figures. And we have seen them combined to create new symbols such as with 144,000.

9. The theme of this book has not changed.

The theme of this book is that things are not always what they seem. The theme is that to truly see something as it really is, we must look at that thing through God's eyes. That theme hasn't gone anywhere.

10. The choice presented in this book has not changed.

Caesar or Christ? The city of man or the city of God? The kingdom of man or the kingdom of God? The bloodthirsty whore of Chapter 17 or the beautiful radiant woman of Chapter 12? Those who dwell on the earth or those who dwell in heaven? Those are the choices that everyone has been called upon to make so far in this book, and we should not expect that call to change in the closing chapters. We have been tracing the number two throughout our study of this book. That number has been a thread throughout our study, and two is the number of decision. Either one or the other. There is no third choice.

With that background, let's dive in.

Chapter 19

God's people were told to rejoice in verse 20 of Chapter 18, and that is what we see them doing here in Chapter 19. The church rejoices over the fall of the great city and the victory of the church.

The great joy of those who overcame and who conquered is compared here to the joy that accompanies a great wedding feast. The picture is one of victory and unrestrained joy.

The battle at Armageddon (which was first portrayed in Chapter 16) is considered again in this chapter. The two beasts are defeated and cast into a lake of

fire. This chapter provides some of the details that were omitted when that battle was first described.

Revelation 19:1-2

1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: 2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

A great multitude in heaven rejoices over the judgment of the harlot. This great multitude (which we first saw in 7:9) represents all of God's people both living and dead. Although they are pictured in heaven, this book (as we just saw in the previous chapter) has consistently divided the godly from the ungodly by describing the former as being in heaven while describing the latter as those that dwell on the earth.

Verse 2 reminds us that God's judgments are true and just. God's greatness rests not just on his power but on his character. God's judgments are **always** true and just, and this judgment of Rome is no exception.

In judging Rome, God avenged the blood of the martyrs as they had requested him to do in 6:10 where they cried with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth." That prayer set events into motion, and verse 2 tells us that prayer has been answered.

If the villain in this book is not first century Rome (as many argue), then how do we explain the answer here in Chapter 19 to that prayer from Chapter 6? What other world power was martyring God's people at the time of this vision? It wasn't Jerusalem. Jerusalem was just a pile of rubble in AD 79, and Jerusalem was not close to being a world power at any point in the first century. The only

world power martyring Christian was Rome. Verse 2 here is a link back to Chapter 6. If Chapter 6 is describing Rome, then so is Chapter 19.

Verse 2 also provides an important focus for what is about to be described. Verse 2 tells us that the focus of the joy and the focus of the judgment is the great harlot — and we know that that great harlot is Rome. We should keep that context in mind if we are tempted at times to leap ahead thousands of years (and possibly many more) to the final judgment at the end of time. This vision is still focused on Rome!

Let's pause for a moment and look at one word in particular from verse 1: "**Hallelujah.**" In the Old Testament that one word is written as two words. For example, it appears twice in Psalm 150:6 — "Let every thing that hath breath *praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.*" In the New Testament the one word form, Hallelujah, appears only here in verses 1, 3, 4, and 6. It is a translation of the Hebrew phrase we saw in Psalm 150, which means "Praise ye Jah [Jehovah]." Here, that word is being spoken in the very presence of God.

What is my point? My point is that the word "Hallelujah" is a powerful and beautiful word, but sadly it is used more often than not today with no thought of God. The word "Hallelujah" includes within it the very name Jehovah, and yet the world uses that word as a byword. And more often than not the world uses it to express approval for something that God condemns. We need to make sure we treat that word just as reverently as we do the names for God and the references to God in the Bible. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). The quickest and easiest way to stand out in this world is simply to guard our tongues. The world will notice that very quickly.

Revelation 19:3

3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

Rome is depicted in verse 3 as a city set on fire by God that burns forever. In Revelation 18:9-10, the kings of the earth stood far off and watched the city burn. The shipmasters in Revelation 18:18 also watched the great city burn.

Fire is a common symbol for the judgment of God. Sodom and Gomorrah were literally destroyed by fire, yet eventually that fire went out. So that means a

fire that literally goes out can't be a fire that burns forever and ever, right? Wrong. Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah are presently "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

What does that mean? At least two things. It means that the evil people of Sodom and Gomorrah are still suffering the punishment for their sins, and it also means that Sodom and Gomorrah continue to serve as an example to others who might be tempted to follow their evil example.

Those two cities fell never to rise again, and their fall serves as an eternal example. Edom is likewise described in Isaiah 34 as burning forever.

*Isaiah 34:9-10 — And the land thereof shall become
burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day;
the smoke thereof shall go up for ever.*

That they burn forever simply means that they serve as an example forever. We are seeing the smoke from those cities today as we study about their judgment and refuse to follow their example.

Rome likewise provides an eternal illustration of the power of God and of God's ability to deal with anyone or anything that opposes his will and harms his people. In that sense, Rome burns forever and the smoke that rises from it is always visible.

Of course, Romans were very familiar with the image of a burning city. They had literally lived through such an event in AD 64 during the reign of Nero. Many, including myself, believe that Nero himself set the fire so that he could rebuild the city in his own image. How bad was the fire? According to Tacitus, of Rome's fourteen districts, three were completely devastated, seven more were reduced to a few scorched and mangled ruins, and only four completely escaped damage.

As bad as that fire was, it was eventually went out, and eventually the smoke could no longer be seen. The smoke here in verse 3 will always be visible. Why? Because this smoke is shown in the word of God, which will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

Lesson 44

Last week we started Chapter 19, which is the first of the four remaining chapters in this book. These final four chapters have, in particular, suffered much at the hand of careless commentators, so we started our study by reviewing 10 points that will help us stay on the right track.

What we see in Chapter 19 is what God's people were commanded to do in Chapter 18: rejoice! We see the great rejoicing of God's people in response to God's answer to their prayers. The church is rejoicing over the fulfillment of Daniel's great prophecy in Daniel 2:44. The church has come through this great tribulation victorious. How? Because they have remained faithful unto death. That is how we overcome this world and the kingdoms of this world. Not by physical power or by carnal weapons, but by being faithful to Christ following our obedience to his gospel. That was how the first century church overcame the world, and that is how the twenty-first century church will overcome the world.

Revelation 19:4-6

4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. 5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. 6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Again we see the word Hallelujah, and here the word is spoken by the twenty-four elders and by the four living creatures who defend God's holiness. We

first met these twenty-four elders and these four living creatures back in Chapter 4. And once again we see the unity of this vision. What we were seeing at the beginning of the vision is what we are seeing at the end of the vision. There is no indication that the subject has changed, and every indication that it has not changed.

God is the one King who was able to stop the military might of Rome. God reigned then, God reigns now, God has always reigned, and God will always reign. God reigned prior to the fall of the Rome, and God reigns after the fall of Rome. If we are reading this book looking for something that God is going to **begin** to reign over, we will be disappointed. God has been the King of the universe from the moment God created the universe.

You mean to say that God reigns as King over evil people? Yes, that is exactly what the Bible tells us.

***Psalm 47:7-8** — For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. **God reigneth over the heathen:** God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.*

God was Rome's King, but Rome was rebelling against its King. Punishing Rome did not make God King over Rome — God punished Rome because God was already King over Rome. This is a good point to remember as we inch ever closer to Revelation 20:4 and the so-called thousand year reign of Christ. (It is actually a reign *with* Christ, but more on that later.)

In verse 6, we have yet another reminder that what John is seeing and hearing is a vision. "And I heard **as it were** the voice of a great multitude, and **as** the voice of many waters, and **as** the voice of mighty thunderings" John is reminding us that he is describing a vision using things we are familiar with (such as the sound of many waters), and this is an important reminder, particularly as we study the closing chapters of this book.

Verse 6 shows one reason why I love the King James version of the Bible: "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" I don't think it is a coincidence that the most used English version of the Bible was translated at the very time at which the English language reached its peak of beauty and power. I love that phrase: "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" The ASV loses some of the beauty, but arguably gains a bit in accuracy: "for the Lord our God, **the Almighty**, reigneth."

The word “Almighty” in verse 6 occurs ten times in the New Testament — once in 2 Corinthians 6:18 in a quotation from the Old Testament and nine times in Revelation. The term denotes God’s sovereignty over all of creation.

Rome believed that it was almighty, but Rome was very badly mistaken. Almighty God created the universe, including Rome, and Almighty God reigns over the universe — including Rome! That is a vital lesson for nation builders in any age! “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1). Sadly, there are many people today who are laboring in vain. That was certainly the case in the first century.

Revelation 19:7-8

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

So far in this book we have met two women. First, we met the radiant woman of Chapter 12, and then we met the bloodthirsty whore of Chapter 17. In verse 7 we again meet a woman, the wife of the Lamb, but this is not a third woman. This is a woman we have seen before in this book. This woman in verse 7 is the same radiant woman we met back in Chapter 12. This woman is the people of God, who at this time is the church of God. That is confirmed by the description in verse 8 — who else but the church could be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.” And to remove all doubt we have the closing phrase of verse 8: “the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” This woman represents the saints.

So what is happening in these two verses? That’s the million dollar question, but let me start with the simplest answer, which I think is the correct answer. What is going on here is a scene of unrestrained joy by the people of God over their victory against Rome. Isn’t that what we would expect to see at this point in the book? Isn’t that what God’s people were commanded to do in the pre-

vious chapter in Revelation 18:20? I think that is what we are seeing here, and a common symbol for unrestrained joy is a wedding.

The harlot of Chapter 17 is no more. And now that the harlot — that great enemy and rival of the church — is gone, it is time for a wedding. It is time for rejoicing.

The phrase “**let us be glad and rejoice**” in verse 7 is a phrase that is commonly associated with persecution in the Bible.

***Matthew 5:11-12** — Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. **Rejoice, and be exceeding glad:** for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

1 Peter 4:13** — But **rejoice**, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, **ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

These Christians suffered great persecution — many had been persecuted to death — but now they had come out of that persecution. God had given them the promised spiritual victory, and so what we see here is their response: unrestrained rejoicing!

And, of course, the image of the church as the bride of Christ is not unique to this book. In the Old Testament, the relation of God to his people was often referred to as a husband and wife relationship, albeit usually in a negative sense as in Hosea 2 and Ezekiel 16. But even when the image was used to show how God’s people had forsaken their husband, the image of how God wanted his relationship to be with his people remained.

***Ezekiel 16:8-9** — Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. **Then washed I thee with water;** yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil.*

Given those Old Testament descriptions, it was natural for the relation between Christ and his church to be described that same way in the New Testament.

***Ephesians 5:23-27** — For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with **the washing of water by the word**, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

Did you notice the similarity between Ezekiel 16 and Ephesians 5? “Then washed I thee with water” in Ezekiel 16. “The washing of water by the word” in Ephesians 5. There’s a sermon on baptism lurking in those two verses!

We also see the symbol of marriage applied to the church in Romans 7.

***Romans 7:4** — Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

We find that same symbol here in Chapter 19, where there is a marriage between Christ the Lamb and the woman who becomes the wife of the Lamb, which is the church. The marriage and the marriage feast are used to illustrate the joy of God’s people in Chapter 19 just as the joyous feast of the tabernacles was used for that same purpose in Chapter 7.

That all sounds pretty simple. God’s people are told to rejoice, and that rejoicing is described as a great wedding. But is that really all there is here? Are we missing something? Many would say yes, but I don’t agree. I am very suspicious of any theory about these verses that purports to tell us something about the church that is not described anywhere else in the New Testament.

Many commentators (including some in the church) have used the closing chapters of Revelation to develop elaborate theories about Christ’s marriage to the church. Let’s look at a rather extreme example. Max King, whom we

discussed in our introductory lessons, teaches that Jesus was **married** to literal Israel until the church appeared, at which point Jesus was **betrothed** to the church while still **married** to Israel. But when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, Jesus was **divorced** from Israel and **married** to the church. **That theory sounds more like a soap opera than it does like Scripture!** Max King's theory is baseless and, in fact, is contradicted by Paul's pre-AD 70 descriptions of Jesus' relation to the church that we read just a moment ago.

In fact, the church is described sometimes as being married to Christ and at other times as being betrothed to Christ. For example, the point of Ephesians 5 is to describe the relation between Christ and the church as **one flesh**.

Ephesians 5:29-32 — For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Being one flesh is more than a betrothal. (Recall Matthew 1:18 — “When as his mother Mary was **espoused** to Joseph, **before they came together.**”) And remember also Romans 7:4 — “that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, **that we should bring forth fruit unto God.**” That, too, is more than a betrothal. And those are descriptions of the church **prior** to this wedding that we see here in Chapter 19.

But some might object that in 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul wrote, “for I have **espoused** you to one husband, that I **may present you as a chaste virgin** to Christ.” Didn't that mean the wedding was yet future. Was the church married to Christ or just betrothed to Christ? And if it was just a betrothal with the wedding yet to come, then is there a contradiction between 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5 and Romans 7?

Of course not. **Neither is literally true, but both are figuratively true.** Just as with similar Old Testament descriptions, these descriptions of the church being married to Christ or betrothed to Christ are illustrations that show the love of Christ has for his church. Sometimes that love is shown as a marriage, while other times it is shown as a betrothal with the marriage yet to come. In each case a spiritual point is being made, and in neither case is the intent to

show that the church is *literally* married to Christ or *literally* betrothed to Christ.

Paul used marriage in various ways to describe the church. In Ephesians 5, for example, Paul used marriage both to describe Jesus' love for the church and to emphasize the need for purity in the church. In Romans 7, Paul used marriage to describe not the relation of the entire church to Christ but instead the relation of an individual Christian to Christ. Romans 6 and 7, studied together, describe baptism as a wedding ceremony in which we enter a covenant relationship with Jesus. In short, even outside of Revelation, the symbol of marriage is used to describe different aspects of the church and of a Christian's relationship with Christ. Here in Revelation 19 we see yet another aspect — the unrestrained joy of the church in its victory over Rome.

Yes, verse 7 sounds on the surface like the church was not married to Christ prior to verse 7, but we know that was not the case. A Christian is married to Christ from the moment of baptism, and there has never been a moment since Acts 2 when Christ did not love the church as a husband loves his wife. When verse 7 says that the marriage of the Lamb is come, that is just part of the symbol for a joyful wedding. The wedding is happening! It is time to rejoice!

A central theme of this book is that Jesus loves his church and is intimately concerned with its welfare. How better to illustrate that love and concern than with a marriage? How better to illustrate the great joy of the church than with a marriage and a marriage feast? The context here is unrestrained joy, and a marriage is used to symbolize that joy.

I think we have gone astray from the text and the context when we start trying to create elaborate theories about the church from these verses. I like what Jim McGuigan has to say on that subject:

It's not out of place here to say a word or two about using figures to build doctrines on. If the doctrine is not clearly taught in other plain sections of scripture, it's a foolish man indeed who founds a school on a figure! Haven't we seen enough of this in the world? We've had men fill us with their types, double applications, and allegories.

To which I say, Amen! (And I should add that I like what brother Jim McGuigan has to say on most other subjects as well!)

The fine linen, clean and white, that the bride is wearing in verse 8 is a sharp contrast to the worldly apparel that the harlot was wearing. The bride of the

Lamb, as Ephesians 5:27 tells us, is without “spot or wrinkle or any such thing,” but is “holy and without blemish.”

And isn't there a lesson there for us? A lesson that we can understand without having to look up the Greek word for “betrothal”? **We are the bride of Christ without spot or blemish, and we should live that way! We must always give Christ our very best.**

After all that this book of Revelation has told us so far about Christ and his church (and the most beautiful descriptions are yet to come!), how could his church possibly fail to give him its very best? But do we? I fear sometimes that the modern church is in danger of settling into a bed of comfortable but deadly mediocrity. Jesus deserves and demands our very best. God sent his very best into this world to die for us — how can we respond with less than our own best? Remember how this book started: “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16).

Malachi 1:13 — Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.

That was God's response in the Old Testament when his people brought him something less than their very best. Do we really think God will respond differently today if his people do the same thing? Remember — we are the wife of the Lamb!

Revelation 19:9

9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Verse 9 confirms all that we just said about this marriage. What is the main point of this marriage symbol — the marriage itself or the joy that accompanies the marriage? Look at verse 9. The angel says that those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb are blessed. What that means is that

the wedding **guests** are blessed. Why? Because they are able to share the **joy** of the event. The context is joy, and the marriage is a beautiful symbol for that joy.

But who are these wedding guests? If the church is the bride, then who is left to be blessed? There can be only one answer to that question, and it is an answer that we have seen before in this book and that we saw in our study of Zechariah — these guests are those Romans who are called by the gospel and who repent and heed that call in obedience to Christ.

Even here, at the joyous wedding feast celebrating the victory over Rome, the church is pictured as continuing its work to proclaim the gospel to those who are lost. Earlier we saw the church doing its mission work while being persecuted, and here we see the church doing its mission work while celebrating. The church has a mission, and nothing can stand in the way of that mission. We must continue working until that last great day.

And for those who want to see the end of the world in these verses, doesn't the presence of these wedding guests tell us that the world had not yet ended? Doesn't the fact that we see the mission work of the church continuing here in verse 9 provide further evidence that what is being described in this chapter is not that last great day! There will be no wedding guests on that day! On that day, the church will no longer be proclaiming the word to the lost.

What does the end of verse 9 mean? "These are the true sayings of God." Why did that need to be added? Do we have sayings of God somewhere that are not true? Of course not. God's word is truth (John 17:17). This phrase is just emphasizing what has been said, and is just reminding us that if God said it then there can be no doubt at all as to its truthfulness. And it is a reminder on one more thing: these words are the sayings of God. They are not the sayings of man.

Revelation 19:10

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

John falls down to worship the angel but is told that such worship is improper. (This same thing will happen again later in Revelation 22:8.) **Why did John try to worship this angel?**

Some argue that John was confused as to the identity of the speaker and perhaps thought it was Christ himself, but others rightly respond that John knew Christ very well and was able to recognize him elsewhere in the book.

Others argue that John was perhaps so overwhelmed at what he was seeing that he impulsively fell at the feet of the angel — something he would never have done in ordinary circumstances. I favor this view, which also explains why it happens again in Revelation 22:8. Can you imagine what it must have been like to actually **witness** the visions in this book? I'm surprised that John didn't fall down more often!

In any event, the angel uses John's reaction as a teaching moment (which is itself a teaching moment!). When John falls down before the angel, the angel responds by restating a central theme in this book: **God alone is worthy of worship**. The choice between Caesar and Christ is no choice at all. Caesar is a creature; Christ is the Creator. Paul made this same point when he described the Romans in Romans.

***Romans 1:25** — Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.*

Verse 10 is making that same point. Worship God!

Now this is interesting. Many people see the command in Ephesians 5:19 to sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord, and they add to that command by bringing musical instruments into the worship service. God says sing, and they sing and play an instrument. Look at the command in verse 10: "worship God." Do they interpret that command the same way they interpret the command to sing? Do they worship God and also worship Buddha, arguing: "The Bible never tells us we can't worship Buddha! Neither Buddha nor electric guitars are mentioned anywhere in the Bible! So why can't we worship one and play the other? I'm still singing; I'm just also playing a guitar! I'm still worshipping God; I'm just also worshipping Buddha!" I have never heard anyone make that argument when it comes to worshipping Buddha, but I have heard countless people make that argument when it comes to playing mechanical instruments in the worship service. "Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord." "Worship God." Doesn't the first command exclude any music other

than singing just as surly as the second command excludes worship of anything or anyone other than God? **If not, why not?**

No creature — be it an angel or an emperor — is to be worshiped. And if it is improper to worship this wondrous angelic being, then how much more so must it be to worship a perverted pagan emperor!

There is a stark contrast between this event and another event recorded by John. In John 9:38, John described the reaction of the man blind from birth after Jesus gave him his sight — **“and he worshipped him.”** Unlike this angel, **Jesus accepted the worship of men.** Unlike this **created** angel, Jesus is the eternal **creator.** Jesus is the great I Am (John 8:58)! Jesus is God (John 1:1)! How else can we reconcile John 9:38 with what Jesus told Satan in Matthew 4:10? “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” How else can we reconcile John 9:38 with what we read here in verse 10? Jesus is God, and worthy to be praised!

What is meant by the phrase “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” in verse 10? Some hold that this testimony is our testimony about Jesus using the word of God, while others hold that it is Jesus’ testimony to us through the word of God. Either could be the the intended meaning. The word of God is the testimony of Jesus, and the word of God is the spirit of prophecy. Barclay suggests that John may have intended the passage to carry this double meaning.

Revelation 19:11-13

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

There have been many **openings** in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 4:1, a door was opened in heaven. In Revelation 11:19, the temple of God in heaven was opened. In Revelation 15:5, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony was opened. Here in verse 11 heaven itself is opened. The next time we say our prayers, we should be sure to thank God that heaven has a door!

We have also seen many **images of Jesus** in the book of Revelation. We saw Jesus with a countenance like the sun in Chapter 1. We saw Jesus as a lamb that had been slain in Chapter 5. We saw Jesus as a lamb in the midst of the throne in Chapter 7. We saw Jesus as a child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron in Chapter 12. We saw Jesus as a lamb standing on Mount Zion in Chapter 14. Also in Chapter 14, we saw Jesus as the Son of man sitting on a white cloud and having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. Those are all wonderful and beautiful images of Christ, but my personal favorite is right here in verses 11-13.

Behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

There can be no doubt about the identity of this rider on a white horse — this is Jesus, the conqueror of Rome and the righteous judge!

Nero thought he was all-powerful, but he was not. In fact, Nero was now dead and waiting in hell to greet Domitian. Domitian thought he was all-powerful, but he was not. In fact, he would soon be dead himself.

***Ecclesiastes 8:8** — There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death.*

The one with the real power is the one who has power over death, and that person is the rider of this white horse. That person is Jesus.

***2 Timothy 1:10** — But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, **who hath abolished death**, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Unlike those Roman emperors, Jesus is faithful and true. Unlike those Roman emperors, Jesus judges in righteousness. Unlike those Roman emperors, Jesus makes war in righteousness. Unlike those Roman emperors, Jesus wears the true crowns. Jesus was coming in judgment to sweep away those evil Roman emperors and their evil Roman empire. And Jesus knew everything that Rome had done — his eyes are like a flame of fire. And Jesus was not just king over a few things, wearing just a few crowns. Jesus is wearing many crowns. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords!

The next time we become discouraged about the state of the church today, we should read verses 11-13. The next time we become discouraged about the state of this world, we should read verses 11-13. The next time we look around us and wonder, as the songs asks, does Jesus care, we should read verses 11-13. In fact, maybe we should read verses 11-13 every morning to remind ourselves about the one we follow.

Behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

And the most wonderful thing of all? The rider of that white horse died for you! “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). This wondrous rider was on that old rugged cross, and was there for you and for me. Can we even imagine such a thing? But it happened. That is how much God loves us. That is how much Jesus loves us. Do you think that is something the first century church needed to hear? Yes, and it is something the church of every century needs to hear.

John 3:16 — *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

There is no statement in any language made anywhere or at anytime more beautiful than that one. God’s only begotten Son, the rider on the white horse, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Now as amazing and as wonderful as this image of Christ is to us, let's think for a moment about who it was who first saw this incredible image of Christ. It was John. John likely grew up with Jesus, and John was the special apostle "whom Jesus loved." John was with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry even up to the foot of the cross. John had seen Jesus in many different settings and in many different circumstances both before his death and after his resurrection. John had witnessed the transfiguration.

And yet here John was now — old, alone, persecuted, and exiled. Perhaps Jesus had just forgotten about poor old John. Hardly! John sees Jesus once again — as a rider on a white horse, with eyes like a flame of fire, with many crowns on his head, clad in a robe dipped in blood, and wearing the very name that John had used to open his gospel record, The Word of God. Aside from the comfort this book must have provided to the church, just imagine the comfort this vision must have provided to John!

In verse 12 we are told that Jesus "had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself," but in the very next verse we are told that name: "his name is called The Word of God." What does that mean? How can it be that no one knows a name when that name is given for all to see in the very next verse?

Names in the Bible are often used to denote a person's status. When one's status changed, his name was changed. We are reminded, for example, of Abram, Jacob, and Saul. To have a **name** that no one else can know means that you have a **status** that no one else can share. That is what verse 12 means. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and no one else can share that status. Roman emperors were a dime a dozen, but there is only one Christ. Only Jesus can wear the name, The Word of God. Only of Jesus can it be said that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus is unique!

Verse 13 tells us that Jesus' vesture was dipped in blood. **Whose blood?**

Some argue it is Christ's own blood, pointing again to the image of Christ as the lamb that was slain. Others argue that it is the blood of the martyrs, shown here as a reminder of why Rome, the bloody city, was being judged.

Either of those views might be correct, but I favor another view — that this blood is the blood of Jesus' **past** enemies. The picture of Christ shown here is that of a warrior going out to conquer the enemies of his people. The ability and power of this warrior to conquer Rome is emphasized by showing him

covered in the blood of those he had previously conquered. And this book of Revelation is full of reminders of the past victories over the enemies of God's people, such as Egypt and Babylon. Jesus defeated them, and Rome is just the next in line in a long line of nations who thought they could hinder the plans of God and harm the people of God. Rome's blood will soon join the blood of those former nations on the robe of Christ.

Does that all sound a bit too bloody, perhaps? It shouldn't.

Isaiah 63:3 — I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

Revelation 14:20 — And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

We will see this same winepress again in verse 15 of this chapter. God does not deal kindly with those who harm his people. Yes, God gives them every chance to repent. Think of Nineveh, for example. But eventually the time for repentance comes to an end, and the hammer of God falls. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

The so-called Dear Leader of North Korea may be feeling a bit relieved these days because of his new friendship with Donald Trump, but Donald Trump is not the one he should be worried about. There is a rider on a white horse with flaming eyes who knows that when someone is found with a Bible in North Korea, that so-called Dear Leader throws that person and three generations of his family into a prison camp.

In a recent list of the top twenty-five countries where being a Christian is the most dangerous, North Korea topped the list. But do you know what other countries were on that list? Iraq was number three. Afghanistan was number five. Pakistan was number eight. Saudi Arabia was number twelve. India was number twenty-one. Egypt was number twenty-three. Do you see any of our so-called close allies and close friends on that list? I do, and I'm sure you do as well. Do you see any countries on that list that have been defended by the blood of Americans? I do, and I'm sure you do as well. And someone else sees them. Someone whose eyes are as a flame of fire sees them. Someone whose

clothing is dipped in the blood of his past enemies see them. There is not a country on that list that can touch the power of mighty Rome, but Rome was swept away by this rider on the white horse with eyes of fire!

Is Revelation relevant today? You bet it is! The Dear Leader of North Korea and all of his fellow tinpot tyrants should open one of those Bibles they have outlawed and see that there is but one eternal kingdom and but one eternal king — and they are not that king, and their nations are not that kingdom. One day they will join Nero and Domitian and all other rulers who put themselves in the place of God.

The description of Christ continues in verses 14-15.

Lesson 45

Some people have described the book of Revelation as a jigsaw puzzle, and maybe they are right. But how do we solve a jigsaw puzzle? Do we throw our hands up in despair and say no one can ever solve it? Do we treat the puzzle pieces as unrelated images and make no attempt to ever make them fit together? Do we leave some pieces facing up and others facing down as if it doesn't really matter whether they are trying to convey a single larger image?

No. We know how to solve a jigsaw puzzle. First you lay out all of the puzzle pieces face up — that is you put all of the evidence on the table so that you can see it. Then you look for the edge pieces and put them together — that gives you the time frame and the context in which all of the other pieces will fit. From the edges you work inward, looking for things you recognize and making sure everything fits and makes sense with what is around it. And then what happens as you approach the end of the puzzle? Does the puzzle get harder to solve or easier? It gets easier! You have fewer pieces to fit, and you can see much more of the overall image that you are reconstructing. That's where we are in these closing chapters! If we have done things right so far, then the book should be much easier for us to understand now that we are in these closing chapters!

So, yes, maybe the book of Revelation is a jigsaw puzzle. But you know what? We can solve a jigsaw puzzle!

In our last lesson we ended by looking at verses 11-13 of Chapter 19, which contain one of the most beautiful and wonderful descriptions of Jesus found anywhere in the Bible.

Behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

That beautiful and wonderful description of Jesus continues in verses 14-15.

Revelation 19:14-15

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Jesus doesn't need any army to take care of Rome, but verse 14 tells us that armies are following him. Who are these armies?

The text gives us a big clue in verse 14: these armies also ride white horses, and these armies are clothed in fine linen, white and clean. The white horse is the sign of a conquerer, and the fine linen is the sign of purity. So verse 14 tells us that these armies following Christ consist of **pure conquerers**.

Where in this book have we already seen a large group of pure people following Christ? We saw that in Chapter 14 with the 144,000, which represent all of God's people, being twelve times twelve times ten times ten times ten, where twelve is the symbol for God's people and ten is the symbol for completeness. Revelation 14:4 describes the 144,000 as virgins "which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

Can there be any doubt as to the identity of the armies in verse 14? They are the church! We are pure by the blood of Christ, and we follow Jesus wherever he goes. We are the armies of Christ! But are we fighting a **physical** battle? No. We are fighting a **spiritual** battle.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 — For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The next time someone tells you about the great battle at the end of time when Christians will fight a great war in Israel against the antichrist, ask them a simple question: **are the weapons of our warfare carnal?** Paul just told us they are not. “The weapons of our warfare are **not** carnal.” That statement is very hard to misunderstand, but premillennialists seem to have trouble with it.

The armies of heaven are the armies that are allied with Christ. They are the ones who conquer with Christ. They are the ones who overcome Rome with their faithful endurance. They are **not** the armies of those who dwell on earth — they are the armies of heaven.

But if there is only one church (Ephesians 4:4), then why do we see **armies** (plural) here rather than an **army** (singular)? The Greek word used here for army just means a band of soldiers, so most likely the one church is being shown here as consisting of many bands of soldiers, possibly pointing to many congregations of the one church (as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3). A second possibility is that these armies also include armies of angels, which are typically shown as coming with Christ in judgment both figuratively (as in Matthew 24:31) and literally (as in Matthew 25:31). I favor the first view: these armies are the church!

But, wait. The soldiers in these armies are riding **white horses**, which means that they are conquerers. Were the poor persecuted first century Christians **conquerers**? Absolutely they were! And absolutely we are as well! In fact, we are more than conquerers!

Romans 8:37 — *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

So I guess that means that those conquering Christians did not suffer persecution, right? I mean how can you be a conquerer if you are persecuted, right? Wrong! Let's go back and read Romans 8:37 again, but this time let's start in verse 35.

Romans 8:35-37 — *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

The phrase “in all these things” in verse 37 is pointing to the persecution! It is in the persecution that we are more than conquerors! We do not conquer **despite** the persecution; we conquer **in** the persecution! Can there be any better indication than that that what we are seeing here is **spiritual** conquering rather than **physical** conquering?

Who stood with Christ when he conquered Rome? Who was allied with Christ in that great battle? Who overcame the Roman empire through faith in Christ and obedience to his word? Who remained faithful unto death and received a crown of life? **The church!**

So is this battle the great battle at the end of all time? **What great battle at the end of all time?** Where in the Bible are we ever told that there will be a battle, great or otherwise, at the end of all time? Where is there a battle in 1 Corinthians 15:52?

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Where is there a battle in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17?

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

On that last great day we will rise to meet Jesus in the air. **There will be no great battle on earth because there will be no one left on earth to fight it, including Jesus.** We will meet Jesus in the air. **That last day will be a day of judgment and a day of sentencing, not a day of fighting.** And right after that judgment, there will no longer be any place on earth to fight a great battle. Why? Because the earth itself will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10). There will be no battle and no battlefield. All there will be on the last great day are sheep and goats, and nowhere are we told that those two groups will engage in a battle.

But saying that there will not be a war at the end of all time does not mean there will not be a war. In fact, there is a war, and **we are at war now!**

1 Timothy 6:12 — *Fight the good fight of faith.*

1 Timothy 1:18-19 — *This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience.*

2 Corinthians 10:4 — *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.*

Ephesians 6:11 — *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

The church is at war now. We are fighting the good fight of faith while wearing the whole armor of God. We are not engaged in a physical war with carnal weapons, but rather we are engaged in a spiritual war with spiritual weapons. **And on that last great day, we will lay our weapons down; we won't pick them up.**

So what battle is being described here? This is the same battle of Armageddon that we studied back in Chapter 16. We are just being given a few more details about it here in Chapter 19. For example, back in Chapter 16 we wondered where the church was in this great battle, and we see the answer to that question now in Chapter 19: the church was right where we would expect the church to be — following Christ.

As we said about Chapter 16, God chose the most famous battlefield on earth (Armageddon) on which to depict the complete judgment and utter destruction of Rome. This battle is the warfare between the church and Rome, and that was a **spiritual** battle. How do we know? Because the Christians who overcame Rome were those who remained faithful **unto death**. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). **For a physical battle, death means defeat. Only for a spiritual battle can death mean victory!** Listen as Paul describes what our life on this earth would be like if we had no hope of a resurrection — if we had no hope of a spiritual victory.

1 Corinthians 15:19 — *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

Why? Because we would have been storing up riches in heaven with no hope of ever going there! If this life is all there is, then why not just eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (1 Corinthians 15:32)? We must be seeing a spiritual battle in these verses because that is the only battle that matters.

The sharp sword in verse 15 reminds us of Revelation 2:16 — “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” The same weapon that would be used against faithless compromisers in the church would also be used against the godless Romans.

What is that sword? Verse 15 gives us a big clue: it goeth out of the mouth of Christ. That sword is the word of God. It is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). You mean to say that Jesus will judge people with **words**? Yes.

John 12:48** — He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

Verse 14 tells us that it is with that same word that Christ will smite the nations. You mean to say that Jesus can smite nations with just words? Yes, and Jesus can do much more than that with just words — he can bring into existence from nothing an entire universe! We must never doubt the power of the word of God!

***Hebrews 4:12** — For the word of God is quick, **and powerful**, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

The “rod of iron” in verse 15 reminds us of the great Messianic Psalm 2.

***Psalm 2:9** — Thou shalt break them with a **rod of iron**; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.*

And it also reminds us of Isaiah 11.

***Isaiah 11:4** — He shall smite the earth with **the rod of his mouth**, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.*

The rod of iron is a symbol of strength and of judgment. Yes, Jesus is a Lamb, but Jesus is a Lamb who rules with a rod of iron! And, as verse 15 continues, Jesus is a Lamb who “treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

What an incredible and remarkable phrase! “He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God!” That explains why Jesus’ robe has blood on it (verse 13). Jesus is treading Rome as one would tread grapes, and Rome’s blood flows as wine from the winepress.

We are reminded at once of another judgment against an enemy of God’s people, the judgment of Edom in Isaiah 63.

Isaiah 63:3-4 — I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

And once again, God has trodden the winepress **alone**. Yes, Jesus has armies, but Jesus is the one who is smiting the nations, not the armies arrayed behind him. Jesus is the one who is treading the winepress, not the armies behind him. Jesus does not need an army to defeat Rome!

Revelation 19:16

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

In verse 12, we were told that Jesus had a name that no man knew. In verse 13, we were told that his name is The Word of God. Here in verse 16, we are told that his name is King of kings and Lord of lords. As we said earlier about verse 12, having a name that no man knows means that you have status that no man can share. That is true of Christ. Only Jesus is the word made flesh, and only Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Yes, the Roman emperors thought that their word was final, but they were wrong. And those Roman emperors thought they were King of kings and Lord of lords, but they were wrong. Those descriptions are true only of Jesus.

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. What does that mean? What it means is that Jesus is King of everyone and everything and Lord of everyone and ev-

everything. If Jesus is King of kings, then Jesus is your king. If Jesus is Lord of lords, then Jesus is your lord.

But what if I do not obey him? What if I don't believe in him? It matters not as to whether Jesus is your King and Lord. It matters only as to whether you are his faithful subject. We do not obey the gospel to make Jesus King of our life or Lord of our life. We obey the gospel because Jesus is already King of our life and Lord of our life! When we obey the gospel, Jesus does not change (Hebrews 13:8), but rather we change. We change from being his rebellious subject to instead becoming his faithful and obedient subject. Denominational preachers may tell us we need to make Jesus Lord of our life, but that is not what Peter told us. Peter told us that we must repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38) because Jesus is already Lord of our life (Acts 2:36).

Did Jesus become King of kings and Lord of lords because he defeated Rome in this great battle? No. Jesus was King of kings and Lord of lords before the battle even began. Jesus had all authority when this book started, and Jesus has all authority when this book ends.

*1 Timothy 6:14-16 — That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, **who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;** Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.*

Jesus **is** King of kings and Lord of lords. That was true when Paul wrote to Timothy. That was true when Jesus conquered Rome — and that was true when Jesus conquered us! Jesus **is** King of kings and Lord of lords. Be wary of anyone who would attempt to change the tense of that verb!

Jesus **is** King of kings and Lord of lords. That is something that the first century church needed to hear as they were suffering at the hands of godless Roman kings. And that is something we need to hear today. The church of Christ is the eternal kingdom made without human hands, and our king is the Sovereign King and Lord of the entire universe — the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:17-18

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 18 That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

Here we see a truly vivid, frightening, and beautiful image. An angel standing in the sun (that's the beautiful part!) invites the birds of the air to come and feast on the flesh of all who stand with the army arrayed against God (that's the vivid and frightening part!). This gruesome feast stands in stark contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb that we saw earlier in this chapter.

Does it seem to you as if this angel has any doubts at all as to the outcome of this battle? No, and the message to the church is that it should not have any doubts either. The outcome is certain. In fact, we have already seen the victory celebration earlier in this book.

This same image is also used in the Old Testament to describe past judgments of God against the enemies of his people.

Ezekiel 39:17-20 — And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have

sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God.

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). We see that here — these birds feast on all of God's enemies, be they free or bond, be they small or great. You mean there will be famous people in hell? You mean there will be great political figures in hell? You mean there will be billionaires in hell? On the day of our death, there is only one distinction that matters: are we in Christ or not in Christ. Nothing else will matter, and no other distinction will save us.

Remember that when this book was written the persecution against the church was about to begin again with renewed strength under the emperor Domitian. A central purpose of this book is to assure the first century church that their ultimate victory is certain and that, no matter how it may seem, Rome will not and cannot defeat the church so long as the church remains faithful to Christ. Yes, this image is frightening, but there is no intent here to frighten the church. The intent is to comfort the church and to assure the church of its coming victory.

But what about all of the **neutral** people in Rome? What about all of the **by-standers** who weren't on either side? If we're looking for a modern day lesson from this book of Revelation, here's an important one: **there are no neutral people!** No one is neutral when it comes to Jesus and his church! There is no middle ground. Everyone is either on one side or the other. The choice is Caesar or Christ, and there is no third choice.

Matthew 12:30 — He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

The only two dwelling places we see in this book are the dwelling place of the church (which God shows as already dwelling in heaven) and the dwelling place of Rome (which God describes as dwelling upon the earth). There is no other dwelling place in this book. Either one is in Christ or out of Christ, and those who are out of Christ are living in rebellion to the reign of Christ.

Revelation 19:19-21

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to

make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. 20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Verses 19-21 are describing the same battle between Christ and Rome that we have seen several times before in this book. It is the same battle that has been brewing since the opening chapters. It is the same battle that Daniel talked about in Daniel 2:44 — “it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

This is the same battle we saw back in Chapter 14.

Revelation 14:9-11 — And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

This is the same battle we saw back in Chapter 16.

Revelation 16:12-16 — And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the

water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

These verses are all describing the same event — the triumph of Christ and his church over Rome. And although we do see some additional details here, we do not find here a description of the battle itself. Instead all we see is the outcome of that battle.

One way that commentators get into trouble with Revelation is that they fail to see just how often things are **repeated** in this book. God shows us the church from many different angles in this book, and God does the same with the judgment of Rome. Many see the battle in Chapter 14, the battle in Chapter 16, and the battle in Chapter 19, and they think we must be seeing three different battles. The context and the time frame say otherwise. We are seeing the same battle from three different perspectives. God wants us to see things as He sees things, and so God is giving us different views of those things. It is as if we can walk all around them and look at them from many different angles.

So let's focus now on what verses 19-21 are telling us about this great battle between Christ and Rome.

First, who is arrayed here against “him that sat on the horse, and against his army,” which is Christ and his church? The group arrayed against Christ and his church here is the same cast of characters we have seen many times before. In fact, that we are seeing the same cast of characters is confirmation that we are still looking at the same battle.

So who are those characters arrayed against Christ and his church? First, we see the beast. This is the beast from the sea, which represents the royal side of Rome. This royal beast in verse 19 is standing with the king of the earths and their armies, all gathered together to make war against Christ. These kings are the emperors of Rome, the client kings of Rome, and possibly all of the

other kings who have ever been against God all throughout history. We have already seen how Rome was considered a continuation of Babylon, Persia, and Greece, and so perhaps these kings even include those past kings. **The message is that it does not matter who is on the other side when Christ is on our side!** Do we think that is a message the early church needed to hear? Do we think that is a message that **we** need to hear? “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

Let’s pause for just a moment to think about the image in verse 19. In the first century, nothing could have been more frightening than a Roman army. They were the seemingly unstoppable force that had conquered the known world. Who could stand in their way? Who would have ever thought that the church stood a chance against such a great army? Well, Daniel, for one. Daniel knew the outcome of this battle six centuries before it occurred. In fact, the outcome was so certain that we have already seen the victory celebration earlier in our study of this book! Where does that **great confidence** come from?

***Hebrews 3:14** — For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our **confidence** stedfast unto the end.*

***Ephesians 3:11-12** — According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with **confidence** by the faith of him.*

***2 Corinthians 5:6-7** — Therefore we are always **confident**, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. (For we walk by faith, not by sight.)*

***Acts 28:30-31** — And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all **confidence**, no man forbidding him.*

***1 John 4:17-18** — Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have **boldness** in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.*

***Ephesians 6:10** — Finally, my brethren, be **strong** in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

The people of God are a **confident** people. The people of God are a **bold** people. The people of God are a **strong** people. The people of God are not held back by fear, but rather we charge forward with Christ as our leader. **That is the message of verse 19!** The message is **not** that there will be an atomic war at the end of all time following a great battle in Palestine with the Antichrist. **The message is that the church will be bold, confident, and victorious if they faithfully follow their eternal king!**

In verse 20, the beast is taken. That beast is the the beast from the sea, representing the royal side of Rome. We also see the false prophet taken in verse 20. That false prophet is the beast from the earth, representing the false religious side of Rome. This false prophet represents emperor worship and the worship of all the other false gods of Rome and Greece. Together these two beasts depict Rome as a royal priesthood. But Rome is a **false** royal priesthood, and that false royal priesthood has come up against the **true** royal priesthood, the immovable unshakable eternal kingdom of Christ, who is the perfect King and High Priest. **Who will win in that battle?** It is no contest! The kingdom of Christ “cannot be moved” (Hebrews 12:28). And why is that? “For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). And we see that consuming fire here in verse 20.

These are the same two beasts that we have been studying for several chapters in this book. The focus of Chapter 19 has not changed one bit. We are still in our first century time frame, and we are still looking at the promised triumph of the church over Rome. There is no reason to leap forward to the end of all time, and there is every reason not to do that. This book has not changed its focus, and neither should we.

But wait — hold your four horses! I see a **lake of fire** in verse 20. I see **fire and brimstone** in verse 20. That must be the end of the world, right? Wrong. In fact, the first time we see brimstone in the Bible, it is not describing the end of the world but is instead describing the end of **Sodom and Gomorrah** in Genesis 19:24. We see brimstone again in Isaiah 30:33, again not describing the end of the world, but describing the end of **Assyria**. We see brimstone again in Isaiah 34, again not describing the end of the world, but describing the end of **Edom**.

***Isaiah 34:9-10** — And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone,*

and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

Being tossed into a lake of fire depicts a complete and utter defeat — a defeat from which there is no recovery. Let's keep that in mind as we proceed because we are about to a lot more about this lake of fire.

Will there be fire and brimstone at the end of the world? There will certainly be fire (2 Peter 3:12) and most likely brimstone as well. Must we be looking at the end of the world every time we see a judgment involving fire and brimstone? No. God has described other judgments using that same language, and I think that is exactly what God is doing here as well. But the judgment here is not that of Sodom, or of Assyria, or of Edom, or of the entire world — this judgment is the judgment of Rome. This judgment is the judgment of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, which together represent the royal side of Rome and the false religious side of Rome. That is who we see here in verse 20.

One word in verse 20 is particularly chilling — the beasts are cast **alive** into the lake of fire. Why are they cast in **alive**? What does that part of the figure depict? The key to answering that question is to look at the power of Rome in the first century. The Roman empire reached its greatest geographical extent in AD 117 under Trajan, which was just about forty years after this book was written. **Rome was judged and sentenced while Rome was still very powerful and very much alive.** This book reminds us repeatedly that the events it describes were to come to pass **soon**, and they did. Rome's judgment by God did not happen at the end of Rome's life. Rome's judgment by God happened at the height of Rome's powers. Rome was cast into the lake of fire **alive**.

This description also tells us something else about these judgments — we should not be looking for the **physical** judgment of Rome here. What we are seeing is a **spiritual** judgment, just as we have seen the **spiritual** deliverance of Christians, and not their **physical** deliverance. History confirms this — Rome did not end with Domitian. Should that historical fact concern us? Not at all. We need to stop judging things with our eyes. Why? Because things are not always what they seem. We need to judge things by what we read in God's word. I have reached the age where I have a different pair of eyeglasses for every activity, but the most powerful and important eyeglasses I own are not

made of glass at all — my best eyeglasses are made of paper and ink! Those eyeglasses give me 20-20 spiritual vision!

Sometimes the most momentous events in history from God's perspective don't look like much from the world's perspective. For example, think about the birth of a baby in the backwater town of Bethlehem. Or think about the death of that child on a Roman cross along with two criminals. Or think about the establishment of his eternal kingdom. What did those events look like on earth? Did mighty Rome take any notice of them at all?

But how can we have Rome continue on after its judgment? Is that a problem? Not at all. We see the same thing elsewhere in the Bible. For example, when did **Judaism** end? Didn't Judaism end at the cross when the new covenant came into force at the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16)? And yet to the world it looked as if Judaism continued on. Judaism still had its High Priest, it still had its temple, and it still had its rituals. The church had a different High Priest, a different temple, and different rituals. Then what happened. Jerusalem was judged by God in AD 70 — nearly forty years *after* Judaism ended. In fact, to the world it looks as if Judaism continues to this very day. **But is that how God sees it?** We need to judge things by how God sees them. That is the central message of this book, and we should start with how we see the judgment of Rome.

What happens next? In verse 21, the remnant of those on Rome's side are slain by Christ and the sword coming out his mouth (which is his word), and they become food for the birds, just as was foretold at the beginning of the battle.

So does that mean the church finally had enough, and so it rose up and killed its oppressors? Is that what we see here? No. It is not. Instead, what we see here is yet another reminder of Romans 12:19 — "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The followers of the beast are *not* slain with the **swords** of *those* that sit upon white **horses**, but rather that are "slain with the **sword** of *him* that sat upon the **horse**."

We learn **two important lessons** from that. **First**, Jesus marches with armies to defeat Rome, but Jesus doesn't need armies to defeat Rome. Jesus destroys the armies of the earth by the sword that issues from his mouth, which is his word. And **second**, it is **the word of Christ** that slays Rome, not *our* word. Our power comes from the word of God; our power does not come from our own words.

But is that really all we have here — **just words**? No atomic bombs? No 666 tattoos? No ballistic missiles? We have none of that. All have are just words — **but those words are more powerful than any atomic bomb!** Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the word of God is powerful, but just how powerful is it? Well, here we see the word of God defeating the mightiest army the world had ever seen! The word of God in Daniel 2 has said six centuries earlier that Rome would lose in the conflict and the church would win — is there any power anywhere that could change that outcome? Is there any atomic bomb that could overcome those words from God?

There is nothing on this earth more powerful than the word of God — and we can hold it in our hands! There is no weapon that is more effective against Satan or more feared by Satan than the word of God — and we can carry that weapon around with us twenty-four hours a day! We can carry this weapon into an airport! (At least in **this** country! In some countries it would be easier to carry a gun in than a Bible! They at least recognize the Bible's power!)

If we are fearful or if we are losing the fight, it is **not** because we lack a powerful weapon. Instead, it is because we are not using the powerful weapon that God has given us. If we march out to war and leave the sword of the spirit behind in our tent — whose fault is that? It is not God's fault! We are soldiers for God, and we need to make sure we are properly equipped.

***Ephesians 6:11-17** — Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

Onward Christian soldiers! We are marching as to war! Not with carnal weapons, but with spiritual weapons. And not against flesh and blood, but

against spiritual wickedness in high places. What is that Bible like? How does God see that battle? We just saw the answers to those questions.

Lesson 46

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 is one of the most hotly debated chapters in the Bible, but there is no reason for that. I suspect much of the confusion is caused by commentators who start with Chapter 20 rather than with Chapter 1!

The false doctrine of premillennialism is based entirely on this chapter, and sadly it has permeated much of the denominational world. A premillennialist would deny that premillennialism is based entirely on Chapter 20, but in response I would ask them this question — where else in the Bible would they point to as a source for the thousand year time period that gives premillennialism its name? If Chapter 20 did not exist, would this false doctrine exist? No, it would not. It is based entirely on their false view of one verse in this one chapter.

We looked at some of the teachings of premillennialism during our introductory lessons, and we will not repeat all of that here. But we should pause to consider a very important point — premillennialism is a matter of **doctrine**; it is not a matter of opinion. Premillennialism is **not** something about which we can just agree to disagree and be faithful to God!

The false premillennialist doctrine has consequences that run counter to the very heart of the gospel. Premillennialism **belittles the church** by calling it a temporary measure rather than an eternal kingdom, and premillennialism **belittles the sufficiency of Christ's perfect sacrifice** by arguing that the old law will return and once again be in force. At the heart of premillennialism is the notion that **the church is a mistake** that came about because of a failure by Jesus to accomplish what he intended to do. Can anyone think of another doctrine more perverse than that?

Here are some things we should keep in mind as we begin our study of Chapters 20 and 21. The book of Revelation is focused on **two primary events**, which are really just two sides of the same coin — the judgment of Rome and the victory of the church. Chapter 20 deals primarily with the first of those two events, the judgment of Rome, and Chapter 21 deals primarily with the

second, the victory of the church. We have carefully considered the context and the time frame in our interpretation of the first nineteen chapters. We need to keep doing that now that we have reached the final three chapters!

And what is our goal? Our goal is **not** just to come up with an explanation. That task is much too easy! Instead, our goal is to find an explanation that fits the historical context of the book, that agrees with the time frame of the book, and that would have had a meaning for its original readers that was relevant to their current crisis. In short, our goal is to find the **right** explanation.

Remember that Revelation begins and ends with clear statements that what it talks about would happen **shortly** after it was written. Every commentator on this book faces one of three choices when it comes to those clear statements about the book's time frame: **accept** them, **ignore** them, or **twist** them. Let's **accept** them!

And one more reminder: Similarity of language does **not** mean identity of subject! We are going to see images that could be used to describe the final judgment at the end of time, but those same images have been used elsewhere in the Bible to describe other past judgments by God that are not the final judgment at the end of all time. Judgments in the Bible are generally described using very similar symbols, and so we cannot determine which judgment is being discussed just by looking at those symbols. Instead, we must study the context and time frame of the judgment, as we have been doing. Maybe we will find the end of the world in these final chapters — I'm not saying we will not — but we must not just automatically assume that is what we are seeing. We haven't seen the end of the world so far in the first nineteen chapters, and maybe we won't see it in the final three chapters either.

Revelation 20:1-2

1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

In verse 1 we see an angel from heaven who comes down from heaven with the key of the bottomless pit. We learn something very important from that description — we learn that Satan has now been defeated. How do we know that from this description? We know that because Satan possessed this key to the bottomless pit back in Chapter 9, but now he has lost it.

How has Satan been defeated? Does this defeat refer to Satan's defeat at the cross? Does this defeat refer to Satan's defeat at the end of the world? I don't think this defeat refers to either of those two defeats (but it certainly **good news** that we are having to sort through all of Satan's defeats here!). Once again, let's remember the context and the time frame. The first nineteen chapters of this book have been focused on the conflict between Rome and the church. Satan's plan to destroy the church through Rome has now been completely stopped and totally defeated. I think we will see that that defeat is the defeat being pictured here.

Think for a moment about the **enormity** of that defeat! Satan had the most powerful weapon imaginable (the mighty Roman empire) with which to attack the church in its infancy when the church was seemingly at its weakest and in its most vulnerable position. Remember Revelation 12:4 — “the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.” How could Satan possibly fail with such a weapon aimed at a little child? **And yet Satan failed! Satan failed completely!** How would we expect such a tremendous defeat to be described? I think we are seeing that defeat described right here in Chapter 20. And what does that defeat tell us about Satan's **later** attempts to destroy the church? We will also see that question addressed in this chapter.

Verse 2 pictures that great defeat by showing Satan being bound for a thousand years, presumably with the great chain from verse 1. **What does that picture mean?**

First, should we get out our watches? Should we mark dates on our calendar? No. What we are seeing here are **symbols**, just as we have seen symbols all throughout this book. Numbers are used figuratively, and periods of time depict a state of affairs or a condition. Recall, for example, the period of three and a half years (a broken seven) that we have seen used many times to depict a state of **temporary** persecution.

So what does the thousand years in verse 2 depict? First, what would we **expect** it to depict? What would we expect this book to be telling us right now about Satan? Satan has tried to destroy the church with the most powerful

weapon imaginable, and Satan has failed. Wouldn't we expect to see some **gloating** here? Wouldn't we expect to see a description of just how badly Satan had failed? That is just what we see here in verses 1-3.

We know that the number ten represents completeness, and we know that numbers are sometimes raised to powers to emphasize their meanings. We saw that with the symbolic number 144,000, which is twelve squared times ten cubed. Within that symbol of 144,000, the number one thousand is used to depict **all** of God's people, with no one left out. If the number ten represents completeness, then the number one thousand represents "**complete completeness!**"

This use of the number one thousand is a common symbol even outside of apocalyptic books. Psalm 50:10 tells us that God owns cattle on a thousand hills, which means that God's ownership is **complete**. Deuteronomy 7:9 tells us that God keeps his covenant to a thousand generations, which means that God's faithfulness is **complete**. Does God own the cattle on **hill one thousand and one**? We know that he does. Will God be faithful to **generation one thousand and one**? We know that he will.

***Psalm 105:8** — He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.*

Which is it? Forever or just a thousand generations? Isn't our common sense alone enough to know that when God says a thousand generations in the second half of that verse he means exactly what he said in the first half of that verse, **forever**? "He hath remembered his covenant **for ever**, the word which he commanded to **a thousand generations.**" God's faithfulness is complete!

Satan is bound for a thousand years, which means that Satan's defeat is **complete**.

So I guess that means that Satan was no longer a problem after the first century? Of course it does not mean that! We know it does not mean that! How do we know that? At least three reasons.

First, we know that Satan would remain a problem for the church because the rest of the Bible tells us that Satan would remain a problem for the church.

Second, we know that Satan would remain a problem for the church because verse 3, which we will study in just a moment, tells us that Satan would remain a problem for the church.

Third, we know that Satan would remain a problem for the church because we can with our own eyes see Satan making problems for the church today.

James 4:7 — Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 Peter 5:8 — Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

Did Christians still need to resist Satan after the judgment of Rome? Were people devoured by Satan after the judgment of Rome? Yes, and it is still happening today! Satan is still walking about like a roaring lion, and we still need to heed that warning from scripture. Earlier we talked quite a bit about the whole armor of God. Do we still need that armor today? Must we still equip ourselves with that armor today? Why? Because Satan is still active.

Ephesians 6:11 — Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

And when we select elders, one of the requirements is that they have a good report of them which are without. Why? Because Satan is still active.

1 Timothy 3:7 — Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

If Satan is bound in a pit today and not walking about like a lion, then why is 1 Timothy 3:7 still a requirement for elders? Why are we still wearing the whole armor of God? We know from the rest of the Bible that, whatever these verses in Revelation 20 mean, they do not mean that Satan is not at work in this world today and still trying to destroy the church! Yes, Satan is a loser, but he is a **persistent** loser! He is still active today.

Some people, even some in the church, have erred badly by creating doctrines about Satan based on these figurative descriptions that disagree with plain teachings about Satan found elsewhere in the Bible. Some have argued that the thousand years here is the entire Christian era, and that Satan is bound during the Christian era. To get there you have to make at least **three mistakes** — you have to ignore the context of this book, you have to ignore the time frame of this book, and you have to ignore what the rest of the Bible has to say about Satan and his activities during the Christian era.

But then how can we say that Satan has been **completely** defeated if Satan remains a problem? Satan was completely defeated in what Satan was trying to do with Rome, but that does not mean that Satan won't try something else. **In fact, a central message of this book is that if Satan couldn't defeat the church in its infancy using the mighty Roman empire as a weapon, then Satan will never be able to feat the church.** Yes, Satan will try, but Satan is doomed to failure. Jesus Christ himself built that church, and not even the gates of hell can prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Do we find this defeat of Satan discussed elsewhere in the Bible? Yes. Paul told us that Satan was behind the persecution by the emperor Domitian.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 — Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

And Paul also told us how that would turn out for Satan.

Romans 16:20 — And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

In fact, Paul said in the first century that it would happen **shortly**. That's the same Greek word we saw in the opening verse of this book: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass."

But if Satan was completely defeated, how can Satan remain a problem. **Question:** Was Satan completely defeated at the cross? Did Satan remain a problem after the cross? Yes and yes.

Hebrews 2:14-15 — Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Satan was completely defeated in what he was trying to do. Satan tried to derail Jesus from his mission to bless the entire world and establish his promised eternal kingdom, but Satan completely failed. Later, Satan tried to obliterate that eternal kingdom using the most powerful empire the world had ever seen, and once again Satan completely failed.

But how do we know for sure that the focus here is on Satan's use of Rome rather than just on Satan in general? We know that because of how Satan was described back in Revelation 12:3. Satan was described as "a great red dragon, **having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.**" That was the first appearance of the dragon in this book — and when he appeared he was clothed in Rome and in the Roman emperors! He had Rome's seven heads, Rome's ten horns, and Rome's seven crowns. **We cannot separate Satan from Rome in that description.**

Yes, Satan will try again. He will use a new weapon, and he will try a different approach. But do we really think he will fare any better? **He will not**, and that is message of the next verse, verse 3.

Revelation 20:3

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

There are a lot of very complicated theories about verse 3. Commentators in and out of the church have spun off in many different directions when it comes to this verse. How can we wade through all of that? First, let's keep our time frame and context front and center — neither has changed. We are still looking at the conflict between Rome and the church in the first century. But second, let's look first for the simplest explanation. If we can find a simple explanation that fits all of the facts and that remains faithful to the context and the time frame, then why do we need to look for a more complicated explanation?

So is there a simple explanation that fits all of the facts? Yes. What we see in this figure is Satan cast into a pit for a thousand years so that he cannot deceive the nations any more, but then he is let loose for "a little season." We have already talked about the first half of that image. Satan being cast into a pit for a thousand years depicts Satan's complete defeat as to Rome and as to Satan's plans to destroy the church using Rome as a weapon.

If we had any doubts about that, they should go away with verse 3. Why? Because verse 3 specifies what Satan had been doing before he was defeated — he had been deceiving the nations. Where have we seen that before?

Revelation 12:9 — *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, **which deceiveth the whole world:** he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

Revelation 13:11,14 — *And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. ... **And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth** by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.*

Revelation 18:23 — *And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; **for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.***

Revelation 19:20 — *And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, **with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast,** and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

What those verses are telling us is that Satan was the great deceiver, and Satan used Rome to deceive the whole world. And that is not something we see only in the book of Revelation.

2 John 1:7 — *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. **This is a deceiver** and an antichrist.*

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by **any means:** for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be re-*

vealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Satan tried to deceive the whole world with Rome, and Satan failed. Satan tried to deceive the church into worshipping Caesar rather than Christ, and Satan failed. Yes, Satan failed at the cross, but that is not the failure we are looking at here. This failure is Satan's failure to deceive the world with Rome.

That's the simplest and I think best explanation for the first half of verse 3, but what about the end of verse 3? What does it mean that after the thousand years, Satan "must be loosed a little season"?

Here is the simplest and I think best explanation of that part of verse 3: Yes, Satan tried and failed to defeat the church using Rome, but Satan will try again. Satan did not give up his attacks against the church after he failed to destroy the church using Rome. Yes, that was a complete defeat for Satan as to that weapon, but Satan will try again using a different weapon.

But here is the wonderful message — if Satan could not destroy the church when the church was the most vulnerable and when Satan had the greatest empire the world had ever seen to use as a weapon against the church, **does anyone really think Satan will fare any better with some other weapon?** If I can't kill an ant with a bazooka, then do I really think the problem is that I just need a bigger weapon? Perhaps, instead, the problem is that what I see as an ant is, in reality, much, much stronger than it appears and has very powerful friends! Perhaps things are not what they seem! That is the position Satan is in with regard to his attacks against the church, and that is the message these verses are intended to convey.

So what then does the "little season" in verse 3 denote? Just as the thousand years referred to a state of affairs rather than to a specific period of time, so does this "little season" refer to a state of affairs rather than to a period of time. But to what state of affairs does it refer? If the thousand years refers to Satan's complete defeat after his attack on the church using Rome, then the "little season" refers to Satan's subsequent attacks against the church using other weapons.

Why are Satan's subsequent attacks called a "little season"? To denote their **futility**. They are doomed to failure, just as Satan's attack using Rome was a failure. The "little season" refers to Satan's inability to defeat the Church now

or ever. Satan did the worst he could do through Rome, and he failed completely. Although Satan will gather his strength and try again, his future attacks will be **insignificant** compared to what he did and tried to do through Rome. That is why they are shown as lasting only a little season.

By saying Satan will return for only a little season, God is saying that Satan's future attacks are nothing to be anxious about. Satan had at his disposal an evil, blood thirsty empire that ruled the world, and yet Satan was not able to defeat the church in its infancy with such a weapon. Why should the church fear future attacks?

Although Satan had been defeated with regard to Rome, the church must have wondered if Satan might not attack again later and perhaps be more successful next time. God assures them in this chapter that, although Satan will attack again, Satan will never be able to defeat the church. God will continue to protect the church in the future just as God protected the church from Rome.

That was something the suffering first century church really needed to hear, and it is something we really need to hear today as well! It is easy to become discouraged these days, but the book of Revelation should give us courage just as it did to its first century audience.

Yes, Satan is real. Yes, Satan is active. Yes, Satan has us in his sights. Yes, Satan is once again trying to deceive us. But the eternal, unshakable, immovable kingdom of God is more powerful than Satan! "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)?

Is our modern age somewhere in this book of Revelation? Yes! We are living right there in the "little season" — not as in a period of time, but rather as in a state of affairs. That promise that Satan will not defeat the eternal kingdom of Christ is just as much a promise for us as it was for those first century Christians. And we are not ignoring our time frame in saying that because verse 3 contains a promise that was made in the first century but that applies to future generations of Christians. There is no expiration date when it comes to God's love for his church and to God's promises of victory for his church.

Revelation 20:4

**4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them,
and judgment was given unto them: and I saw**

the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Verse 4 is considered a very controversial and difficult verse, but is it really that hard to understand? Yes, if we took our scissors and sliced that verse out of its context and its time frame, then maybe we would have some trouble understanding it. But when we read verse 4 in light of the previous chapters and verses in this book, is it really all that hard to understand?

If Satan was completely defeated with regard to Rome (as we saw with the thousand year binding of Satan), then what would we expect to be on the other side of that coin? Wouldn't we expect a word or two about the complete victory of Christ and his church with regard to Rome? And if the complete defeat is described as a thousand year binding, then might not the complete victory also be described using a thousand years — perhaps as a thousand year reign of the church with Christ?

People miss so much when they get to verses 3 and 4 and whip out their calendars to start counting off a literal one thousand years. Oh, but we must take it all literally! Really? Is the key in verse 1 literal? Is the bottomless pit in verse 1 literal? Is the great chain in verse 1 literal? Is the dragon in verse 2 literal? Is the seal in verse 3 literal? Those who argue that one thousand is literal are not being consistent.

Again, the simplest answer is the best answer. Verse 4 is just describing the other side of the coin from verse 3. In verse 3, we see the complete defeat of Satan and Rome. In verse 4, we see the complete victory of Christ and his church. In each verse, the notion of completeness is depicted using a very common symbol for completeness — the number one thousand. That God is faithful to a thousand generations and God owns the cattle on a thousand hills means that God's faithfulness is complete and God's ownership is complete.

Oh, but some will say that verse 4 must be describing the end of the world. Really? Aren't we still operating under the time frame given to us in the very first verse of the book? In fact, we will see that time frame again in the closing

verses of the book. And who is that beast mentioned there in verse 4? Isn't that Rome? Haven't we seen that image for Rome used all throughout these chapters? And don't we see the martyrs beheaded by Rome? In fact, tradition tells us that the apostle Paul was beheaded by Rome.

Verse 4 is a first century verse! And isn't that exactly what we would expect? This entire book has been building toward the climax in these final three chapters. Do we really expect God to suddenly change the subject now that we have reached the grand finale?

Who are sitting on the thrones in verse 4? We have four clues: First, they are sitting on thrones. Second, judgment was given to them. Third, they **include** the martyrs who were slain because they refused to worship the beast. Fourth, they live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

A note on that third point is that a careful reading of verse 4 says that the group on the thrones includes those who were beheaded by Rome. We do not have to conclude that the group on the thrones consists only of those beheaded by Rome. I think the best way to see those on the thrones is to see them as those who were beheaded by Rome and those who were ready to be beheaded by Rome — those faithful Christians who had died for Christ and also those faithful Christians who were willing to die for Christ. And, of course, when you put those two groups together you have the church.

This group must be the church! Remember Christ's earlier statements to the church in Chapter 3.

***Revelation 3:11** — Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

The church is a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We reign in life by Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17). Rome was a false royal priesthood. The church is the true royal priesthood.

This was also something we studied in Daniel. We spent a great deal of time discussing Daniel 7 and its relation to Revelation 17.

***Daniel 7:20-21** — And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.*

As we saw, that eleventh horn in Daniel 7:20 was the eleventh emperor of Rome, Domitian. What does the very next verse in Daniel 7 say?

Daniel 7:22 — *Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.*

Yes, Domitian would persecute the church and would prevail against them, but Domitian would not have a permanent victory. The permanent victory would belong to the church, and it is that permanent victory over Rome that we are seeing here in the closing chapters of Revelation. Daniel tells us that when Rome was judged, judgment would be given to the church and the church would possess the kingdom. Revelation 20:4 describes judgment being given to the church, and the church sitting on thrones and reigning with Christ. Daniel 7:22 and Revelation 20:4 are describing the same thing, and each gives us the same first century time frame.

What does it mean that the church is given judgment? What does it mean that the church is sitting on thrones and reigning with Christ? It means simply that the church is sharing the victory with Christ. It means that the judgment of Rome was prompted by the prayers of the saints and particularly of the same martyrs we see here in verse 4.

Revelation 6:9-10 — *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

That prayer has now been answered. The church has been given the victory over Rome. Yes, the church had given up much in this life for Christ, some had even given up their lives for Christ. What would they have in return? They would be sit on thrones and would be given judgment. This is much like what the apostles were promised.

Matthew 19:27-28 — *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have*

followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Although that promise is not the same as the one we see here in verse 4, the reason for the promise is the same. In each, Jesus is talking to those who had given up much, and he is assuring them that they will gain much more than they gave up. And isn't that something the early church needed to hear in Revelation 20 just as much as Peter needed to hear it in Matthew 19?

In verse 4 we see Christians who had been beheaded by Rome. As we said, tradition tells us that that group includes the Apostle Paul. Had these Christians beheaded by Rome been defeated by Rome? Hardly! Does verse 4 look like a defeat to anyone? Revelation rings throughout with the message that death is not a defeat for a Christian. Defeat would have occurred had a Christian renounced Jesus in order to live.

Matthew 16:25 — For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

The only Christians defeated by Rome were those Christians who compromised with Rome and fell away from grace as a result of the compromise.

So, yes the martyrs were victorious. They were not defeated. How does verse 4 describe the victory of these martyrs? "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." That's how! They experience a **complete** victory over Rome. The ESV is more clear: "They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." These martyrs are like the two witnesses we saw back in Chapter 11. They appeared to have been killed and defeated by Rome, but they came back to life. All was not as it seemed!

Is this resurrection of the martyrs in verse 4 a **literal** resurrection or a **figurative** resurrection? Everything we have seen so far has been focused on the spiritual rather than the physical. We have seen the spiritual judgment of Rome rather than the physical judgment of Rome, and we have seen the spiritual deliverance of the church rather than the physical deliverance of the church. I don't think this verse is any different. Yes, the martyrs died a physical death at the hands of Rome, but they awoke to spiritual life with Christ for all eternity!

And how anyone can take the thousand years as a literal thousand years is beyond me! Is that the message we think the church needed to hear? "Yes, you

will reign with me for a thousand years, but starting with year one thousand and one you will need to make other living arrangements! Yes, you are victorious, but you do need to keep an eye on that calendar over there because I have rented out your throne to someone else starting with year one thousand and one!” How ridiculous is that! It is just as ridiculous as saying that the cattle on hill number one thousand and one don't belong to God! What the church needed to hear is that their victory over Rome was **complete and forever**, and that is what verse 4 tells them.

Lesson 47

Last week we looked at the first four verses of Chapter 20, which are controversial and much disputed, although, as we said last week, they need not be. When viewed in their proper time frame and their proper context, and when their symbols are properly understood, those verses mean just what we would expect them to mean — Satan loses, and Jesus wins! The kingdom of Satan loses, and the kingdom of Christ wins!

Oh, but some will say, verse 4 is telling us all about the thousand year reign of Christ on earth! Really? Where in verse 4 is the phrase “reign of Christ”? Where in verse 4 is the phrase “on earth”? All we see in verse 4 is that the martyrs will reign *with* Christ a thousand years. Nowhere does verse 4 describe a thousand reign of Christ, as if Christ were not reigning before or after those thousand years. And nowhere in verse 4 do we see a thousand year reign on earth.

And where did anyone ever get the idea that Jesus will return to stand again on this earth? There is no indication in the Bible that such will ever happen, and every indication that it will not happen.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 — *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Acts 1:11 — *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Yes, it is true that Romans 14:10 says that we shall all “stand before the judgment seat of Christ,” and some argue that means Jesus will return to the earth to sit on a judgment seat, but this “judgment seat” could also be a description of “the Lord in the air” as Paul describes. I don’t think Jesus is ever setting foot on this earth again, but even if Jesus did return to occupy a judgment seat on the earth, he would not stay very long. How do we know that? Because of what Peter tells us.

2 Peter 3:10 — *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

The earth will be destroyed on the day of the Lord, and so there will be no earth on which Christ could reign for any time more than a single day, much less a thousand years.

And as for the so-called “millennial reign of Christ,” isn’t it strange that such an important event (in their own mind) is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible? Barnes explains the situation well in his commentary on Revelation:

It is admitted, on all hands, that this doctrine [of premillennialism], if contained in the Scriptures at all, is found in this one passage only. It is not pretended that there is, in any other place, a direct affirmation that this will literally occur, nor would the advocates for that opinion undertake to show that it is fairly implied in any other part of the Bible. But it is strange, not to say improbable, that the doctrine of the literal resurrection of, the righteous, a thousand years before the wicked, should be announced in one passage only.

If premillennialism were true, then wouldn’t we have expected Paul to say something about it somewhere in his many letters? Instead, what Paul tells us is very different from premillennialism.

Premillennialists have built a very elaborate edifice of false doctrines on a single verse from Chapter 20. Their twisting of God’s word shows the danger of ignoring the time frame and the context of this book. We could say much against premillennialism, but two points are sufficient for our purposes: first, premillennialism is **false**, and second, premillennialism is **dangerous**. Premillennialism belittles the plan of God and the work of Christ, and premillennialism creates a difference between Jew and Greek that leads people astray. We can’t just agree to disagree when it comes to premillennialism. It is a matter of doctrine.

Revelation 20:5-6

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Verses 5-6 can be confusing, but they need not be so. Yes, if we don't notice the symbols that are being used here, these verses can be confusing. But if we pay attention to those symbols, and if we study these verses in light of the verses that came before, then everything will fall into place. The first sentence in verse 5 is a prime example of that.

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” Do we need to get out our calendars to understand that verse? Do we need to count off a thousand years, or perhaps count off some other amount of time, such as the entire Christian era? No. This is the fourth time in five verses that we have seen this thousand years, and in each of the previous occasions we have seen that it refers **not to a period of time but to a state of affairs**. The binding of Satan for a thousand years depicts the **complete defeat** of Satan as to Rome. The reign of the martyrs with Christ for a thousand years depicts the **complete victory** of the church as to Rome.

The focus here is still on Rome. How do we know that? Look at the previous verse again. Who do we see in verse 4? We see the beast. That beast is Rome. Everything we have seen about that beast is pointing to Rome. This beast has seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 17:3) representing the emperors of Rome — the same symbols that we saw back in Daniel 7 describing the fourth kingdom that followed Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. What was that fourth kingdom? Rome. The focus here is still on Rome. If we are tempted to leap to the end of the world, then we need to explain why the focus here is on this first century Roman beast.

Who are “the rest of the dead” in verse 5? At the end of the verse 4, some of the dead came back to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Those

dead were the martyrs who had been beheaded by Rome (the beast) for the witness of Jesus. They were those who had followed Jesus' command to remain faithful unto death. So who then are "the rest of the dead"? Well, if the dead in verse 4 are those who died in service to Christ, then the rest of the dead in verse 5 must be those who died in service to Rome. Who else could they be? This is the same group we saw back in Revelation 19:21 who were killed with the sword of the rider on the white horse and who had birds feasting on their flesh.

What then does it mean that those who died in service to Rome would not live again until the thousand years were finished? Well, what does "the thousand years" in verse 5 refer to? Again, we need to look in verse 4. The thousand years at the beginning of verse 5 is the thousand years at the end of verse 4 — which means that the thousand years in verse 5 denotes the complete victory of God's people over Rome. Verse 5 is telling us that those who died in service to Rome will have no share in the victory of God's people. They will not share in that victory. They will not experience that victory. They have no part in the complete victory of the saints, and isn't that exactly what we would expect to see?

Verse 5 ends with another seemingly difficult sentence: "This is the first resurrection." What does that mean? I think the key to understanding that sentence is to see the previous sentence as a parenthetical explanation — "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." What is the support for putting parentheses around that sentence? The support is the end of verse 6, which once again mentions the thousand year reign with Christ. We saw that in verse 4, and we see that in verse 6. What we see at the beginning of verse 5 is something that is apart from that reign with Christ, as indicated by the word "but" that opens the verse.

If the first sentence in verse 5 is parenthetical, then the meaning of the second sentence in verse 5 is immediate. The first resurrection is the resurrection of the martyrs when they come back to life to enjoy their victorious reign with Christ over Rome.

Verse 6 confirms that understanding with the fifth of the seventh beatitudes in this book: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." That blessing confirms that the first resurrection is for those who died in service to Christ and who enjoy the victory of Christ over Rome. Unlike Rome, this group is the true royal priesthood as verse 6 tells us: "they shall be **priests** of God and of Christ, and

shall **reign** with him a thousand years.” This group is the church, the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

What is the “second death” in verse 6, and if there is a **first resurrection** and a **second death**, then is there also a **second resurrection** and a **first death**?

Let’s start with the first of those questions — what is the “second death” in verse 6? Whatever it is, verse 6 tells us that it will have no power over those who take part in the first resurrection. If it is the church experiencing that first resurrection, then verse 6 is telling us that this second death will have no power over the church. Now that sounds familiar.

Matthew 16:18 — *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

In this world, Rome had the power of life and death. At the Roman games, the emperor could with a single thumb up or thumb down signal grant life to a contestant or sentence that contestant to death. Rome could and was sentencing Christians to death because of their allegiance to Christ. But Rome’s power over life and death was in this world only. Satan is the prince of this world (John 16:11); he is **not** the prince of the next world.

Do you mean to say that there is a death that has no power over the church, a death that awaits those who in this world were opposed to the church? Yes, eternal death in hell apart from God. That is the second death of verse 6. Yes, Rome could hand out the first death to Christians, but not the second death. Rome’s death dealing days were done!

But if the second death is eternal death in hell, then haven’t we jumped to the end of the world? Not necessarily. It is possible that all we have done is jumped to the end of the lives of those persecuting first century Romans. Yes, there is a great day coming in which we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, **but our fate is sealed and known to us at the moment of our death**. When we open our eyes in that next world, we will know our eternal fate. We may not know why the reason yet (Matthew 7:22) and we may not know the sentence yet (Luke 12:48), but we will know our eternal fate (Luke 16:23).

Nero and Domitian are not sitting around somewhere anxiously wondering where they will spend eternity! They have known the answer to that question for two thousand years! Remember what Jude 7 says about the people of Sodom and Gomorrah: they are “suffering [**not will suffer**] the vengeance of eternal fire.” And on that last day the wicked will be given the opportunity to

do something they never did in this life — bend the knee to Jesus Christ and confess that he is Lord of all. Nero and Domitian will one day be on their knees before the Lord Jesus Christ, as will we all. We will read more about the second death when we get to verse 14.

Now back to our other question: if there is a **first resurrection** and a **second death**, then is there also a **second resurrection** and a **first death**? Yes and yes. The first death affected both those who were on the side of Christ and those who were on the side of the beast. Both the Romans and the Christians died. But one of those two groups would never die again! The martyrs who came to life would not face the second death. The second death would affect only those who served the beast.

And the **second resurrection**? The second resurrection is the one mentioned at the beginning of verse 5. Those in the second resurrection are those who “lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” We will learn more about that group in verse 13.

But if the beginning of verse 5 is describing the **second** resurrection, then why does the end of verse 5 say that this is the **first** resurrection? Again, I think the only way to see the first part of verse 5 is to see it in parentheses. The first resurrection at the end of verse 5 is pointing back to the resurrection at the end of verse 4 — “they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Reading it any other way causes the “rest of the dead” in verse 5 to experience the blessing of verse 6, and we know that blessing is reserved for those on the thrones in verse 4.

Those who experience the first resurrection will not experience the second death. Instead, they will be priests and will reign with Christ for a thousand years. Was this something new for them? What this a status that these Christians had not previously enjoyed? Not at all! The church is a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)! Revelation 1:5-6 tells us that we became part of a kingdom of priests when we were freed from our sins by the blood of Christ. These verses in Chapter 20 are simply a public reaffirmation of a status that the martyrs enjoyed even before their death. They reigned with Christ in life, as do we! They were royal priests in life, as are we! This reign with Christ is not something that starts on day one of year one and ends on day 365 of year one thousand. This reign with Christ is something the church has enjoyed from Acts 2 and will continue to enjoy for all eternity. We are the **eternal** kingdom of Christ, not the **thousand year** kingdom of Christ!

Revelation 20:7-10

7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, **8** And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. **9** And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. **10** And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Just when we think we are starting to get a handle on things, in walk Gog and Magog! Let's start by recalling what we read about Satan just a few verses earlier:

Revelation 20:2-3 — And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

Verse 7 is picking up where verses 2-3 left off. Verses 7 and following are explaining what happens when Satan is loosed a little season.

First, why is Satan not loosed a little season until after the thousand years are ended? Simple — so that Satan will not detract from the picture of complete victory symbolized by the thousand years. God is in effect saying to the church,

“Yes, Satan will try again, and you will need to be ready for that, but for right now just enjoy your victory and celebrate your reign with Christ!”

The “little season” in verse 3 during which Satan is loosed stands in sharp contrast with the thousand year reign with Christ. As we have seen, both periods of time are used to symbolize a state of affairs — the church’s victory over Rome is total and complete, and Satan’s defeat with regard to Rome is total and complete. But the contrast between a thousand years and a little season give us another symbol — unlike the church’s victories, Satan’s **victories** will be neither total nor complete. Satan has **not** been loosed for a thousand years! Satan has been loosed for only a little season. Yes, Satan will try again, but if Satan could not defeat the church with Rome, then Satan will never be able to defeat the church.

And what is this great weapon that the church has that can defeat Satan? What great weapon of the church was able to defeat the mighty Roman empire? Was it some new type of sword? Did the church invent a new kind of catapult? No. We don’t wield carnal weapons.

1 John 5:4 — This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

We overcome this world by our faithfulness to Christ. We defeat Satan when we say no to Satan’s temptations and instead say yes to Christ. We defeat Satan when we stand firm and strong in the faith in the face of Satan’s fiery darts.

Ephesians 6:16 — Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

That is how the church defeated Satan in the first century, and that is how the church defeats Satan in the twenty-first century.

What causes Satan to be loosed out of his prison in verse 7? If he was locked up, how did he get out? We aren’t told, but I like what Hailey has to say on that issue:

In the spirit of faithfulness [the early Christians] bound Satan by overcoming him. When such a spirit and loyal devotion to the principles and cause of Christ no longer distinguish God’s people, the restraining power is gone; Satan is loosed once more.

Remember that we are seeing symbols in these verses. Satan was not literally locked up somewhere. This binding was a symbol for Satan’s defeat with Rome,

but Rome was not the final nation of this world. There have been many others after Rome, and Satan has used many of them in his fight against the church. Rome was not the last kingdom that was used by Satan to deceive the world.

Well what other nation has Satan used to deceive the world and attack the church? Can we think of an example? We don't have to come up with our own example. Verse 8 gives us an example: Gog and Magog. **But who or what are Gog and Magog?** As Lenski explains, "Gog is the prince and leader, Magog his land and his people." We first meet Gog of the land of Magog in the book of Ezekiel.

***Ezekiel 38:2-3** — Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.*

Later in that same chapter, God says this about Gog:

***Ezekiel 38:17** — Thus saith the Lord God; Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?*

But where is any such prophecy found in the Bible? A quick word search turns up a son of Japheth named Magog, and a son of Shemaiah named Gog — but they are not mentioned again, and there is no prophecy about them. One verse in Genesis seems to have been the source for three names we see here in Ezekiel 38: Magog, Meshech, and Tubal.

***Genesis 10:1-2** — Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and **Magog**, and Madai, and Javan, and **Tubal**, and **Meshech**, and Tiras.*

But the first time we meet Gog of Magog is right here in Ezekiel 38. How can there be an earlier prophecy about them? **Our answer to that question will also answer our questions about Revelation 20.**

So what is the answer? If Gog of Magog is never mentioned in the Bible prior to Ezekiel 38, then how can it be true that he was spoken about in old time by the prophets (plural!) of Israel? Not only are we told that one prophet spoke

about Gog of Magog, but multiple prophets spoke about him. What is the answer?

The solution is to recognize that there is no literal Gog of Magog. There is no literal king named Gog, and there is no literal kingdom named Magog. There is no earlier prophecy that mentions Gog by name, but there are many earlier prophecies that foretell of heathen enemies of God's people that would be defeated by God. Daniel 2 speaking of Rome is one such prophecy, but there are many others. Gog of Magog figuratively depicts whoever happens to be the current enemy of God's people. That is exactly how Gog of Magog was used in Ezekiel 38, and that is how he is used in Revelation 20.

How do we know that for sure? We know that for sure by looking at the context of Ezekiel 38 where Gog of Magog was first introduced.

The setting in Ezekiel was that the Jews had been promised a restored kingdom, and they had responded, "So what?" First there had been Egyptian slavery, and then the Philistines had attacked, and then the Assyrians, and now the Babylonians. Who was next? What guarantee did the Jews have that the same thing wouldn't happen to this newly restored kingdom that Ezekiel was telling them about?

We are looking at Ezekiel 38. Do you remember what happened in Ezekiel 37? That's where we see the great resurrection in the valley of dry bones. So you mean we have a resurrection in Ezekiel 37, and then we see Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38? Didn't we just see a resurrection earlier in Revelation 20, and now we are seeing Gog of Magog? Yes, Revelation 20 is a parallel to Ezekiel 37-38. The time was different and the current enemy was different, but the concern of God's people was the same — **yes, we overcame this enemy, but what about the next one?** Was there any hope? Or were the people correct when they said, "our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezekiel 37:11)?

To convince the Jews that under the Messiah their glory would be secure, Ezekiel used a symbolic battle with the fictitious Gog of the land of Magog to show that they would be able to defeat **any** enemy with the Messiah on their side. The earlier prophecies about Gog of Magog are all of the earlier prophecies about all the previous enemies of God's people.

Instead of saying to the Jews that God defeated the Egyptians, God defeated the Philistines, God defeated the Assyrians, God defeated the Babylonians, and on and on and on, God just wraps all of those enemies up into a single package

and calls that package Gog of Magog. There, as here in Revelation 20, Gog of Magog just means “anybody but nobody in particular.” **No matter who it is who attacks the church, that enemy will fare no better than Rome.** That’s the message of verses 7-10, and that was certainly a message the church needed to hear!

In Revelation 20, God’s people have just been vindicated from a terrible oppressor. But then a huge army gathers from all over the world to make war against them. Is there any hope? Yes. God defeats this huge army without his people having even to lift a finger. What God is saying to them is this: “I have already defended and vindicated you in this present crisis and I will do so again anytime and anywhere no matter who or what rises against you.”

And once again that is a beautiful message for us today! I fear that the church today has developed a severe inferiority complex. If at any time the church could have felt inferior and powerless, it was during the Roman persecution — and yet the church then as now was anything but inferior or powerless. Rome was not the eternal kingdom! That description belongs only to the church! Later in Chapter 21 we will find out exactly how God views the church, and he does **not** view it as inferior in any way! If we see ourselves as inferior, is it any wonder if we find ourselves ineffective? The first step to being the kind of church that God wants us to be is to see ourselves as God sees us, and there is no better place to determine how God sees the church than right here in the closing chapters of Revelation. I fear that the church’s neglect and misunderstanding of this great book may have hindered the mission of the church.

And who is Gog today? Where is Magog today? What is our great enemy today? Whatever it is, God will deliver us from that great enemy if we remain faithful to God and refuse to compromise with Gog.

Yes, Gog’s army is huge. In Ezekiel 39:12, we see that Gog’s army was so large it took 7 months to bury them all! In Revelation 20:8, we are told that “the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” The message here is that no matter how big and powerful the enemy, God will defeat them — but we must do our part. Remember Revelation 12:11 — “and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” We must do our part.

We also see in these verses a change of tactics by Satan after his defeat in using Rome. Satan is many things, but he is no dummy. Satan is good at what he does, which is why we have so many warnings in the Bible about him — one of

which cautions us not be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). What we see here is that those devices can change. Rather than relying on a single great power as Satan did with Rome, verse 8 tells us that in the next round Satan would gather his allies from the four corners of the earth. Yes, Rome almost ruled the whole world, but maybe that word "almost" was the problem. Perhaps Satan just needs a more powerful army. Perhaps Satan just needs more allies.

Satan still seems to be taking this same approach today. Just think about all of Satan's allies. He has Hollywood and the vast entertainment industry firmly in his camp. He has powerful false non-Christian religions in his camp, several of which have taken over entire countries and made evangelism illegal. He has powerful so-called Christian religions in his camp, sewing confusion and deceiving many. If Satan's problem in the first century was that he put all of his eggs into one basket, then he seems to have resolved not to make that mistake again. We see that in verse 8, and I think we see that around us in the world today.

But here is the question — will Satan's new strategy work any better than his old strategy? Satan was not able to defeat the church with a laser focused approach — will Satan be able to defeat the church with a shotgun approach? Will the church survive when Satan throws a kitchen sink at us? In a word, yes! That is the message of these verses! Satan may change his strategy, but the church must never change its strategy. The church's strategy must stay the same, and if it does, then we are guaranteed the victory.

And what is that strategy? We just read it a moment ago. Revelation 12:11 — "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Our strategy is three fold: the blood of Christ, the word of Christ, and faithfulness unto death. Satan will never be able to defeat that strategy! But if we look away from Christ and the blood of Christ, then Satan will defeat us. If we fail to follow the word of Christ, then Satan will defeat us. If we fail to remain faithful unto death, then Satan will defeat us. We must do **all** that the first century church did: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

Lesson 48

Last week we read verses 7-10, and we discussed the mysterious Gog of Magog. We looked back to Ezekiel 38 where he first appeared in the Bible, and what we discovered was that Gog of Magog figuratively represents any enemy of God's people but no enemy in particular. The people in Ezekiel's day, as the people in John's day, were wondering whether some future enemy might prevail against them. God's promise in each case was the same — God would protect and sustain his faithful people no matter who is opposed to them. That promise is shown in verses 7-10 by the symbol of a great army gathered by Satan against God's people.

In verse 9, this great army of Satan surrounds the beloved city. What is this city? There can be only one answer to that question — this beloved city is the church! The only other city we have seen in this book is Rome, and Rome is no more. This beloved city is the new Jerusalem that we will see later in this book. This city is the church, and Satan has it surrounded from all sides. Again, don't we see some similarities here with our own situation today?

The "camp of the saints" in verse 9 is an interesting phrase. The word "camp" in Greek is a military term that is used six times in Acts to describe the barracks or headquarters of Roman soldiers. It is used twice in Hebrews to describe the camp of Israel. The "camp of the saints" in verse 9 is the barracks of God's faithful army. It is also describing the church. You mean verse 9 contains two different symbols describing the same thing? Yes, and does that surprise us? God has shown us the church from many different perspectives in this book, including the two in this one verse. A big problem with the early church was that they were not seeing the church for what it is — the dwelling place of God and the body of his Son! **I think the one central purpose of this book was to show God's people what the church is really like!** And the most beautiful descriptions are yet to come!

So how does this all turn out? Are we about to read all about the fierce battle? Not really. It all comes to a very quick and certain end. Fire comes down from heaven and destroys the army of Satan, and then Satan himself is cast into a lake of fire and brimstone — suffering the same fate as the beast and the false prophet verse 10 tells us.

Is this the end of the world? **Possibly, but not necessarily.** What do I mean by that answer?

First, we should note that this description is full of symbols. The thousand years in verse 7 is a symbol. The prison in verse 7 is a symbol. Gog and Magog in verse 8 are symbols. The camp of the saints in verse 9 is a symbol. The beloved city in verse 9 is a symbol. The lake of fire in verse 10 is a symbol. And, importantly, the beast and the false prophet in verse 10 are symbols. The beast is not a person, and the false prophet is not a person. They are both symbols for Rome, with the beast representing the **royal** side of Rome, and the false prophet representing the **religious** side of Rome. Together they depict Rome as a false royal priesthood.

So back to our earlier question and answer: Is this the end of the world? **Possibly, but not necessarily.**

Why is this **possibly** the end of the world? Wouldn't that violate our time frame? No, it would not. The focus here is still on the defeat of first century Rome by the first century church. That defeat was a **spiritual** defeat, as evidenced by the historical fact that Rome was physically very much alive and kicking at the end of the first century. What we are seeing in verses 7-10 is **another spiritual defeat** — the spiritual defeat of any other force on earth that would ever set itself against the Lord's church. They will suffer the same fate as Rome did, and Satan will fare no better with them than he did with Rome.

And here is the key question: **what does it mean to suffer a spiritual defeat?** What it means is that you are lost eternally. If a spiritual **victory** means you are **saved** eternally after remaining faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), then a spiritual **defeat** must mean that you are **lost** eternally. And that is what we are seeing here — the **spiritual defeat** of any and all who are opposed to God, the devil included. So, yes, this could be the end of the world here, and that would not violate our time frame. What we are seeing here is a promise to the first century church who must have been worried about the next great enemy, whoever that turned out to be. And, of course, we today can also take comfort in that promise. God still loves and cares for his church today two thousand years after this book was written.

But why is this **not necessarily** the end of the world? How could this language be anything else? Anytime we find ourselves asking that question, warning bells should sound! We have seen language of judgment used all throughout this book and all throughout the Bible that is not describing the end of the

world. Yes, the last great day will be a day of judgment, but that is not the only judgment described in the Bible. The judgment of Jerusalem described in Matthew 24 up through verse 34 comes to mind, as do the Old Testament judgments of Babylon, Egypt, Edom, and Tyre.

If this language is not describing the end of the world, then what is it describing? That's simple — it is describing the complete and utter defeat of Satan as to Rome and as to any other force Satan has used or will ever use against the church. **There is no weapon that can ever defeat the blood of Christ, the word of Christ, and a faithful life (Revelation 12:11)!** The kingdom of Christ can never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:14). We have a kingdom that cannot be moved (Hebrews 12:28). Why? **Because our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).** And what do we see here? We see our God as a consuming fire casting Rome and Satan into the lake of fire.

Satan's defeat is complete and absolute. Why? Because Satan has just been told that no matter what he ever does he will never be able to defeat the church. Not one of his future attacks will ever be successful. **Satan's failure with regard to Rome will be the story of his life.** Satan's defeat is total and complete not just with regard to Rome but with regard to any army Satan may ever use to battle the church no matter how large or powerful that army may be. **Satan cannot overcome the church!** How is that situation depicted? By showing Satan being cast into a lake of fire and brimstone — a complete and utter defeat — a defeat from which no one can ever come back. Don't you think that is a message that early church needed to hear? I do, and it's the same message the Jews needed to hear in Ezekiel 38. It's the message of Romans 8:31 — “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

So back to our earlier question and answer: **Is this the end of the world?** My answer was possibly, but not necessarily — and I think that is where we should leave it as far as the text goes. But my **opinion** is that we are **not** seeing the end of the world here. I think we are seeing a vivid symbol for the complete defeat of Satan in all of his attacks against the Lord's church (past, present, and future). But if you think this is the end of the world, I'm not going to complain one bit — you very well may be right. But even then **the focus remains on the first century** because what we are seeing here is a promise to the first century church that Satan will never be able to defeat God's faithful people just as he was unable to defeat them using Rome, and a promise to the first century church that all of God's enemies will suffer a spiritual defeat just

as Rome has suffered. What that means is that our first century time frame is still firmly in place.

With these thoughts in mind, let's now look at the great judgment scene in verses 11-15 that closes out this chapter.

Revelation 20:11-15

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Now that **must** be describing the end of the world, right? I'll cut to the chase — my answer is the same as before: **possibly, but not necessarily**. Why? Let's look at the text. There are at least three ways to view this great judgment scene.

First, we can view this great judgment scene as completely focused on first century Rome, with this judgment describing a **first century judgment** that is not the end of the world.

Second, we can view this great judgment scene as completely focused on first century Rome, with this judgment describing **the final judgment** of first century Rome that we know will happen at the end of the world.

Third, we can view this great judgment scene as including **Rome and all other enemies of God** that came or will come after Rome, with this judgment describing their **final judgment** at the end of the world.

Let's look at each of these possibilities, and I'll tell you the one I prefer.

Let's start with the first of these three views: We can view this great judgment scene as completely focused on first century Rome, with this judgment describing a first century judgment.

But wait, you say, this scene involves a great judgment scene before which the dead, small and great, stand before God. This scene involves books being opened, one of which is the book of life. This scene involves the dead being judged out of those books according to their works. This scene involves the death of death itself, and the casting of those opposed to God into a lake of fire.

How can those be first century events?

The answer is that those things are not **literally** first century events. They are **literally** events that will occur at the end of the world. **But since when did we start interpreting the visions in this book literally?** We should interpret verses 11-15 just as we have all of the other verses in this vision — we should look for the symbols and the figures.

And here is the key to understanding these verses as a first century event: These verses may be using the **future** literal judgment at the end of the world as a figure for the first century judgment of Rome just as the **past** literal judgment of Egypt and the **past** literal judgment of Babylon have been used for that same purpose many times earlier in this book. So, yes, the past judgment of Egypt was literal, the past judgment of Babylon was literal, and the future judgment of the world is literal — but all three of those literal events are being used in this book as symbols for the judgment of Rome. In fact, so much so, that Rome is referred to as Babylon in this book!

So does that mean we can't learn anything about the final judgment of the world from these verses? No, not at all. Under this view we can still learn a great deal about the final judgment of the world from these verses, just as we have learned things about the past judgments of Babylon and Egypt from the earlier descriptions in this book. When God uses a past (or future) event as a symbol for some other event, God is teaching us something about **both** of

those events. So if God uses the final judgment of the world as a symbol to depict the first century judgment of Rome, then God is teaching us something about both of those judgments.

Do we see something like this anywhere else in the Bible? Yes. In fact, we have seen this same event described elsewhere in the Bible. Daniel told us all about it.

Daniel 7:9-11** — I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: **his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.** A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: **the judgment was set, and the books were opened.** I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: **I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

The fourth beast in Daniel 7 was the Roman empire, and those verses from Daniel 7 are describing what precedes the destruction of that fourth beast. **Don't they sound familiar?** A great throne? A great judgment? Books being opened? Burning flame? **We know that Daniel 7 is describing a first century event.** In Daniel 7:14 we see Jesus being given an eternal kingdom — that happened in the first century (Acts 2). At the end of time, Jesus will not be given the eternal kingdom but will instead deliver the eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24). Daniel 7 is describing a first century event, and Daniel 7 uses the same language that we see here in verses 11-15.

And how about these verses from Matthew 24.

***Matthew 24:30-31** — And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

That sure sounds like the final judgment, right? In fact, it uses images taken from events that we know will apply to the end of the world such as Jesus coming in the clouds and the sound of a trumpet. But are those verses in Matthew 24 describing the end of the world? No. How do we know? Because we can read verse 34: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” Verses 30-31 in Matthew 24 are describing the end of Jerusalem in AD 70, but they are doing so using vivid imagery about the end of the world. In short, the message was that this judgment would be so bad that you will think it is the end of the world!

We may be seeing the same thing here in verses 11-15. We may be seeing imagery taken from the end of the world being used to describe the end of Rome.

What are the advantages of this view? A big advantage is that it keeps us firmly placed within our context and our time frame. The very first verse of Revelation told us that the book was going to describe “things which must shortly come to pass,” and under this view verses 11-15 are describing a first century judgment. Another big advantage of this view is that it fits well with how the Bible described the judgement of Rome in Daniel 7, and it fits well with how this book itself has used other literal judgments as imagery to describe the judgment of Rome.

Are there any disadvantages? Some might say that one disadvantage to viewing verses 11-15 as a first century judgment is that it would mean we would have to toss out about 10,000 sermons that have suggested otherwise! But is that really a disadvantage? If this really is a first century event, then does it matter how many sermons have taught otherwise?

But, to address that potential disadvantage, as we said a moment ago, when God uses one event to depict another event, God is teaching us something about both of those events. So, yes, I think that even under this first view, we can learn something about the end of the world from these verses. So perhaps many of those sermons don't need to be tossed out at all; perhaps they just need to be clarified.

But is there a way in which we can view verses 11-15 as actually describing the end of the world? Yes, and that brings us to the second of the three possible view of these verses that we listed earlier: **we can view this great judgment scene as completely focused on first century Rome, with this judgment describing the final judgment of first century Rome that we know will happen at the end of the world.**

This view is very similar to the first view, but, at least on the surface, it seems to move our time frame from the first century to the end of the world. **But does it really?** Let's look more closely at that issue.

What are we saying with this second view? What we are saying is that the focus is still on first century Rome, and in particular the **spiritual judgment** of first century Rome, **but verses 11-15 are giving us a flash forward in time so that we can see what that spiritual judgment really means.** And what does it mean? It means that those persecuting Romans will be lost eternally, cast away from the presence of God into hell.

So does this view violate our first century time frame? Not at all. **When does all of this happen?** Careful — that's a trick question! The actual casting away will happen at the end of time, but the works in verse 12 that caused that casting away to happen for the first century Romans — those works happened in the first century. And the spiritual judgment? That also happened in the first century at the moment when each of those persecuting Romans died. From that moment onward each of them knew their eternal fate. The explanation, the sentencing, and the bending of the knee yet await, but each person who has died already knows his or her eternal destiny and so, at least in that sense, has been judged.

What we are saying is this: The focus remains on first century Rome and on the conflict between Rome and the church, but part of the description of the spiritual judgment of first century Rome involves a flash forward in time to show what is in store for them at the end of all time.

But there is a potential problem with the second view. If verses 11-15 are a flash forward to a literal event, then what happened to our rule that we interpret this language figuratively? First, that is not exactly the rule we have been following. The rule is that we interpret the language figuratively unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise, and the final judgment of the world might be seen by some as a pretty compelling reason to do otherwise! But second, even if this language is describing the final literal judgment of the world, don't we still see some figures? Earth and heaven fleeing away in verse 11? The books in verse 12 — do we think they are literal paper and ink? Death and hell being cast into a lake of fire? I think we are still seeing some symbols in this language even if it is describing the literal end of the world.

So where are we? So far, we have looked at two views. In each view, the focus is firmly on the first century conflict between Rome and the church, which is the same focus this book has had throughout. In the first view, we are seeing

the first century judgment of Rome described using figures taken from the final judgment at the of the world. In the second view, we are again seeing the judgment of Rome, but we are seeing what will happen to Rome at the end of the world when they receive their final judgment for the evil works they did here on earth.

In my opinion, either of those two views could be the correct view. What is my preference? Let's hold off on that until we examine the third view.

First, why do we need to consider a third view? We need to consider a third view because of a potential problem with the first two views, and it is the same potential problem for each. What is that potential problem? In short, it is this: **What about Gog and Magog? What about the loosening of Satan for a little season?** Should we broaden our focus at least a bit to include those events in this great judgment scene? The third view we will consider will do just that.

Here again is the third view: **We can view this great judgment scene as including Rome and all other enemies of God that came or will come after Rome, with this judgment describing their final judgment at the end of the world.**

This view has some appeal, but it does stretch the time frame quite a bit. Suddenly we are not looking just at first century Rome, but we are looking at every other enemy of God that has arisen or will arise after first century Rome. Yes, Gog and Magog give us a basis for doing that, but the description of Gog and Magog need to be read in light of the other verses in this book, including these two that we will get to at the end of the book:

***Revelation 22:6** — These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.*

***Revelation 22:10** — Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.*

I have a hard time fitting a judgement of twenty-first century North Korea into the time frame of those two verses.

But didn't Gog and Magog already violate our time frame? No. Gog and Magog were introduced to make a simple point about Satan's defeat. I don't think that they were intended to make us stretch our time frame to include thousands of years of history and counting. They appear in Revelation 20 for the same reason they appear in Ezekiel 38 — to promise God's people that God will pro-

tect them no matter what comes. Gog and Magog are a vivid illustration of Romans 8:31 — “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Even while Gog and Magog are being described, the focus remains firmly on the first century conflict between Rome and the church. Gog and Magog were introduced to make a simple point — Satan failed with Rome, and Satan will continue to fail no matter what else he tries. In fact, Satan would fail so completely that his failure is described as being cast into a lake of fire in verse 10, the same thing we saw happen to Rome in Revelation 19:20 and the same thing we will see happen to death and hell in verse 14.

So what is my opinion about these three views? I favor the **first view**, but I think a good case can be made for the second view as well. I am not a fan of the third view because I think it violates our time frame and moves away from our context. The second view is very appealing, and in my opinion it comes in very close to the first view, but the time frame and particularly the parallel description from Daniel 7 make me favor the first view — that these verses are describing the first century judgment of Rome by God using vivid imagery taken from the final judgement at the end of the world, just as this book has elsewhere borrowed language from other judgments by God to describe the judgment of Rome by God.

Now that we have looked at these three ways of interpreting verses 11-15, let's do the interpretation — let's take a closer look at the text of verses 11-15.

Verse 12 confirms what we already know — the great white throne in verse 11 is the throne of God. God is the righteous judge who knows everything — that is the message of verse 11. Rome may have thought no one knew what they were doing, but Rome was wrong. Rome may have thought that there was no one who could do anything about what they were doing, but Rome was wrong. Every move Rome made was being watched very closely by the righteous judge of the universe.

Most people behave better when they are being watched. In fact, most people behave better when they think there is a chance they are being watched. And cameras seem to be everywhere these days. It seems that every day on the news we see some criminal going about his criminal activities in full view of some hidden camera. How would we act if we were being watched every second of our lives? That's an easy question to answer — we would act just like we already act. Why? **Because as Christians we already know that we are being watched every second of our lives!** And not just us, but everybody! God knows everything we do and everything we think. We are never alone!

And that truth is both a promise and a warning. It is a promise because God is always with us. “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5)! But it is also a warning — we cannot hide from God (Genesis 3:8). The same righteous judge who was watching everything that Rome did is watching everything that we do!

What does it mean in verse 11 that “the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them?” This description will help us understand a verse in the next chapter.

***Revelation 21:1** — And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

The phrase “a new heaven and a new earth” is an idiom for a new environment, and that verse is telling us there will be new environment for the church. We’ll have more to say about what that means when we get to that verse in Chapter 21. But if there is a new environment, something must have happened to the old environment — and that is what verse 11 is telling us.

Is this change of environment the great change of environment that will occur at the end of the world? I don’t think so. Why? Because of the parallel passage in Daniel 2.

***Daniel 2:31-35** — Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that **a stone was cut out without hands**, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; **and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them:** and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.*

That stone cut out without hands is the church — that’s what Daniel 2:44-45 tells us. And the feet of iron and clay in Daniel 2 is Rome — we saw that when we studied Daniel. Rome was the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2, following Baby-

lon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. **So what does Daniel tells us would happen when the church was victorious over Rome?** Daniel 2:35 — “Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, **that no place was found for them.**” That’s exactly what we see here in verse 11 — “and there was found no place for them”! Verse 11 is talking about the new environment that came about after the church prevailed over Rome, which is the same thing Daniel was talking about in Daniel 2 using the same language we see here in verse 11. **Verse 11 is anchored in the first century. Why? Because Daniel 2 is the anchor!**

We need to be careful if we argue that these verses are describing the end of the world. Careful about what? Careful that we don’t also drag Daniel 2 to the end of the world. We know that the kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2 as prophesied in Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, and Joel 2 — but many falsely teach that the kingdom of Christ will not be established until the end of the world. There is a rope tied from Daniel 2 to Revelation 20 — we need to be careful we don’t tug on that rope to the point that we suggest that Daniel 2 is a yet future event. It is not. The kingdom of Christ existed in the first century, and it exists today. It was established in Acts 2.

And if verse 11 is anchored in the first century, then what does that say about verses 12-15? Yes, those verses sound like the final judgment, and yes countless sermons have applied those verses to the final judgment. But is that the test we should be applying here? Daniel 2 happened in the first century, and verse 11 is lifted right out of Daniel 2. Shouldn’t that be enough to make us take a closer look at verses 11-15, not to mention our context and our time frame?

Yes, as we have said, we can learn something about the end of the world from these verses. Why? Because that final judgment (a literal event yet to occur) is being used as a symbol for the judgment of Rome, just as the plagues of Egypt (a literal event that has already occurred) has been used for that same purpose. So yes we can learn something about the final judgment from these verses, but I believe that the coming final judgment of the world is being used here to figuratively describe the **first century** judgment of Rome.

Is there any textual support in these verses for that view? Yes. Look at verse 14. **“This is the second death.”** We have seen that before. We saw that back in verses 4-6. And what was the focus back in those verses? “The souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received

his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands.” **Those are the Christians killed by Rome.** Those are the Christians who were killed because they refused to worship Caesar. Verse 14 gives us a **link** back to the beginning of the chapter. Verse 6 told us who would **not** be affected by the second death. Verse 14 tells who would be affected by the second death. That makes two groups — and they are the same two groups we have seen over and over in this book: those on the side of Christ versus those on the side of Caesar.

Everything in this beautiful book fits together. Everything in this beautiful book reinforces the theme of the book: Christ or Caesar. Everything in this beautiful book fits with what Daniel prophesied six hundred years earlier. Things start to break down only when we take our scissors to the text, slicing out a verse here and a verse there to make a point that is divorced from the time frame and the context of the book.

But what about **the lake of fire** in verse 14? What does it mean to be cast into a lake of fire? Who is cast into this lake of fire? Again, let’s look at the text.

Revelation 19:20 — *And the **beast** was taken, and with him the **false prophet** that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

Revelation 20:10 — *And the **devil** that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Revelation 20:14-15 — *And **death and hell** were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Revelation 21:7-8 — *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the **fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

So who is cast into the lake of fire? We should really ask who **or what** is cast into the lake of fire because not everything cast into it is a person. The **beast and the false prophet** are cast in — they are the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, which together represent Rome as a false royal priesthood. The **devil** is cast into the lake of fire. **Death and hell** are cast into the lake of fire. And **those who fail to overcome** are cast into the lake of fire. What do they all have in common — Rome, Satan, death, hell, and those who fail to overcome? **They were all completely defeated!** Their common denominator is **defeat!** That is what it means to be cast into a lake of fire — it means to suffer a great defeat.

And aren't those categories enough for us to know that what we are seeing in these verses is **figurative**? The two beasts are cast into the lake of fire, as are death and hell. That cannot be understood literally. We are seeing symbols here. Casting death into a lake of fire means that death has been defeated. Casting the two beasts into the lake of fire means that Rome has been defeated. If the beasts are figurative (as we know they are), then casting the beasts into a lake of fire must also be figurative.

And another thing — **who is judged here**? Is it everyone as at the end of all time? I don't think so. The ones being judged here are the ones brought back to life in verse 13. Who are they? They are the "rest of the dead" from verse 5 — "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." **God's people were raised back in verse 4; they are not among the number being raised in verse 13.** This group in verse 13 did not share in the victory with Christ; that is, they did not live again "until the thousand years were finished" as verse 5 tells us. The people judged here are the people who died in opposition to Christ and in the service of Rome. These are the ones who were killed by the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

These verses show the great contrast between those who stood with Christ and those who stood with Rome. Those who stood with Christ experience a complete and total victory symbolized by a thousand year reign with Christ. Those who stood with Rome experience a complete and total defeat symbolized by death in a lake of fire. We are looking at the same two groups that this book has been focused on for twenty chapters.

Lesson 49

Last week we looked at the great judgment scene at the end of Chapter 20, and we considered several possible interpretations. The two most promising viewpoints are, first, that the judgment is the **first century spiritual** judgment of first century Rome, and, second, that the judgment is a flash-forward in time to the **final judgment** of first century Rome. Those views are very similar, and either could be correct, but I favor the first view because of the parallels it has with the descriptions in the book of Daniel.

When we ended last week, we had gone from choosing the best way of interpreting these verses to doing the actual interpretation, and when class ended we were just about to look at the book of life in verse 15.

Why is **the book of life** mentioned in verse 15? It is mentioned to reinforce one of the primary themes in this book: **God knows!** All throughout this book we have seen two groups: those on the side of Christ and those on the side of Caesar. And for every person on earth, God knows which group that person is in. That was true in the first century, and that is true in the twenty-first century. Those on the side of Christ have their names recorded in the book of life.

Philippians 4:3** — And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, **whose names are in the book of life.

“The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Timothy 2:19). The presence of this book here reinforces that theme: God knows everything, and, more particularly here, God knows everything that Rome has done to harm his people. Those facing this judgment are those **not** found in this book; that is, those who chose Caesar over Christ.

Remember where we first saw this book of life in the book of Revelation.

***Revelation 3:5** — He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I **will not blot out his name out of the book of life**, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

That verse tells us that some of the people suffering this terrible defeat in Chapter 20 had once had their names written in that book of life. God had once

numbered them among his faithful people. But that had changed. They had comprised and fallen. They had proved faithless to God. They had chosen Caesar over Christ. **And now they saw only a blotted out spot where their names had once been written in that great book.** Can you imagine anything worse than seeing a blank spot in that book and knowing that your name had once been there? If there is anything more horrible to contemplate than seeing erasure marks where your name once appeared in the book of life I'm not sure what it could be — and yet don't we all know people who are most likely in that situation? Don't we all know some who have erred from the truth? We have responsibility toward them, and James tells us what it is.

James 5:19-20 — Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

But the book of life in verse 15 must be an **end time event**, right? Not really. While I am alive on this earth, my name can be added to that great book, and my name can be blotted out of that great book. **At what point is that no longer true?** At the end of the world? No, but rather at my death. At the moment of my death, if my name is not in that book, then my name will never be in that book. And, likewise, at the moment of my death, if my name is in that book, then my name will forever be in that book. **Death is the finish line for a Christian**, and, in fact, death is the finish line for everyone. So, yes, the book of life will play a big role on the last great day when Jesus comes to claim his own, but that book also plays a big role on **my own last great day** when I depart this world for the next.

But what about **the defeat of death** in verse 14? That has to be the end of the world, right? Why? If I moved the defeat of death in any direction I would **not** move it **later** in time! Instead, I would move it **earlier** in time toward the cross. That was when death was defeated!

Yes, it is certainly true that on that great last day when we are literally raised incorruptible it will come to pass that “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). And it is certainly true that “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). But it is equally true that death was defeated at the cross and at Christ's resurrection from the dead. Paul told Timothy that Jesus “hath (past tense) abolished death” (2 Timothy 1:10). Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us that Jesus died to “destroy him that had the power of

death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” And Romans 6:9 tells us “that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” The defeat of death is a past event now, and it was a past event when Revelation was written. Yes, death is still around, but death is not doing very well since the cross. **Death has been on life support for two thousand years!**

So why then is death (and hades, the land of death) shown as being defeated here? Because Rome’s power of death has been removed. Death is personified in Revelation, and nowhere is that clearer than here in verse 13 where Death gives up its dead! **Rome’s defeat was Satan’s defeat, and Satan’s defeat was Death’s defeat.** Rome had used death as a terrible weapon against God’s people, and now that was all over as to Rome.

Why was it all over? Were Christians no longer suffering? Were Christians no longer being put to death? That’s not why. It was all over for death because when a Christian died that first death at the hands of Rome, then Rome’s power came to a complete end. Rome had power over the first death, but Rome had no power over the second death. **God will always have the last word when it comes to death!** When a faithful child of God remained faithful unto death, that person was then and forever after permanently safe from the clutches of Rome and from the death that Rome inflicted. **Faith is the victory!** We are still looking at a **spiritual** rather than a **physical** event in these verses.

But if verses 11-15 are describing a first century judgment rather than the final judgment at the end of all time, we might ask whether that **earlier first century judgment** is described anywhere else in the Bible using those terms. I think the answer is yes, it is. I think Peter tells us about it.

*1 Peter 4:12-19 — Beloved, think it not strange concerning **the fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as **ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings**; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be **reproached for the name of Christ**, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if **any man suffer as a Christian**, let him not be*

ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Look at the judgment there in 1 Peter 4:17 — is that the **future** judgment at the end of time? No. Peter tells us it is not. He says, “for **the time is come** that judgment must begin at the house of God.” **That judgment was something that was already occurring.**

What did that judgment involve? How was it a judgment that began at the house of God? Peter also tells us that. Five times in those verses, Peter describes the persecution that Christians were **at that time** experiencing at the hands of Rome. How was that a judgment? It was a judgment because of the decision that had to be made by one undergoing that persecution — remain faithful to Christ or instead renounce Christ. That was a hard decision when faced with death and torture. And isn't that what Peter tells us in verse 18 — “if the righteous **scarcely** be saved”? There will not be anyone **scarcely** saved at the end of all time. On that day, the saved will be rising in the air to forever be with Christ. **There is nothing scarce about that!** The scarceness comes with the terrible decision that first century Christians were called upon to make — give up their life for Christ, or save their life and forfeit Christ. I don't think any one of us can really know what that was like if we have never had a gun to our head (or a family member's head) and heard the command to renounce Christ or die. Those who remained faithful were saved — but only through a tremendous struggle. That was their judgment, and that judgment began at the house of God. But — **and this is Peter's point** — **if a child of God had to go through a trial like that, what must await those who are opposed to God?** What sort of judgment and trial must await the ungodly and the sinner? **If that is the judgment suffered by the Christian having the gun at his head, what sort of judgment must await the one holding that gun?** I think we are seeing the answer to that question here in Revelation 20.

So what is left in this book of Revelation? Chapters 21 and 22 conclude the book with a beautiful description of the triumphant and victorious church. In fact,

nowhere will you find a more beautiful description of the church than in these final chapters of the Bible. **The Old Testament ends with a curse. Let's see how the New Testament ends.**

Chapter 21

Before we study this chapter, let's ask this question: after studying the first twenty chapters of this book, **what do we expect to see here in Chapter 21?**

Remember, all throughout the book, God's faithful people have been pictured as safe in heaven even while many of them were still living on earth and facing persecution. If they remain faithful, their security is so certain that God pictures them as already being safe in heaven. On the other hand, the persecuting Romans have been repeatedly referred to in this book as those that dwell upon the earth. The image has been that of God keeping his people safe while he punishes and judges the Romans who were persecuting his people.

But now what has happened? Rome has been judged. Rome has been cast into the lake of fire along with everything and everyone else who might harm God's people. In short, God has created **a new environment** for his people. The old environment is no more. Rome is gone.

Did all of that **literally** occur? Did it occur **physically**? No and no. The focus of this book has been on spiritual deliverance and spiritual judgment, and that focus has not changed. Do you mean to say that Christians continued to face persecution in this new environment? Yes, they did, and the Romans continued to thrive. But you know what? **Things are not what they seem!** That is one of the central themes of this book, and just as the focus of the book has not changed, neither has that theme changed. God is still trying to get his people to see things as they really are — which is to say that God is trying to get his people to see things as God himself sees things.

Yes, but that doesn't sound much like a victory, does it? God's people are still being persecuted, right? The Romans are still very much in charge of things, right? It doesn't seem like much has changed, right? That's all correct — **from an earthly viewpoint**. In the words of Solomon, those objections are all correct — **when viewed under the sun**. But what if we lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help (Psalm 121:1)? What if we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen? What if we look

not at the things that are temporal, but at the things that are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18)? Then how do things look? **Chapter 21 answers that question!**

Yes, when viewed from earth, it looked like Rome will still very much in power and very much in charge. How did Rome look when viewed from heaven? Rome looked like a beast and a false prophet that had been cast alive into a lake of fire. That is how God saw Rome, and God wanted his people to see Rome in exactly that same way. Rome was no threat to the faithful people of God! “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). God’s people could rest secure in God’s promises.

And the church? How did the church look when viewed from earth? The church looked weak and foolish (1 Corinthians 1:27). The church looked base and despised (1 Corinthians 1:28). There weren’t very many people in the church who were wise after the flesh or mighty or noble (1 Corinthians 1:26). From an earthly viewpoint, the church didn’t look like much. The church had none of the beauty and grandeur of Rome; the church had none of the pomp and circumstance of Rome. Like Christ, the church of Christ was despised and rejected of men.

That is what the church looked like when viewed **from earth**. But what did the church look like when viewed **from heaven**? **Chapter 21 answers that question!**

In my opinion, there is no more beautiful description of the Lord’s church found anywhere than the description we see here in Chapter 21. The first century church needed to see the church as it really was, and so God shows it to them. God shows them the church in all of its beauty and power. And you know what, it is not just the first century church who needs to see the church as it really is — that is also true of the twenty-first century church!

How will the church be described in this chapter? We will hear about the **newness** of its environment — a new heaven and a new earth. We will hear about its **beauty** — golden streets and jeweled walls. We will hear about its **purity** — a beautiful bride. We will hear about its **stability and strength** — huge walls and a city four-square. We will hear about its **importance** and its **testimony** — a source of light to those living in darkness. And there can be no doubt about the **power** of the church — Rome left the building in the previous chapter!

If we are worried and discouraged about the state of the church today, then Chapter 21 is the chapter for us! I have said it before, and I'll say it again — when we view the church as God views the church, then this book of **Revelation** will become a book of **revolution**! God's word will change us if we let it — so let's do just that! If we ever have doubts about the power and beauty and relevance of the church, then let's allow God's word to change how we view the church.

Revelation 21:1

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

In Revelation 20:11, the earth and the sky fled from the presence of God, and no place was found for them. That was the end of the **old environment with Rome**; now has come the time for the **new environment without Rome**, and that is how Chapter 21 begins.

The figure of heaven and earth passing away is a common one in the Bible. God depicts the judgment of the ungodly by **figuratively** bringing their world to an end just as one day God will **literally** bring the entire world to an end. This is another example where God is using a literal future event to figuratively describe some other event. And God has done that same thing elsewhere in the Bible.

In Isaiah 13, God dismantles the earth and the stars to depict the judgment of Babylon by the Medes.

Isaiah 13:10 — For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Isaiah 13:13 — Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In Isaiah 34, the heavens are dissolved and rolled together as a scroll to depict a judgment against Edom.

Isaiah 34:4 — *And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.*

Matthew 24 describes the judgment of Jerusalem in a similar way.

Matthew 24:29 — *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.*

Joel described the events leading up to the establishment of the church in Acts 2 using similar language.

Joel 2:30-31 — *And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.*

Just as the apocalyptic language in Matthew 24:29 depicted the destruction of the Jewish world in Jerusalem, so the same language here in verse 1 depicts the destruction of the Roman world. Just as things would never again be the same for Jerusalem, so things would never again be the same for Rome. Their old world was gone. Something else was about to take its place. And that was also true for the establishment of the church in Acts 2, which was described in Joel 2 using similar apocalyptic language. After Acts 2, the old world would never be the same, and so God, through the prophet Joel, pictures a dismantling of the old world.

What are we saying? **What we are saying is that earth-shattering events are described in the Bible using earth-shattering language!** And is that really so surprising? Is there some other sort of language we would expect God to use to describe such momentous events?

Is the new heaven and the new earth in verse 1 the end of the world? The context says no. The time frame says no. The many examples of similar language in the Bible describing events other than the end of the world say no. But let's hold off on finally answering that question until we read the rest of Chapter 21.

One thing we can say with certainty now is that the phrase “a new heaven and a new earth” need not describe the end of the world, although it can be used that way, and in fact is used that way in 2 Peter 3:13. But the same language can also be used to describe other dramatic changes of environment, as we saw in Isaiah, Matthew, and Joel.

The creation of a new heaven and a new earth can depict a great judgment (such as the judgment of Jerusalem AD 70 or the judgment at the end of time), the removal of some specific enemy (such as Babylon or Edom), or some other radical change in circumstances (such as the establishment of the church). The particular change in environment that is under consideration must be determined from the context, which is what we will do as we study the remainder of the chapter.

Notice the end of verse 1 — “**and there was no more sea.**” We talked about the symbolic use of the **sea** in an earlier lesson. In this book, the sea is used two ways — to denote wickedness and to denote separation from God. So, if the sea is no more, then whatever is about to be described in this chapter will lack those two things — wickedness and separation from God.

With those two clues, don't we already see the **church** in verse 1? Don't we see the blood-bought body of Christ cleansed in the blood of the Lamb? Don't we see the people of God who can enter the holy of holies and boldly approach the throne of grace?

But is verse 1 then suggesting somehow that the church did not already enjoy these blessings? No. The church has enjoyed those blessings from the moment of its creation by God in Acts 2. There has never been a time when the church was not cleansed by the blood of Christ. There has never been a time when the church could not boldly approach God's throne.

So why then does verse 1 say there was no more sea as if the church only now began enjoying those blessings? Verse 1 is doing something we have seen many times before in this book — verse 1 is restating and reemphasizing something that the church already enjoyed but that the church did not fully appreciate. Verse 1 is describing a new manifestation of a blessing that the church already enjoyed.

As I think we will see, this chapter contains a beautiful description of the church, and particularly of the church after it came through the Roman persecution. But, and **here is the key point**, these beautiful descriptions do not apply to the church **only** after the Roman persecution. These beautiful descrip-

tions were **always true** of the church, from the day of its establishment in Acts 2, and they remain true of the church in the present day. God's view of the church has not changed! Yes, God may show us the church in different ways, and yes God may bless and protect the church in different ways at different times, but God's love and care for the church are unwavering and unchanging. That is one of the most beautiful promises in this book!

Revelation 21:2-4

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Are these verses describing the end of all time? **How could they be?** Look at verse 2. Does that verse show the church leaving this earth and going to heaven as will happen at the end of all time? No. Verse 2 shows precisely the opposite! Verse 2 shows the church "coming down from God out of heaven." How could that be describing the end of the world?

And another thing, how could these verses be describing **heaven**? Verse 2 tells us that what is being described here is coming "**out of heaven**." Even if we didn't know for sure what was being described here, isn't verse 2 enough for us to know that heaven is **not** being described? If I had a giant box up here, and I asked you to guess what was inside the giant box, would anyone guess that what was inside the giant box was the giant box itself? No. You might not

know what I was about to pull out of the giant box, but you would certainly know that whatever it was, it was not the giant box itself. Likewise, whatever is coming down **out of heaven**, we can be certain that it is **not** heaven. We are not seeing heaven come down from God out of heaven in verse 2!

Why do I stress that point? Because many people who read this chapter treat verse 2 the same way they treat the numerous time frame verses in this book — which is to say that they read it, and then they forget it or ignore it. Let's not do that. Let's remember verse 2 as we study the other verses in this chapter. These verses are not describing heaven. They are instead describing something that has come down from God out of heaven. That's not me saying that; that's verse 2 saying that.

So what is being described then? What is coming down from God out of heaven? Look at the clues! It is the **holy city**. It is the **new Jerusalem**. It is prepared as a **bride**. Many more clues will follow, but from those clues alone don't we already know that this holy city is the **church**?

But, wait, some may say — **that's not what our songbook says!** We have many songs that take language from this chapter and apply it to heaven. **Two points in response.** First, there may be many good arguments against what I am saying here, but telling me that it violates our songbook is not one of those good arguments! But second, there is nothing at all that is wrong about those songs! **Why is heaven beautiful?** Heaven is beautiful because God is there. And **why is the church beautiful?** For the same reason! The church is beautiful because God dwells there with his people.

***Ephesians 2:22** — In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

***Matthew 18:20** — For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

So even if these verses are describing the church rather than describing heaven, **heaven and the church are beautiful for the same reason.** And the church in heaven will be just as beautiful as the church on earth, and again that is true for the same reason — the church is the body of Christ and the habitation of God.

But why does verse 2 picture the church as **coming down from God out of heaven**? Several reasons.

One reason is to show the contrast with the beasts of Rome that came up out of the earth and sea. **The church is not the product of man!** The eternal kingdom was not made with human hands. Unlike Caesar worship and the other false religions of this world, the church of Christ did not originate from man. The church was established by God.

Let me be very blunt on this point: there is no denomination that can ever claim to have come down from God out of heaven, and in fact I don't know any denominations that do make such a claim about themselves. If you read their websites, they will trace their history back to the actions of men, not to the actions of God. Don't believe me? Here is how the Baptists themselves describe their origin:

American Baptists, Southern Baptists and all the scores of other Baptist bodies in the U.S. and around the world grew out of a common tradition *begun in the early 17th century*. ... The *origins of Baptist thought* and practice can be seen in the late 16th century in English Congregationalism. ... The *earliest Baptist churches* (1609-1612), although comprised of English-speaking congregants, flourished in Holland, where religious toleration was much greater than in England.

Does that sound like they are claiming to have ever come down from God out of heaven? It doesn't sound to me like they make any claim to have even existed prior to the seventeenth century! Does that sound like a product of God or like a product of man? And that's not me describing the Baptists! That is the Baptists describing the Baptists! And the same is true of every other denomination; they are all man-made, and they will be the first to tell you that! And if you are a Baptist, please consider this point very carefully! **From whence came ye (Revelation 7:13)?**

There is a great contrast in this book of Revelation, and in fact all throughout the Bible, between the works of God and the works of man. The eternal kingdom of Christ, his church, is a work of God, not a work of man. The church is the stone cut without human hands, and it is that stone that will sweep away all of the works of man, be they kingdoms of man or religious organizations of man. There is but one eternal kingdom.

A **second reason** the church is shown coming down out of heaven is that God's people have been referred to throughout this book as dwelling in heaven (even while still on earth) and the wicked have been referred to as those who dwell

on earth. Now that the wicked and their wicked Roman world are gone, the church is pictured as returning to a world that has been made new. God had pictured them safe in heaven while he took care of the Roman problem on earth, and now that the Roman problem has been resolved, God pictures the church returning to earth. But this earth is not the same one they left because this earth is a Rome-free earth. That great enemy of God's people is no more.

Why are there no more tears or death or pain? Verse 4 tells us — it is because the former things have passed away. What are the former things that have just passed away? The blood thirsty harlot and the two beasts are gone. Rome is no more. Rome has been weighed and found wanting. Rome has been judged.

Lesson 50

Last week we started looking at Chapter 21, which as we will see contains perhaps the most beautiful description of the Lord's church found anywhere in the Bible. We learned two important things from verse 2 — first, this is not describing the end of the world, and, second, this is not describing heaven. Why not the end of the world? Because in verse 2 we see the church coming down out of heaven, while at the end of the world the church will be delivered up to heaven. And why not a description of heaven? Because whatever we are seeing here is coming down **out of heaven**, which tells us it is not heaven. In fact, it is the church, as we have already seen in the opening verses and will see in greater detail throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Why do we see the church coming down out of heaven? We discussed two reasons. First, that description stresses the divine origin of the church as opposed to Rome, which was pictured as coming up from the earth and from the sea. And second, that description fits with how the church has been described all throughout this book — as already being in heaven while Rome has been referred to as those who dwell upon the earth. Now that Rome has been judged, the church is figuratively shown returning to its new environment on earth.

When we ended we were looking at verse 4: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

How can the beautiful promises in verse 4 apply to anything other than the end of the world? We could ask Isaiah that same question because he used similar language to apply to something other than the end of the world. He used similar language to describe a deliverance from Assyria.

Isaiah 25:8 — He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

*Isaiah 30:19 — For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: **thou shalt weep no more:** he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.*

These promises in Isaiah were intended to emphasize that Israel's past troubles would soon be no more, which is the same way the language is used here in Revelation. Rome had been judged. The figurative language in verse 4 describes the dramatic change in environment experienced by the victorious church.

So **when** will all of the promises in verse 4 occur? **When** will every tear be wiped away? **When** will death be no more? **When** will there be no more crying or pain? **Verse 3 gives us the answer** — these promises will occur when the dwelling of God is with men. So when will that happen? We should ask instead when **did** that happen! God is dwelling with his people today!

Isaiah 2:2 — *And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of **the LORD's house** shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.*

Matthew 18:20 — *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am **I in the midst of them.***

1 Corinthians 3:16 — *Know ye not that ye are **the temple of God**, and that **the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?***

Ephesians 2:19 — *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of **the household of God.***

Ephesians 2:22 — *In whom ye also are builded together for **an habitation of God through the Spirit.***

1 Timothy 3:15 — *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in **the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

We are waiting for many things, but dwelling with God is not one of them! That is a blessing we are enjoying right here and right now in the church. Yes, we will enjoy that blessing in a different manner someday, but that does not change the fact that we are enjoying that blessing today. God dwells with his people **now**. Christ's perfect sacrifice made that possible. God dwells in his church, and anyone who persecutes that church will answer to him. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest **thou me?**" (Acts 9:4).

These descriptions concerning crying, tears, pain, and death should not be taken literally. This language is symbolic, and we must consistently treat it as such. Here, as in Isaiah, these descriptions depict the state of God's people after a specific enemy has been removed by God.

But what about the phrase “**no more death**”? Death has played a major role in this book. Death was the primary weapon that Rome used against the church. But when God defeated Rome, God defeated Rome's power to inflict death. Rome would never again have the power of physical death over God's people once Rome was finally removed. But, more importantly, as we saw in the previous chapter, the really important death is not the first death, but is the second death. And the second death awaits only those who are opposed to God; the second death does not await the faithful people of God. Rome could inflict the first death, but Rome had no power over the second death. As we have said, God always has the last word when it comes to death.

But could that same language in verse 4 also be used to describe the end of the world? Yes — and in fact Paul uses it that way in 1 Corinthians.

*1 Corinthians 15:54 — So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory.***

Paul is quoting Isaiah 25:8 there — and that is a verse we read just a moment ago. As we said then, Isaiah 25 is talking about Assyria, but Paul tells us that it applies to the end of the world. What does that tell us? What it tells us is that Isaiah 25 had a **dual fulfillment**. It applied to the current situation in Isaiah 25 involving Assyria (as Isaiah tells us), and it applied to the final judgment at the end of time (as Paul tells us).

We *may* have some dual fulfillments in Revelation just as we do in Isaiah — one fulfillment pointing to Rome and a second fulfillment pointing to the end of the world. The problem is that we can never know for sure that a dual fulfillment is in view unless the inspired text tells us, as it does with Isaiah 25. But that also means that we can't rule out a dual fulfillment. We may be seeing one here for example. Paul tells us that the defeat of death **as to Assyria** had its ultimate fulfillment in the defeat of death at the end of all time. That may also be true of the defeat of death **as to Rome**.

But, and **here is the key point**, the defeat of death was not **only** a yet future event. Christ defeated death at the cross. Yes, death would face another (but very much related) defeat at the end of time as Paul tells us, but Paul also tells us that death was defeated much earlier than that.

*2 Timothy 1:10 — But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who **hath** abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Jesus defeated death by his own death and resurrection. Death has never been the same after the cross!

Verse 4 is describing the **spiritual blessings** of the church — no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, and no pain. Those are spiritual blessings. Yes, we will and we do shed **physical** tears, as did Jesus. Yes, we will and we do experience **physical** pain and **physical** death, as did Jesus. But **spiritually** our situation is very different — even in the midst of that physical suffering. Spiritually, we have no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, and no pain. And that is true here and now. That is true today. Will it also be true in heaven? Absolutely it will be. In fact, **if it is true today while we are still groaning in our earthly tabernacle, how much more will it be true after we have put aside that earthly tabernacle?**

I am not saying that these spiritual blessings don't apply to the church in heaven. What I am saying is that these spiritual blessings don't apply **only** to the church in heaven. They also apply to the church today. Why? Because of what verse 3 tell us — because “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” That blessing has been enjoyed by the church from the day it was established in Acts 2. The church is the **Lord's house** (Isaiah 2:2). The church is the **household of God** (Ephesians 2:19) and the **habitation of God** (Ephesians 2:22). The church is the **house of God** (1 Timothy 3:15).

My fear is not that we will **apply** these blessings to heaven; my fear is that we will **limit** these blessings to heaven. God wants us to see the church as he sees the church; and God sees the church as his house, as the place where he dwells and lives among his people.

*Ephesians 1:3 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places in Christ.*

We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings. Yes, they are blessings in heavenly places, but they are blessings we already have. Paul does not tell us that we **will** be blessed with all spiritual blessings; Paul tells us we **have** been blessed with all spiritual blessings. And what does it mean to have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places? It means no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, and no pain. **Physically** we experience those things, but **not spiritually**.

Revelation 21:5-8

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Who is on the throne in verse 5? Is it God the Father or God the Son? We don't need to choose. This throne is the same throne we will see in Chapter 22, and there in verse 1 and verse 3 it is described as "the throne of God and of the Lamb." The title "alpha and omega, the beginning and the end" brings us full circle back to the description of Jesus in the opening chapter of the book, where that same phrase was used twice to describe Christ.

"Behold, I make all things new." What a beautiful promise! It points back to first verse of this same chapter where John saw "a new heaven and a new earth." By judging Rome, God created a new environment for his people. But

I think verse 5 is broader than that. I think verse 5 is pointing to a continuing action on the part of God, not just to make a new environment for the church as to Rome, but to do that again and again for the church. And, of course, God does that for us as well.

2 Corinthians 4:16 — *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 — *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Colossians 3:10 — *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

There is newness in Christ! That was certainly a wonderful promise for the persecuted first century church, but that is a wonderful promise for us as well. We become a new creature when we arise from the waters of baptism.

Romans 6:4 — *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness** of life.*

Verse 5 also says, “for these words are true and faithful.” In Revelation 3:14, Jesus was described as “the faithful and true witness.” In Revelation 19:11, Jesus was called “Faithful and True.” Here in verse 5 it is not Jesus that is called faithful and true, but rather the words that John has been told to write. But, of course, as John tells us elsewhere, Jesus is the word made flesh (John 1:14). Here we see that same message as the descriptions applied to Christ are also applied to the word of God. Doesn’t that fact alone tell us how we must treat the word of God? When we hold, and read, and study, and proclaim the word of God — we are holding, reading, studying, and proclaiming that which God has described using the same terms with which he describes his only begotten son! We must never treat God’s word lightly or with any attitude other than the greatest reverence. In the next chapter, we will find what awaits those who take away from or add to the word of God.

In verse 6 we are told that “it is done.” What is “it”? What else could it be other than everything we have seen done in the previous verses and chapters of this book? Remember what prompted this book — it was the cry for vengeance in

Revelation 6:10 — “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” The entire book has been an answer to that question, and here in verse 6 the answer is that “it is done.” Rome has been judged, and their blood has been avenged.

“It is done.” That phrase reminds us of the great statement of Jesus from the cross in John 19:30 — “It is finished.” We shouldn’t need a reminder of this fact, but here we have two reminders: **Jesus never fails in what he sets out to accomplish!** The premillennialists would do very well to make note of that fact. Why? Because they falsely teach that Jesus came to this earth to establish his kingdom, but he failed to do so and instead set up the church. We have discussed that false doctrine before, and we could spend many weeks studying it, **but do we really need to look any further at a doctrine to know it is false when that doctrine is based on the idea that Jesus failed to do something that he set out to accomplish?** Is there really a need to study their doctrine further after we hear the words “Jesus failed” come from their lips? I don’t know about you, but that’s when I change the channel!

In verse 6 we see another promise: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.” This promise reminds us of many verses, one of which we looked at in our study of the book of Zechariah.

***Zechariah 13:1** — In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.*

***Jeremiah 2:13** — For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

***John 4:14** — But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

***John 7:38** — He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Are we looking at the end of the world here? Again, I ask, how could we be? Will this invitation to the thirsty to drink from the fountain of life remain available after the end of the world? John 4:14 tells us that those who partake

of this water “shall never thirst” (which is yet another **spiritual** blessing). What that means is that the thirsty in verse 6 have not yet partaken of this water, and yet verse 6 is an invitation for them to do so. Will there be such an invitation after the word has come to an end? No, there will not. The door to heaven is open today for all who will enter, but on that last great day that door will close. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Verse 7 talks about he that overcometh and is another verse that comes full circle back to beginning of the book.

Revelation 2:7 — *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

Revelation 2:11 — *He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

Revelation 2:17 — *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

Revelation 2:26 — *And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:*

Revelation 3:5 — *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

Revelation 3:12 — *Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*

Revelation 3:21 — *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

And now here in verse 7: “He that **overcometh** shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

If we had to reduce the message of Revelation down to a single word, what would that word be? Perhaps we might choose “victory,” and that would be a very good choice. But perhaps an even better choice would be this word: **Overcome!** As we said when we studied Chapters 2-3, those two chapters provide the all-important context for the vision that follows, and the message of Chapters 2-3 is overcome! The promises and the blessings in this book are for those who overcome, and the judgments in this book are for those who fail to overcome.

But Calvin says that once we are saved, we are always saved. And those who follow Calvin today say that man plays no role at all in his salvation. Is that what Jesus is saying here? Don't we see the command to overcome given seven times in Chapters 2 and 3? Don't we see the wonderful promises in those chapters reserved only for those who overcome? Calvin says we don't need to do anything; Christ says we need to overcome. What is our choice? **Calvin or Christ?** Calvin belongs in the same dustbin in which the faithful first century Christians placed Caesar. Whether the choice is between **Caesar or Christ** or between **Calvin and Christ** — that is no choice at all! “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And Calvin? What does the Bible say about him? “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9). If that verse does not apply to John Calvin, then it applies to no one.

Verse 7 is a promise to those who overcome. How do we overcome? John, writing by inspiration, answers that question.

1 John 5:4 — For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Revelation 12:11 — And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

How do we overcome? We overcome by faith in Christ. We overcome by the blood of Christ. We overcome by the word of Christ. We overcome by faithfulness to Christ unto death.

Verse 8 is for those who fail to overcome. Verse 7 tells us the blessings awaiting those who overcome. Verse 8 tells us what awaits those who fail to overcome: the second death. Again we have come full circle back to the beginning of the book.

Revelation 2:11 — *He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

Verse 8 gives us the other side of that coin: he that overcometh **not** shall be hurt of the second death. And sadly from the descriptions in verse 8 we can see that this group includes both the persecuting Romans as well as the persecuted Christians who proved faithless in the end and failed to overcome. I think that fact is clearer from the ESV than it is from the KJV. Where the KJV has “fearful and unbelieving” in verse 8, the ESV has “cowardly and faithless.” This list begins, not with the Romans, but with the Christians who proved to be cowardly and faithless. They suffer the same fate as the murderers, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and the liars, which describe the Romans who worshipped Caesar and lied about and murdered the saints. Yes, these Christians saved their physical lives, but they lost their spiritual lives.

Mark 8:35 — *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*

Let's pause for a moment here to ask a difficult question. What can we say about those Christians who renounced Christ under severe torture and threat of death, their own and perhaps also that of their family? Does it seem fair that they will suffer the same fate as those who inflicted that torture? As I said, it is a difficult question, but let's make a few observations about it.

First, anytime we are tempted to tell God that he is not being fair, we need to remember his response to that same accusation in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 18:25 — *Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?*

We are the ones who are not fair, not God. “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

Second, God has promised his people that he will not lay on them a burden that is too heavy for them to bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 — There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Third, we need to remember that God is a loving, all-knowing judge. All throughout this book, we have been reminded that God loves his people and God knows what happens to his people. Yes, this is a difficult question, but we can trust the one who is in charge of answering that difficult question.

And fourth, however God deals with those who renounced Christ under torture, we need to be mindful of our responsibility in that regard. In the first century, those who stood up for Christ faced death and terrible hardship — what is our excuse if we, **facing none of that**, fail to stand up for Christ? Yes, some of those early Christians failed to overcome the **terrible boulder** that was placed in their path. But what can be said for us if we fail to overcome the **pebble** that is placed in our path?

Revelation 21:9

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

In verse 9, we once again see one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls of God's wrath that were poured out on Rome. Why do we see this angel here? This angel is a **connection** between what we are seeing here and what we saw before. This angel is a **reminder** of what we have seen before. In short, this angel appears so that we will know that what we are seeing here in Chapter 21 is occurring because of what we saw in the previous chapters. If we are tempted to think that perhaps the first part of the book was about the first century but the end of the book is about the end of the world, we need to think about this angel.

What is this angle about to show us? Is he about to show us heaven? No. The angel tells us what we are about to see — “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” We are about to see the victorious church!

That’s **what** we are seeing, but **when** are we seeing it? Are we about to see the church in heaven after the final judgment of the world, or are we about to see the church back on earth safe and sound after the judgment of Rome?

Didn’t verse 2 already answer that question? There John “saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” We will see that same statement again in verse 10. Not only are we not looking at heaven in these verses, but we are not looking at the church in heaven in these verses. We are seeing the church “coming down out of heaven” to a world made new after God’s judgment of Rome.

And, again, that’s not me saying that — that’s verse 2 and verse 10 saying that. And the angel that we see here in verse 9 stresses the connection between the judgement of Rome in the earlier chapters and the description of the church in this chapter.

Revelation 21:10-14

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; 12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve

foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

As we just said, verse 10 repeats the description we saw in verse 2. John is not seeing heaven, but rather John is seeing something coming down from heaven. That something can only be the church. What else is the holy Jerusalem from God? What else is the bride of the Lamb? What else is the holy city? What else would we expect to see in Chapter 21 having studied the previous twenty chapters?

Where in the Bible is the most beautiful description of the Lord's church? Is it in **Daniel 2**, where we read about the eternal kingdom that sweeps away the kingdoms of the earth? Is it in **Isaiah 2**, where we read about the house of God established on the mountains to which all nations are drawn? Is it in **Joel 2**, where the establishment of the church is described as the great and awesome day of the Lord? Is it in **Ezekiel 40**, where the church is described as a huge temple constructed according to the pattern of God? Is it in **Matthew 13**, where Jesus gave us the parables of the kingdom? Is it in **Matthew 16**, where Jesus promised to build his church? Is it in **Acts 2**, where we read a firsthand account of the church's establishment? Is it in **Ephesians 2**, where Paul tells us about the peace in the church between Jew and Gentile? Is it in **Ephesians 5**, where Paul beautifully describes Jesus' love for his church as a husband's love for his bride? Is it in **Hebrews 12**, where the church is described as the city of the living God?

Each of these is beautiful, but none of these would be my choice for the most beautiful description of the church. Instead, I would turn immediately to the concluding two chapters of Revelation that we are now studying. In my opinion, the description we are studying here is the most beautiful description of the Lord's church found anywhere in the Scriptures.

This beautiful description that begins in verse 11 is **not** a beautiful description of heaven but rather is a beautiful description of the church. Could some of these descriptions apply to heaven or to the church in heaven? Certainly, **some** of them could, but I think we will see that not all of the could. As we said earlier, heaven is beautiful for the same reason the church is beautiful — because God dwells there. And the church will be just as beautiful in heaven as it is on earth. But what the **text** tells us is that we are seeing the church on earth, and

what the **time frame** tells us is that we are seeing the church on earth shortly after this book was written.

As we mentioned last week, the Old Testament ends with a curse in Malachi 4:6. The New Testament by contrast ends with a beautiful description of the Lord's church, the holy city of God in which God is at last able to once again dwell with men as he did in the Garden before the Fall. The final chapters of Revelation are the perfect ending to the story of reconciliation that began with the opening chapters of Genesis.

So what does this beautiful description tell us about the church? Verse 11 tells us that the church has the glory of God. Verse 11 tells us that the church has a light like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Verse 12 tells us that the church has a great high wall with **twelve** gates and **twelve** angels, with the names of the **twelve** tribes of Israel on the twelve gates, and verse 13 tells us that there are three gates on each side. Verse 14 tells us that the wall has **twelve** foundations with the names of the **twelve** apostles of the Lamb.

Twelve gates. Twelve angels. Twelve tribes. Twelve foundations. Twelve apostles. Do you think the text is trying to tell us something here? I do! And we all know what it is! Twelve is the symbolic number for the people of God! How anyone could possibly read this description and not see the symbolic use of numbers in this book is completely beyond me! What we are seeing here is a description of the people of God, which is the church.

Lesson 51

Last week we read verses 10-14, which give us a beautiful description of the church. What does that beautiful description tell us about the church? Verse 11 tells us that the church has the glory of God. Verse 11 tells us that the church has a light like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Verse 12 tells us that the church has a great high wall with twelve gates and twelve angels, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the twelve gates, and verse 13 tells us that there are three gates on each side. Verse 14 tells us that the wall has twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

We ended class last week with a question. Does this description fit with what the rest of the Bible has to say about the church? Yes, it does.

***Ephesians 2:19-22** — Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

***Ephesians 3:21** — Unto him be **glory in the church** by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.*

Ephesians 5:27** — That he might present it to himself a **glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

***Colossians 1:12-13** — Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us **from the power of darkness**, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

1 Timothy 3:15 — *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Hebrews 12:28 — *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*

What the description here in Chapter 21 is telling us about the church is what those verses tell us about the church. The church shows the glory of God. The church is the kingdom of light. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The church has a strong foundation and cannot be moved.

What do the great high walls in verse 12 tell us about the church? They tell us that the church is protected by God. They tell us that the church can rest secure in the promises of God.

What do the twelve gates tell us about the church? They tell us that people can enter the kingdom of God, which we know happens when they obey the gospel and are added by God to the church (Acts 2). But they also tell us that people can leave the kingdom of God if they prove faithless and have their names blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 2-3).

What do the names of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles tell us about the church? They tell us that the church consists of the faithful people of God, both those who were faithful under the new covenant and those who were faithful under the old covenant (Ephesians 2).

Why are we told that each of the four sides has three gates? That description emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the number twelve, which is three times four. Three is the symbolic number for God, and four is the symbolic number for God's creation. The symbolic number for the **new creation** of God is thus three times four, which is twelve.

Were these descriptions true of the church only after the judgment of Rome? Of course not! The verses we just read show us that. These descriptions of the church have been true of the church from the day the church was established in Acts 2 and will remain true of the church through the great day when Jesus delivers the kingdom to God at the end of the world. There has never been a day since Acts 2 when the church was not the glorious kingdom of Christ built on a firm foundation.

The question we should ask is not whether these descriptions were true of the church during the Roman persecution, but rather we should ask whether the suffering persecuted first century church saw the church in this way. And we could also ask ourselves whether we see the church in this way! Do we? Did they? God wants us to see the church as he sees the church, which is to say that God wants us to see the church as it really is. And that is so important that that is how God ends the New Testament!

And, in my opinion, there has never been a time in the history of the church when it has been more difficult for the people of God to see the church as it really is than it is today. Yes, it was difficult in the first century, but in the first century the church was not surrounded on all sides by creations of men calling themselves churches! By one estimate there are nearly four hundred thousand such religious groups in the United States alone — each of them calling itself a church! We saw earlier a prophecy that Satan would regroup and try again after his defeat with Rome. Don't we see evidence of that all around us today? We know that this religious confusion has **not** been caused by God (1 Corinthians 14:33).

So how do we fight that confusion? How do we overcome Satan's attack? The same way the first century church did — by faith in God. Faith is the victory! And one way we demonstrate our faith in God is to see the church as God sees the church — to believe what God tells us about the church. If we see the church as just another denomination on a block filled with denominations, then faith will not be the victory for us. If we see the church as a footnote in history that is buffeted about by the kingdoms of men, then faith will not be the victory for us. If we see the church as weak and powerless, then faith will not be the victory for us.

What did Satan do the very first time we met him? He put the word "not" before something God had said. In Genesis 2:17, God said "thou shalt surely die." In Genesis 3:4, Satan said "ye shall **not** surely die." Satan is still doing the exact same thing today. God is telling us right here what the church is like. Satan is telling us that the church is **not** like that. **Will we believe God or Satan?** That was the question in Genesis 3, that is the question in Revelation 21, and that remains the question today. The very first step for the church to be effective in the world is for the church to see itself as it really is. Is it any wonder that Satan is trying so hard for us **not** see to ourselves as we really are?

Revelation 21:15-21

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. 17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. 18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. 19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; 20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

“In the land of endless day lies the city four-square; it shall never pass away and there is no night there.” That’s a well known hymn about heaven, but is the city foursquare in verse 16 heaven? We know it is not. In fact, we know it is not the church in heaven. Verse 2 tells us what we are seeing here — we are

seeing the holy city **coming down** from God **out of heaven**; we are seeing the church here on earth.

Will these beautiful descriptions be true of the church after the world has come to an end and Jesus has delivered the kingdom to God the Father? Yes. I think most of these descriptions will always be true of the church, whenever and wherever it is. But — and here is the key point — these beautiful descriptions apply to the church right here and right now!

Right here and right now we are the holy city of God, the new Jerusalem. Right here and right now, we are enjoying all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Right here and right now, we are the beautiful city foursquare. If we don't see ourselves that way, then we are suffering under the same misconceptions about the church that many of the suffering first century Christians seem to have had. And the cure? It is the same in each case — pick up and read the word of God! Let God tell us what the church is like!

Why is the city measured in verse 15? This measuring is based on Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40-43. In that vision, the temple was carefully measured to stress its holiness and its separation from that which is common.

***Ezekiel 42:20** — He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.*

Earlier, in Revelation 11, we saw the temple measured for the same reason.

***Revelation 11:1** — And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.*

The church is measured again here in Chapter 21 for the same reason — to stress its separation and its holiness.

***2 Corinthians 6:17** — Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

This part of the description should cause us to pause and meditate on what this means. God not only knows his church and loves his church, but God measures his church. **Do we measure up?** That is the question for the church of every age.

What are the measurements? Here we see some of the most beautiful and profound symbols in this book that is full of symbols.

First, we see that the holy city, the church, is a perfect cube — twelve thousand by twelve thousand by twelve thousand furlongs. There we see the symbol for God (the three dimensions of the cube), the symbol for God's people (twelve), and the symbol for completeness (one thousand). It is hard to understand how anyone could think that these measurements are literal: twelve thousand furlongs is about fifteen hundred miles! What that means is that the **height** of this city would be about the distance from Houston to Boston! I would hate to get stuck in that elevator! But, of course, we know that these numbers are not literal. We have studied the previous twenty chapters in this beautiful book, and we know that these numbers are symbolic, and we also know the symbols! This city contains all of the people of God! Twelve thousand by twelve thousand by twelve thousand! This city is the church!

Verse 17 tells us that the walls surrounding the city are 144 cubits high, which is about two hundred feet. We recognize the symbol number 144, which is twelve times twelve. We saw that same symbol used earlier when the church was described as the 144,000. The appearance of the two twelves may point to those in the church who lived faithfully under the old covenant combined with those in the church who live faithfully under the new covenant.

What is meant by the phrase at the end of verse 17: “according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.” That is a difficult phrase, but Hailey may have the right answer:

The measure “according to a man, that is, of an angel,” is that it is a measure understood by man, one in common use by men, but in the hands of an angel.

Perhaps the verse is here simply to let us know that we are not seeing here the giant angel of Revelation 10, but rather we are seeing here an angel the same size as a man, and so the measurements made by the angel are the same type of measurements that a man would make.

That's possibly all that is intended by this phrase, but I think there is something else here as well. There may also be a reference back to Revelation 13:8 where we saw a similar phrase — “the number of a man.” There the focus was on Caesar and his false man-made religion. But was man himself the problem? Could there be no redemption for man? No. The problem was not man; the problem was sin. And so perhaps this verse is reminding us that men are in

the church just as men were in Rome. This angel is not using some heavenly system of measurement; he is using man's system of measurement. Why? Because men are in the church. The same men who persecuted the church could, if they repented and obeyed the gospel, find themselves in the church they were persecuting. It happened to Paul; it could happen to others as well. I think the end of verse 17 is reminding us that the church consists of people — ordinary people who have been set free by the blood of Christ.

Verse 18 tells us that the wall is made of jasper and that the city itself is made of pure gold that was like clear glass. Verses 19 and 20 tell us about the twelve foundations of the great city — each is made with a different precious jewel. Verse 21 tells us that the twelve gates of the city are made of pearl, and the streets of the city of made of pure gold like transparent glass.

Before we go any further, just stop for a moment and think about what such a city would look like. A giant cube of solid gold fifteen hundred miles in every direction glittering like glass and displaying every precious jewel.

It has been said that that which we dissect, we kill. And that would certainly be the case if we were to launch in to some type of word study on each of these precious jewels! We are not intended to do that. The symbol is the great city itself. The gold, the jewels, and the pearls are all just intended to stress the tremendous beauty of that great city.

Is this great city heaven? No. And that's not me saying that, that's verse 2 saying that. And that's all of these beautiful symbols for the church telling us that. These verses are describing the holy city of God, the new Jerusalem, as it celebrates its victory over Rome — the same victory that Daniel prophesied about in Daniel 2. The number twelve appears in every measurement — this city contains the people of God. This city is the church! **John is not describing a place; John is describing a people!**

So now let's go back and ask one more time the same question that we have asked over and over again in our study of this book — how does God see the church? When God looks down at this earth and sees the kingdoms of men churning like the restless waves of the ocean, how does God see the kingdom of his dear Son? Now, at last, we have the answer, and what an answer it is! When God looks down at this earth, he sees his church as a huge golden city with streets of gold and glittering with every sort of precious jewel!

Is that how we see the church? That's the real question. Do we see the church the same way that God sees the church? We don't if we think all of these beau-

tiful descriptions apply only to the church's final home in heaven rather than to the church itself whenever and wherever it is.

Yes, we are blessed here to have a beautiful building in which to worship — but the people inside this building are infinitely more beautiful than the brick and mortar that surrounds us. We are the city foursquare! We are the beautiful city of gold with streets of gold! That is how God sees us — and if that is how God sees us, then that is what we are!

Do we see ourselves as God sees us? Do we truly understand how **beautiful** the church is? Do we truly understand how **important** the church is? We often say that Revelation shows us things we can't see (heaven) in terms of things we can understand (golden streets), but is that really what it happening here? If these chapters are describing the church, then isn't God really describing something we **can** see (the church) — but isn't God then telling us that we are not seeing it as it really is! Isn't God telling us that we are not seeing the church as the beautiful, golden city of God that it is. These chapters are giving us God's view of his church — and if that view is not our view, then we need to change our view!

Why did God end the Bible with a description of the church? Perhaps because God knew that how we see ourselves in this world is the key to our effectiveness in this world. If we think the church is powerless against the great tides of history, then won't we be powerless? If we think the church just blends in with the worldly philosophies of the day, then won't we just blend in? If we think the great works of man are more attractive and more beautiful than the church, then won't we begin to doubt the relevance of the message we are proclaiming? But what if instead we see the church as God sees the church? What if we see the church for what it is — the most beautiful, most important, most relevant, most powerful organization on earth, unique and different from everything else on this earth? Won't that view change us? Perhaps that is why God ended the New Testament with a description of the church.

Revelation 21:22-27

22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. 23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did

lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. 24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. 27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Are we still looking at the church, or are we looking at heaven? And if we are looking at the church, are we looking at the church whenever and wherever, or are we looking at the church in heaven? I think verses 2 and 10 should answer those questions, but let's look at the text here in verses 22-27 and let these verses answer those questions.

Verse 23 confirms we are still looking at a city, and we have seen only two cities in this book — the city of Christ and the city of Caesar. The city of Caesar is no more, which means the only city left is the city of Christ, which is the church.

Verse 22 tells us that there is no temple in this city because God and the Lamb are the temple. What does that mean?

In the Old Testament the temple stressed the separation between God and man. God lived in the inner sanctuary where only the High Priest could enter. But in this city, God dwells with his people. In this city, there is no separation between God and man. In this city, every citizen has direct access to God through Jesus.

Is that true of the church right here and right now? Absolutely.

Hebrews 4:16 — Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:19 — *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.*

Ephesians 3:12 — *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

Will we enjoy those blessings in a different manner someday? Yes. Paul wrote of these blessings and yet he looked forward to the day when he would depart this life to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23). And yet, saying that we will enjoy these blessings differently someday does not change the fact that we are enjoying these blessings today. We have **boldness** and **access** (Ephesians 3:12).

Verse 23 tells us something else about this city — it has no need of the sun or the moon because the glory of God and the Lamb provide all of the light.

Isaiah uses very similar language to describe, not the end of the world, but the coming of Christ and his kingdom.

Isaiah 60:1-3 — *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

Isaiah 60:19-20 — *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

Is this true of the church here and now? Do we get all of our light from God and the Lamb?

2 Corinthians 4:6 — *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 5:8 — *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*

Ephesians 5:14 — *Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

Colossians 1:12-13 — *Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

James 1:17 — *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

1 John 1:5 — *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

The church is enjoying the blessing of verse 23 right here and right now. Will we enjoy them differently someday? Yes. But that doesn't mean we aren't also enjoying those blessings right here and right now. God "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Verse 24 tells us that the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of this city, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into the city. What does that mean?

First, we should note that this description is not surprising given what we have seen earlier in this chapter. This great city has been described figuratively as a huge golden cube stretching fifteen hundred miles in every direction. Do you think something like that might attract some attention? I think we will all agree that it would attract a great deal of attention! We may sometimes see the church as obscure and overlooked, but that is not at all how God sees the church! It is not God's desire that his church be obscure and hidden.

Matthew 5:14 — *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

The Lord's church is that city set on a hill! And it is that city that we are reading about here in Revelation 21. And what does Jesus say about us? We "cannot be hid!"

God's view of the church and God's mission for the church is to be a beautiful golden city that reflects his glory and gives light to a lost and dying world — and nowhere is that message and that mission stated any more clearly than it is right here in these verses from Revelation 21. The church is the light of the world, but not with our own light. Instead, the church reflects the glory of God, and all nations flow to the church because of that glorious light.

Isn't this precisely what the great prophecy from Isaiah 2 says about the church?

Isaiah 2:2 — And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

But what does verse 24 mean when it says that nations shall walk in the light of the city, and the kings will bring their glory and honor into the city? It means just what Matthew 5:14 means — it means that the church is the light of this world. There is no other light in this world. And it means that Jesus, the head of the church, is worthy "to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). Jesus does not come to nations and to kings; nations and kings come to Jesus. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

And, again, this is not a description of the church in the by and by; this is a description of the church in the here and now. In fact, does this part of the description even make sense if we tried to apply it to the end of the world? The church is the light of the world now, but will the church be the light of the world after this world is destroyed? And who are these kings of the earth and who are these nations if this is a description of the church after the end of the world?

And while we are on that topic, look at verse 25: "And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there." **The gates of this city are wide open!** Will that be true of the church after the end of time? If so, who will be coming in, and who will be leaving? I don't think there will be any need for the gates of the church to remain open after the end of time.

We quoted Isaiah 60 earlier with regard to the coming of Christ. That same chapter also uses the same language we see here.

Isaiah 60:11 — Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.

Yes, those gates are open while the church is on this earth fulfilling the great commission, but will that still be true after the kingdom has been delivered to God and the earth has been destroyed?

Why are these gates open in verse 25? Verse 25 tells us — because there is no night there. The gates of a city were closed at night for security reasons. That is not necessary for the church because it is never night time in the church. God and the Lamb are always there, and they always provide light.

Verse 26 explains that the glory and the honor from verse 24 enter the city through these gates. Verse 21 told us that there are twelve gates and that each is made of pearl. Of course, these descriptions of the church are figurative. They describe the great beauty of the church, and they describe the glory and honor that enters the church for God and the Lamb.

Ephesians 3:21 — Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

The first half of verse 27 tells us what will not enter this city. It tells us what will not come in through these gates. And what is it that will not enter in? “Any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.”

What does that mean? We know what that means! Only those who have been made clean by the blood of Christ are allowed to enter this city. No one enters this city until he has followed the command of Acts 22:16 to be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. The church is the body of Christ. People are added to the church when they are saved (Acts 2:47). If you have been saved, then you are in the Lord’s church. If you are not in the Lord’s church, it is because you are not saved. Those outside the Lord’s church are unclean; those inside the Lord’s church have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. The gates of this city are open — but you can enter those gates only after being cleansed by the blood of Christ.

And, yes, these gates are wide open now, but one day those gates will swing shut. One day there will no longer be an opportunity for anyone to enter. And

yet in verse 24 we see the kings of the earth entering the city — will that be possible after the end of the world?

What am I saying? What I am saying is that most of the descriptions of the church that we have seen could apply to the church here on earth or to the church in heaven after the end of the world — but not all of these descriptions can describe both. I think the descriptions in verses 24-26 apply to the church on earth, but I don't see how those descriptions can apply to the church in heaven after this earth has been destroyed. After all, who are the "kings of the earth" in verse 24 if there is no earth?

The final phrase in verse 27 tells us who can enter this city — "they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." That's the book you want your name to be in! God knows those who are his, and their names are recorded in that book. If I am in the church but I fall away from Christ, what happens? Revelation 3:5 tells me that my name will be blotted out of this book — and verse 27 right here tells me that I will no longer be allowed to remain in this city; I will no longer be a part of the church. Yes, I can be restored, but until that happens verse 27 tells me that I am not in the church anymore. There are no lost people in the body of Christ!

So what have we seen in Chapter 21? This chapter has shown us the triumphant and victorious church on earth. The church shines among the nations and brings light to those living outside in darkness. The nations are drawn to it by the light that it casts. That description of the church will continue through the first five verses of Chapter 22.

Lesson 52

Chapter 22

Revelation 22:1-2

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The beautiful description of the church that we saw in Chapter 21 continues in the opening verses of Chapter 22. And the first thing we see is “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” What does that depict?

Water is a common symbol for the blessings of God. Think of Psalm 23, for example: “he leadeth me beside the still waters.” We have also seen water used this way before in this book.

Revelation 7:17 — For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.

That verse was showing us the victorious church, and the victorious church is also what we are seeing here in the opening verses of Chapter 22. Why is the church victorious? The church is victorious because the church is saved. The church is the body of the saved. The water of life in verse 1 and the living

fountains of waters in Chapter 7 are pointing at the same thing — the salvation that comes only through Christ. It is the same water that Jesus told us about.

John 4:14 — *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

John 7:37-38 — *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

The water in verse 1 is the **water of salvation**, and it flows from the throne of God. That water is spiritual water, but salvation also involves physical water.

Men may try to separate salvation from water, but the Bible says otherwise. Ephesians 4:5 tells us that there is one baptism, and Acts 8:36 confirms that that one baptism is water baptism. And 1 Peter 3:21 tells us what that one baptism does — “baptism doth also now save us.” Men try to complicate that message, but there is nothing complicated about it. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). That is about as simple as it gets. The question is not whether men can understand it. The question is whether they will believe it and obey it. And sadly many do not and will not. Here in verse 1 we see the water of salvation.

Is verse 1 a blessing the church enjoys here and now? Absolutely! The church is the pure unblemished bride of Christ washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. We have been sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:27). We have been saved “by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). But we’re not saved by works, and baptism is a work! Really? That’s not what the Bible says. Look at the entirety of the verse from Titus 3 that I just quoted.

Titus 3:5 — *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

We are not saved by our works of righteousness (Titus 3:5), but we are saved by the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). Is that really so hard to understand? Who will we believe? Christ or Calvin? “Baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter

3:21). That's not me saying that; that's God saying that. We have already seen how a sea of water is used to depict separation from God. Is it then surprising that we must pass through water to be reconciled to God?

The water of life is available today to all who will drink of it — and the church is cleansed by the blood of Christ because those in the church have partaken of that living water. That is why those in the church do not thirst (John 4:14).

Has the church always enjoyed this blessing? Yes, absolutely! Listen to the prophet Joel.

***Joel 3:18** — And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim.*

And that blessing has been enjoyed by the church since the day the church was established. How do we know that? Because Peter quotes Joel's prophecy in Acts 2:16 and says, "this is that!" The church has enjoyed these blessings from the day of its establishment.

In verse 2 we see the tree of life on each side of the river of life. This tree of life has twelve types of fruit, and the fruit is yielded every month — which means the twelve types of fruit are gathered twelve times a year. If we had any doubts that we are reading here about the people of God, this repeated use of the symbolic number twelve should dispel those doubts.

First we saw the river of life, and now we see the tree of life. There is a wonderful promise of **life** here to the first century church that was daily facing death for Jesus's sake. And it is also a wonderful promise of life to the church today. We today live in a culture of death, from the abortion industry to our blood-soaked entertainment industry. We stand apart from this world and show our distinctiveness when we proclaim a message of life to a world of death. The gospel we proclaim is the only pathway to life eternal.

John 5:24** — Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; **but is passed from death unto life.

What does this tree of life represent? This tree provides nourishment for God's people just as the original tree of life did the same thing in the garden. Because

of sin, man was cast out of the garden so that he could not partake of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22). But here we see that tree of life available once again. Why? What has changed? What has changed is that man has been reconciled to God — not **will be** reconciled to God, but **has been** reconciled to God.

***Romans 5:10** — For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

***2 Corinthians 5:17-18** — And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

***Ephesians 2:16** — And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*

We are awaiting many blessings, but our reconciliation to God is not one of them. We already have that blessing. We are enjoying that blessing right here and right now in the church. And because we are reconciled to God, the tree of life is once again available to us just as it was in the garden. And that is not a blessing just for the church in heaven; that is also a blessing for the church right here and right now.

So is this tree of life just for us? No. Verse 2 tells us that it is “for the healing of the nations.” This tree of life is available to all who will hear and obey the gospel of Christ and be healed. As we saw with some of the earlier descriptions, the end of verse 2 seems very difficult to explain if we say that it is happening after the end of the world. If the earth has been destroyed, who are these nations that need healing? I don’t think we are seeing the church in heaven after the earth has been destroyed — I think we are seeing the church right here and right now as it proclaims the gospel to the nations of this world in desperate need of healing.

And let’s think about the end of verse 2 for just a moment. I think we would all agree that the world is in a mess today, and although that condition is hardly new, it does seem that things are worse today than they have been in a very long time. And I don’t just mean this year — I mean our generation and

that of our parents and grandparents. I don't think there has been a more blood-soaked century in the history of mankind than the twentieth century, and this next century is not starting out much better. Greed, immorality, drunkenness, godlessness. We see it all around us. What is the solution? What is the cure? What do the nations of this world need? Verse 2 — they need the healing that can come only from God and the Lamb. They need the gospel. **We will never solve the problems of this world through the wisdom of man — never.** The only way to solve the problems of this world is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the only way that the nations will ever find the healing that they need.

Revelation 22:3-5

3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: 4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. 5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The beautiful description of the church continues in verses 3-5. Verse 3 tells us there shall be no more curse. What does that mean? We saw something similar in our study of Zechariah.

Zechariah 8:13 — And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

There God promised to turn a curse into a blessing, and God does that in the church. How? How did Jesus turn our curse into a blessing? Listen as Paul answers that question.

Galatians 3:13 — *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, **being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.***

Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. What does that mean? That means exactly what verse 3 here says it means — there shall be no more curse! There is no curse in the church! And once again, that is not a blessing just for the church in heaven, that is a blessing that the church is enjoying right here and right now.

Verse 3 also tells us that the throne of God and of the Lamb is in this city. And again, we know that this is also true of the church today. God dwells with his people in the church (Ephesians 2:22), and the church is the eternal **kingdom!** God and the Lamb reign over the entire universe in the eternal kingdom. That is the picture we are seeing here in verse 3, and that is true of the church right here and right now.

But doesn't Hebrews 8:1 tell us that Jesus "is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens"? Doesn't that mean that Jesus is reigning from heaven rather than reigning from the church? No. We don't have to make that choice. Both can be true, and both are true. How can Jesus not be reigning from his eternal **kingdom**, the church? Again, we are looking at the spiritual blessings enjoyed by the church, and one such blessing is that Jesus dwells with his people in the church (Matthew 18:20). And as for Jesus reigning in heaven, isn't that exactly where Paul tells us we are **spiritually** located right here and right now?

Colossians 3:1-4 — *If ye then be risen with Christ, **seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.** Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. **For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.** When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

So yes, Jesus reigns in heaven at the right hand of God, but Jesus also reigns in his eternal kingdom, the church. And we reign with him in life (Romans 5:17).

Verse 3 ends with a description of God's faithful people — "and his servants shall serve him." We in the church are the servants of Christ (Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:24), and again that is something we are right here and right now.

Verse 4 says that those in this city “shall see his face.” Two questions — what does that mean, and whose face? Is this the face of God or the face of the Lamb? Again, I don’t think we have to choose. Just as verse 3 mentions the **throne** of God and of the Lamb, I think verse 4 is describing the **face** of God and of the Lamb. Just as the **throne** of God and of the Lamb depicts the **reign** of God and of the Lamb, I think the **face** of God and of the Lamb depicts the **proximity** of God and of the Lamb. God and the Lamb dwell in the church and are near to their people. “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). “In whom we have **boldness** and **access** with confidence by the faith of him” (Ephesians 3:12). We have boldness and access!

The church is not like an earthly kingdom where someone wanting to see the king would have to look at a coin or a statue. In the eternal kingdom the king is dwelling right among his people; so close we can see him. And, of course, this is **spiritually** true of the church right here and right now. The church is a royal priesthood, and as priests we have direct access to the throne. In fact, Hebrews 4:16 says that we may **boldly** approach the throne of grace. Every Christian has the same access to God as the High Priest had under the old covenant. In fact, we have more access — we may boldly approach the throne at any time whereas the High Priest could only enter the holy of holies once a year and did not do so with boldness.

Of course, we know that this description is describing a **spiritual** blessing, just as all of the other descriptions we have seen here. Physically, no man hath seen God at any time (1 John 4:12). And yet those who saw the Word made flesh spiritually saw God the Father — “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). And likewise today, we can spiritually see God the Father through his word — “for now we see through a glass, darkly; **but then face to face**: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Those in the church have spiritual eyesight, and with our spiritual eyes we can see God the Father. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Verse 4 also tells us that “his name shall be in their foreheads.” Whose name? This is the same answer we had for the questions whose throne and whose face. This is the name of God and of the Lamb. Just as the **throne** of God and of the Lamb showed their **reign**, and just as the **face** of God and of the Lamb showed their **proximity**, so the **name** of God and of the Lamb shows their **ownership**. We are not our own; we were bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We have seen this symbol before. In Revelation 7:3 the servants of God were sealed in their foreheads, and in Revelation 14:1 we see that the 144,000 (the church) had the Father's name written on their foreheads. And remember 2 Timothy 2:19 — “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, **having this seal**, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” God knows his people, and that beautiful truth is depicted in this book by God placing his name on his people. Just as we write our own name on things that we own and that are important to us and that we don't want to lose, so God writes his name on his people. Again, this can be true only of the church, and not just of the church in heaven. This is true of the church right here and right now as 2 Timothy 2:19 tell us.

The first half of verse 5 is very similar to verses 23 and 25 from the previous chapter that we have already looked at.

Revelation 21:23 — And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Revelation 21:25 — And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

Revelation 22:5 — And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light.

All that we said earlier about verses 23 and 25 applies equally to verse 5. We are the light of the world — a city that cannot be hid (Matthew 5:14). “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). And again, this is all true of the church right here and right now. Not only are we the light of this world, but we are the **only** light in this world. Those outside of the church are in the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13). But, of course, we are not the source of that light ourselves, but rather God “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). The church is the only light in a world filled with darkness. We, like Paul, are sent “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18). There is no night in the church — how could there ever be night with Jesus in our midst?

Finally, the end of verse 5 tells us that those in this city “shall reign for ever and ever.” Is that just a promise of a future reign or is that true of the church right here and right now? Are we reigning now? Yes. Romans 5:17 says that we reign **in life** through Jesus Christ, and Revelation 5:10 says that we are a king-

dom of priests who reign on earth. In 1 Peter 2:9, we are told that we are a royal priesthood. The church reigns with Christ now and forever! And notice that this reign doesn't end after a thousand years; this reign never ends. We shall reign for ever and ever!

What are we seeing in these verses? What we are seeing here is the triumphant, victorious church of Christ that reigns forever with Jesus. The message to the first century church was not "wait until the end of the world and then you will enjoy these blessings." The message to the first century church was that they were enjoying all of these spiritual blessings right here and right now — they just needed to open their eyes to that spiritual reality. Isn't that what Paul told us in Ephesians 1:3 — "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who hath* blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." That was the message of comfort the suffering first century church needed to hear, and that was the message they heard.

And isn't that a message of comfort that we also need to hear today? Yes, we are awaiting many wonderful blessings that will come our way after the end of time if we remain faithful unto death, but we also have many wonderful blessings in the church that we can enjoy right here and right now. Yes, physically we suffer, we weep, and we die — but not spiritually. Spiritually we have been made new; spiritually, we have no thirst, no pain, no tears, no death, and no night. Why? Because we are a new creature in Christ. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he *is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things *are become* new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is not something that will happen to us when we die or when we get to heaven. That is something that happened to us when we arose from the waters of baptism. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in *newness of life*" (Romans 6:4).

Revelation 22:6-7

6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. 7 Behold,

I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

Verse 6 begins the epilogue of the book (something that may have been much anticipated by some after fifty lessons!). How did the *prologue* in Chapter 1 of the book begin? The prologue began with a **time frame**.

***Revelation 1:1** — The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass.*

***Revelation 1:3** — Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for **the time is at hand**.*

And so how does the epilogue in Chapter 22 begin? The epilogue begins the same way, and with the exact same time frame!

***Revelation 22:6** — The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must **shortly** be done.*

And when we get to verse 10 and read that “the time is at hand,” we will see that the time frame is repeated twice in Chapter 22 just as it was in Chapter 1. Verses 6 and 10 in this final chapter should completely put to rest any idea that perhaps the time frame just applied to the beginning of the vision but not to the end. This time frame applies to the entire vision. No other time frame is given.

What can be said for any interpretation of this book that ignores these clear repeated statements? One must certainly work hard to misunderstand them! One must work hard not to notice them as God repeats the time frame over and over in this book! In fact, in any other context I don't think anyone would fail to understand them, but for some reason in this book they are almost universally ignored.

We see the time frame again in verse 7 — “behold, I come quickly.” The Greek word translated “shortly” in verse 6 and the Greek word translated “quickly” in verse 7 come from the same Greek root word. It is the same word we see earlier in the letters to the seven churches:

Revelation 2:16 — *Repent; or else I will come unto thee **quickly**, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Revelation 3:11 — *Behold, I come **quickly**: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

Now let's think about that for a moment. If the word "quickly" in those two verses was not fulfilled in the lifetime of those first century Christians, then what did those commands mean? "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly." "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast." What meaning would those commands have to those two first century churches if "quickly" meant two thousand years and counting? Those seven congregations aren't around anymore! Either Jesus came quickly while they were still around, or Jesus didn't come to them at all while they had a chance to repent or had an ability to hold fast their crown. On what basis can anyone argue that the word "quickly" in Chapters 1 and 22 has a different meaning than the same word used in Chapters 2 and 3?

But, some might say, the phrase "I come quickly" must refer to the second coming of Christ. Let's pause and put that objection to rest. There are at least three big problems with it.

First, in what sense can we say that Christ came "quickly" if he has not yet come after two thousand years? How is that quick? Yes, God views time differently than we do (2 Peter 3:8), but these time frame verses are not directed to God; they are directed to us. If God does not use words as they mean to us when God is speaking to us, then how are we to understand anything in the Bible? If we start down the road where when God says "quickly" he really means "centuries and centuries," then where else will that road lead us?

Second, some liberal commentators point to this verse and other similar verses to argue that the New Testament writers mistakenly thought Jesus was coming very soon. We need to be careful we don't contribute to that false view by misinterpreting statements such as the one we see here in verse 7. The inspired authors of the New Testament were not mistaken in anything they wrote. In fact, far from saying that Jesus was about about to appear again quickly, Paul said the opposite in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Third, the phrase "second coming of Christ" is found nowhere in the Bible. We often say that we should use Bible names for Bible topics, and I agree — and the phrase "second coming of Christ" would be a good place for us to start. Yes,

Jesus will appear again to claim his own and judge the world at the end of time, but nowhere in the Bible is that last great day called the “second coming of Christ.” Perhaps the closest we get to that is in Hebrews 9:28 — “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he **appear the second time** without sin unto salvation.” That is why I prefer to say the “second **appearance**” of Christ rather than the “second coming” of Christ. Or if we use the word “coming,” perhaps we should preface it with the word “literal.” Jesus **literally** came to this world the first time at his birth, and Jesus will **literally** come to this world (or, more precisely, in the sky above this world) at the end of all time. But, as we know from such passages as Matthew 24, Jesus has **figuratively** come in judgment at other times.

Does it matter what we call it? Yes, I think it does. When we use the phrase “second coming” we leave the false impression that every “coming” of Christ in the New Testament after Jesus’ birth must be the second coming, and that just isn’t true. The coming here in verse 7, for example, has a first century time frame and refers to Jesus’ coming in judgment against Rome — not a literal coming as will occur at the end of time, but a figurative coming in judgment. And, as I mentioned a moment ago, we find a second example in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:30 — *They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

That coming of Christ in Matthew 24:30 must have been a first century event. Why? Because of the time frame given just a few verses later.

Matthew 24:34 — *This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*

The coming of Christ in Matthew 24:30 was a figurative coming of Christ in judgment against Jerusalem. The coming of Christ in verse 7 is the same, except it is a coming against Rome rather than against Jerusalem. Just as Matthew 24:34 provides a first century time frame for the coming in judgment against Jerusalem, so do verses 6 and 10 in this chapter provide a first century time frame for the coming in judgment against Rome.

The Greek word translated “quickly” occurs four times in this chapter in verses 6, 7, 12, and 20! The Greek lexicons tell us that word means “pertaining to a point of time subsequent to another point of time (either an event in the discourse or the time of the discourse itself), with emphasis upon the rel-

actively brief interval between the two points of time” or simply “a very brief period of time.” The same Greek word occurs twice in Matthew 28:7-8.

***Matthew 28:7-8** — And go **quickly**, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed **quickly** from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.*

Is there any doubt what the word “quickly” means in that context? The same word also appears in John 11:28-29.

***John 11:28-29** — And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose **quickly**, and came unto him.*

Is there any doubt what the word “quickly” means in that context? The same inspired author wrote verses 6 and 7 in Revelation 22, using the same word! On what basis can anyone interpret the same word in John 11 and Revelation 22 in such a way that the two occurrences of the word have opposite meanings? Jesus said he was coming **quickly**. If that description by Jesus doesn’t match our understanding of this book, then let’s change our understanding of this book rather than change what Jesus said!

And for the many commentators out there who believe that these chapters apply to the end of time, let me ask them a question — **what could God have written here to convince you otherwise?** If using the word “quickly” four times in a single chapter doesn’t do it, then what would it have taken?

But that then leaves us with a question — in what sense did Jesus come quickly after this book was written? We already know the answer to that! Jesus came in judgment against the persecuting Romans who were murdering Christians and plundering the church. Was that a physical judgment of Rome? No, it was a spiritual judgment, just as the deliverance of the church was not a physical deliverance but was a spiritual deliverance for those who remained faithful unto death. But that judgment happened quickly just as Jesus repeatedly promised it would in this book.

For those keeping track, verse 7 is the sixth of the seven beatitudes in Revelation. “Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” What are those sayings that must be kept? We have seen many, but perhaps

the most pertinent such saying in this context is the one found in Revelation 2:10 — “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

One more comment about verses 6 and 7 — who is the speaker? And is there a different speaker in verse 7 than in verse 6? Some argue that the angel is speaking in verse 6 due to the third person reference to God. Others argue that God or Jesus is speaking in verse 7 due to the first person pronoun “I.” Others respond that in verse 7 an angel may simply be speaking on God’s behalf. In short, we don’t know for sure. Verses 6 and 7 in the original Greek are ambiguous with regard to the speaker’s identity.

People sometimes ask me why I don’t like the New International Version of the Bible, which I recently heard called the “Nearly Inspired Version!” My answer is that I don’t trust the NIV, and verse 6 right here is a prime example why. Verse 6 opens with the phrase “and **he** said unto me.” Who is **he**? The KJV just says “he.” The ESV just says “he.” The ASV just says “he.” The RSV just says “he.” The NRSV just says “he.” The NKJV just says “he.” The NAS just says “he.” And those translations are all correct. The original Greek does not identify the speaker beyond referring to him as “he.” A proper translation of that verse into English should do the same thing. If the original text is ambiguous in some regard, then a proper English translation should maintain that ambiguity so that the reader can resolve the ambiguity from the context.

The NIV does not do that. The NIV translation of verse 6 reads “The **angel** said to me.” The word “angel” is nowhere in the original Greek of verse 6, and yet there it is in the NIV’s translation of verse 6. A reader of the NIV would have no idea that the Greek permitted any other understanding of that verse. The Greek is ambiguous, but the NIV is not. The goal of a translation is **not** to remove ambiguity from the original text. The goal of a translation is to carry any ambiguities in the original text over into English so that the English translation is as close as possible to the meaning conveyed by the original text. A good translation acts like a sheet of glass between you and the original text. The NIV utterly and repeatedly fails in that goal, and that is why I never use it, and I why I don’t trust it.

Lesson 53

Revelation 22:8-9

8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. **9** Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

We saw something just like this back in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:10 — And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

So why, if John has been told just a bit earlier not to worship this angel, do we see John once again trying to worship an angel just a few chapters later? We looked at that question back in Chapter 19, and there we concluded that John is likely just overcome by all that he is seeing here. As we said earlier, perhaps the most surprising thing is that John did not fall down more often! Another possibility we considered is that John mistakenly thought this angel was Jesus, but we know that John knew Jesus very well and under normal circumstances would have recognized, but then these were not normal circumstances, so that remains another possibility.

But, for whatever reason, this event happens a second time, and once again God uses the event to teach a vital lesson — **worship God!** This book of Revelation has been filled with false gods and false worship. Christians were fac-

ing death because of their refusal to worship those false gods. A message that rings all throughout this book is that no created being is worthy of our worship — not even this wondrous angelic being. We must worship and serve the Creator rather than any creature (Romans 1:25).

Verse 9 is a beautiful verse. This wonderful angelic being describes himself as John's fellow servant, and as a fellow servant of the prophets, and as a fellow servant of those who keep the sayings in this book. It's that last part that to me is the really beautiful part — this wondrous angelic being is our fellow servant! We certainly don't know all that angels are commissioned by God to do in our world today, but one thing we know is that this angel is our fellow servant! This angel is working right along beside us to do the will of God.

And one more thing about verse 9 — those two words at the end are perhaps the primary theme of this entire book: worship God! When the choice is between Caesar and Christ, we choose Christ! When we are told to worship Caesar to maintain our position in the trade guild, we instead worship God! When we are told to renounce Christ or die, we instead worship Christ. We could have many lessons on true worship and false worship, but the most important fact about true worship is that true worship is worship of God. Everything else is false worship, be it worship of Caesar, worship of money, worship of pleasure, worship of ourself, or whatever. True worship is always worship of God and of God alone. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). The first step to true worship is to cast away our idols.

Revelation 22:10-15

10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. 11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. 12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work

shall be. 13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

In verse 10, we have the fourth of the four central time frame verses in this book. The first two time frame verses were in verses 1 and 3 of the opening chapter. The final two time frame verses are in verses 6 and 10 of this closing chapter.

Why do I spend so much time emphasizing these time frame verses? Because they are the key to properly interpreting the entire book. If we ignore the time frame of the prophecy (the first statement of which occurs in the very first verse of the book), then we have no hope of correctly understanding the prophecy.

When God says that something will happen, God almost always gives a time frame for when that thing will occur. The so-called prophecies of men are nothing like that. Many have heard of Nostradamus, for example. He was a French physician and astrologer who lived from 1503 to 1566 and who wrote many so-called prophecies, some of which his followers claim have been fulfilled in our own lifetimes. But when we look at his prophecies what we find our just vague statements that could be fulfilled in many different ways at many different times. On the few occasions when Nostradamus included a time frame, he was dead wrong in what he predicted. Only God can tell us what will happen in the future **and when it will happen!** If we ignore the time frames in this book, then we are in effect treating the prophecies in this book as others treat the prophecies of Nostradamus — just slide them along the time line of all human history and look for a match. That is not how the prophecies of God work!

Of the four central time frame verses in this book, this fourth one in verse 10 may be the most informative. Why? Because it includes a link back to another

book we have studied, the book of Daniel. Here in verse 10, John is told to **seal not** the prophecy because the time is at hand. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel received the exact **opposite** command regarding a vision that he had just received.

Daniel 8:26 — *And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore **shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.***

God tells John **not** to seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is near, but God tells Daniel to seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is many days later. Here is the key question: how long was the “many days” in Daniel 8? How long did it take for that prophecy to be fulfilled? The vision in Daniel 8 was received in 550 BC and was fulfilled in 164 BC. That means the “many days” in Daniel 8:26 was 386 years, and because its fulfillment was that far off, God told Daniel to seal up the vision. Here John is told the opposite. Why? Because the time is at hand.

So, with that background, here is our question: if Daniel was told to seal up a vision that would not occur for nearly four centuries, and if John on the other hand is told to **not** seal up his vision because the time of its fulfillment is at hand — then on what basis can we possibly conclude (as so many commentators do) that nothing in the book of Revelation has been fulfilled after two thousand years and counting? Does that make any sense at all?

I would say that that will be my final word on the time frames in this book — but I can't say that! We will see the time frame again in verse 12 and again in verse 20.

In verse 11, the speaker tells the wicked to continue in their wickedness — “he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” Why? The answer to that question is at the end of the previous verse — because the time is at hand! Their judgment is coming! The message to them is this: “Just keep it up! Your judgment is right around the corner!” Earlier we saw calls for repentance, but any Roman still hanging around until this final chapter is almost certainly so entrenched in his evil that he will never change, and so the message of repentance becomes instead a message of impending judgment. If they want to do more wickedness, then they had better hurry because their time is short! We see similar statements elsewhere in the Bible.

Matthew 13:15 — *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with*

their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Hebrews 10:26-27 — *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*

God is long suffering (Romans 2:4), but God is not forever suffering! At some point God determines that enough is enough, and the hammer of judgment falls. Rome has reached that point here.

Verse 11 ends with the opposite command to the faithful — they should continue in their faithfulness. Why? For the same reason — because the time is at hand. They will not have much longer to wait, but they must remain faithful unto death to receive their crown of life (Revelation 2:10). That is the reward in verse 12 — the same reward that was promised at the beginning of the book to those who remained faithful in the face of the terrible Roman persecution. They would receive a crown, while Rome received wrath and indignation. And when would this happen? Verse 12 also answers that question — it would happen quickly. And it did happen quickly. The command was not to remain faithful until the end of the world; the command was to remain faithful unto death.

At times we have had to wonder about whether the speaker is Jesus or an angel, but not here in verse 13. Only Jesus can say, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” And again, the book has come full circle back to Chapter 1.

Revelation 1:8 — *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

This book has a wonderful structure and is a unified whole, and don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise! From beginning to end, the book is proclaiming the same message.

The beatitude in verse 14 is the final beatitude in Revelation, and it is the seventh. The beautiful structure of this book is based on the number seven — the number for perfection.

In the KJV, verse 14 reads, “Blessed are they that do his commandments.” The ESV instead reads, “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” We know that both statements are true based on many other verses in the Bible, but the latter (I am told) has better textual support in the manuscripts, and so that is the one we will use here: “Blessed are those who wash their robes.”

So how then does one enter into this city, which is the church? One obtains the right to enter this city by *washing*. That is how one enters the gates of the church, just as Peter told us in Acts 2:38 on the very day the church was established. Some say we can just **think** our way into the church without actually doing anything, but that is not what the Bible says. Others say that we are either in the church or out of the church as predestined by God and there is not anything we can do to change our location, but that is not what the Bible says. The church is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), and we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27).

That’s who gets to enter into the church through the gates — the washed. Who must remain outside? The unwashed, which verse 15 describes as dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murders, idolaters, and liars. Those terms are all self-explanatory, except perhaps for the first one, dogs. Who are the dogs?

The word “dog” is used in the Bible for various kinds of evil people. In Deuteronomy 23:17–18, the word “dog” designates a male prostitute. In first-century Palestine, the word was used in reference to the heathen as it is used in Matthew 15. In Philippians 3:2 Paul applied the term to the Judaizing teachers. In short, being called a dog is not a compliment! Anyone in this group described in verse 15 needs to obey the gospel and enter the city of God while the gates remain open.

Revelation 22:16-17

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

This word of prophecy about the church has come from the head of the church, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). Jesus loves his church deeply, and that great love is on full display all throughout this final book of the Bible.

Jesus is “the root and the offspring of David.” Jesus is “the bright and morning star.” What that tells us is that Jesus is everything that Caesar is not. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true king. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true light. Jesus, not Caesar, is the true guide for our life. Jesus, not Caesar, is living!

And what do we see in verse 17? A wonderful three-fold invitation to come! This invitation is from the Spirit and from the bride, which is the church.

To whom is this invitation extended? It is extended to those who are thirsty and to “whosoever” will come. Two questions: First, who are these thirsty outside the church who are invited to obey the gospel and enter the church if (as some suggest) this is all happening at the end of the world? And second, what does the word “whosoever” say about the false Calvinistic notion that each person is predestined to heaven or hell without regard to what they do in this life? Unlike Calvin’s invitation, Jesus’ invitation is to **everyone**.

To what are the thirsty invited? They are invited to take the water of life freely. We know what that means!

John 4:14 — But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

That’s the same invitation we are seeing right here. This is the invitation to come to Christ and partake of the living water that only Christ can give. Only by partaking of that water can we never thirst again.

This book has ended with a beautiful description of the Lord’s church, and the most beautiful thing about it is that the gates are open! We can enter into the church and enjoy the blessings of that great city if we come to Christ and obey his word by being washed in the waters of baptism. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come!”

Revelation 22:18-19

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man

shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Tampering with the word of God is serious business. Those who add to the words in this book by teaching things in Christ's name that Christ never taught will find themselves sharing in the horrible plagues described in this book. And those who take away from the words in this book the parts they disagree with or the parts that don't fit with their theories will lose their share in the tree of life and in the holy city.

What? You mean the right to the tree of life can be taken away? Yes, and we have already seen that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 3:5). What does that tell us about the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved"? And one more thing — there is no clearer statement in the Bible than here that there are no lost people in the church. When people in the church fall away from Christ, God removes them from the church. That is what verse 19 says — "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, **and out of the holy city.**" There are no lost people in the church. The church is the body of the saved.

Verse 18 confirms something we have been saying all throughout our study of this book — the judgment in this book is a spiritual judgment. How does verse 18 confirm that? Verse 18 says that "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." The "end is near" crowd believes that the plagues in this book are physical judgments such as atomic bombs — does that make sense in light of verse 18? If I add something to God's word, will I have an atomic bomb dropped on me? If that were true, then atomic bombs would be going off all over the place! No, the plagues in this book are **not** physical plagues that can strike only a few people at a certain time. The plagues in this book are **spiritual** plagues that can strike anybody at anytime if that person is not faithful to Christ. Verse 18 tells me that they can strike me today if I start tampering with God's word!

Whenever I read verse 19 I think of the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* that was released in 1982. As its name suggests, the aim of that project was to remove the parts of the Bible that the editors of the *Reader's Digest* thought we did not need to read. The Old Testament was cut by 55% and the New Testament by 25%. Except for Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, every book in the Bible was condensed to some degree. (Apparently those four books were considered short enough already. I guess Obadiah had some fluff!) Up until recently, I had always wondered if verse 19 made its way into the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible*, but now I know the answer to that question because I bought a used copy of that book from Amazon.

What do you think? Is verse 19 in or out? Put yourself in the place of that editor who has spent weeks and weeks drawing a line through verse after verse in the Bible, and then right at the end he gets to verse 19 — “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Does he leave that verse in or strike it out? I can now report that he struck it out. The *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* deleted the verse that condemns the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible* — which I suppose is not too surprising. One thing we can say from this is that, although the NIV is a very poor translation of the Bible, it is not the worst!

But with all humor aside, let me ask a serious question — do we sometimes *effectively* use an abridged version of the Bible ourselves? Are there parts of the Bible we never study either because of neglect, or worse just because we don't much like what they say? There is more than one way to draw a line through a verse in the Bible! Let's be sure we study, live, and teach “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The Bible is not a cafeteria line where I am free to take the fried okra and leave the brussel sprouts behind!

Revelation 22:20-21

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

The book of Revelation ends with two things: a final encouragement for those suffering persecution and a final reminder of our time frame.

The church had nothing to fear from Rome. Jesus was coming quickly against Rome to bring vindication and judgment, and nothing would stand in his way — be it the mighty Roman empire or the modern commentator who believes it did not happen quickly!

Jesus said he was coming quickly, and Jesus did come quickly in judgment against Rome. God heard the prayer of his people in Revelation 6:10, and God answered that prayer. The kingdom of Rome is no more — swept away long ago by the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ just as Daniel had foretold! ***What a beautiful ending to a beautiful book!*** “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen!”

Conclusion

Now that we have reached the end of our study of this book, it might be helpful to review the five central themes we have seen.

Perhaps the most often repeated theme of the book is the question: ***Christ or Caesar?*** “Choose you this day whom ye will serve!” Will we save our life just to lose it, or will we die for Christ to gain life eternal? Will we bend the knee to Caesar to save our job, or will we remain faithful to Jesus? That was a choice that the first century church faced daily, and it is a choice that we face daily as well. The difference is that we (at least in this country) are not making that choice with a gun pointed at our head. We should look to the first century martyrs, remember the terrible trials they faced, and follow their example of remaining faithful unto death. All throughout this book we have seen the number two appear over and over. That number two certainly points to Rome (as we discussed), but the number two also points to this choice between two paths, and it points to the two groups of people that are created by that choice — those on God’s side, and those on the side of the dragon.

Another theme we saw all throughout the book was that ***things are not always what they seem!*** To see something as it really is, we must see that thing as God sees it. All throughout this book, God has been calling upon us to put on our spiritual eyeglasses. God wants us to see things as he sees them, and the way to do that is to view things through the word of God. The Bible is our spiritual set of eyeglasses! God wants us to see ourselves as we really are, to see the

world and its kingdoms as they really are, and to see the church, the eternal kingdom, as it really is. When we do, this book of revelation, will become a book of revolution!

A third theme we have seen all throughout this book is that **God knows**. Each letter to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 began with the phrase, “I know” spoken by Jesus. God knows what is happening to his people here on earth. We do not worship and serve a distant and uncaring God; we worship and serve a God who is near and who knows and cares about what is happening in our lives. God hears our prayers and moves mountains in responding to those prayers. And, most importantly, “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Timothy 2:19)! God knows!

A fourth theme we have seen throughout the book is that **God reigns**. All throughout this book we have seen the throne of God, from “the seven Spirits which are before his throne” in Revelation 1:4 to “the throne of God and of the Lamb” in Revelation 22:3. This theme reminds us that God is the true king, not Caesar. And it also reminds us that these events are not happening by accident, but rather they are part of the sovereign plan of God. “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:32).

A fifth theme we have seen is that **God alone is worthy of worship**. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That is true worship, but we have also seen many examples of false worship in this book — worship of the dragon, worship of the beast, and worship of the image of the beast. We have even seen John falling down to worship an angel. In each case, the command is the same: worship God! Only God is worthy of our worship. We must always worship the Creator rather than the creation. The reason for the judgments in this book is the persecution of God’s people — and the reason for that persecution was that God’s people refused to worship Caesar. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout history have been put to death because they followed this command: worship God! And, of course, by telling us who we must worship, the Bible at the same time tells us who we must not worship — which is everybody and everything else.

What is the key to understanding the book of Revelation? I think there are three keys.

The first key to understanding Revelation is to recognize the time frame in Revelation 1:1. If we fail to understand the very first verse of the book, we have little hope of understanding the rest of the book.

The second key to understanding Revelation is to recognize the *spiritual* nature of the deliverance in Revelation 2:10. That verse promised a crown of life to those who were faithful unto death. That verse tells us that the promised deliverance was a spiritual deliverance rather than a physical deliverance. Likewise, the judgment of Rome was a spiritual judgment rather than a physical judgment.

The third key to understanding Revelation is to understand *why* the book was written, and we find that in Revelation 6:10. Now that we are at the end of our study, let's read that verse again.

Revelation 6:9-10 — *I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

That cry from the martyrs in verse 10 is what prompted these judgments, and God's repeated answer to their question "how long?" was "quickly!" God said it would happen quickly, and it did happen quickly. God said the time was at hand, and it was.

The martyrs in verses 9-10 play a central role in this book. Their cry for judgment and vengeance is what prompted these events. Who were these martyrs? Most of them are unknown to us by name — but not all of them.

We know the names of some of these martyrs, and there are two in particular I think of when I read these verses. Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul was beheaded by order of the emperor Nero in AD 64 or 65. Tradition also tells us that Peter was crucified in Rome around that same time. Paul was most likely saved from crucifixion by his Roman citizenship.

Revelation 17:6 — *And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*

That is Paul's blood. That is Peter's blood.

Revelation 6:9 — *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.*

Peter and Paul were under that altar. Peter and Paul were among those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. Peter and Paul were asking the question “How long?” in verse 10.

Revelation 18:20 — *Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*

That’s addressed to the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. That’s telling them that their prayer from Chapter 6 had been answered.

Revelation 21:14 — *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

That’s Paul’s name and Peter’s name.

This vivid book becomes even more vivid when we put a face on these martyrs. Yes, Jesus loves his church more than we can ever know or understand, and we can read this book as Jesus’ response to Rome’s attack against the church. But this book was also Jesus’ response to Rome’s murder of Paul. This book was Jesus’ response to Rome’s murder of Peter.

What was Paul thinking about as he was led to the executioner’s block? I suspect Paul was thinking about what he had told Timothy. Paul knew he had remained faithful unto death, and Paul was looking forward to receiving his promised crown.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 — *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

But I also suspect that Paul was thinking about something he had written to the very Christians who were suffering and would suffer with him at the hands of Nero and his evil cohorts. Something that other Christian martyrs no doubt also recalled as they were being put to death by Rome. Something that is a beautiful summary of the entire book of Revelation, and that is the best commentary ever written about the book of Revelation. Something that we will use to end our class.

Romans 8:31-39 — *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In those nine verses is the entire book of Revelation! We are more than conquerors through him who loved us! That is the message of Revelation!

Thank you for your attention and for your patience as we have worked our way through this wonderful book, and thank you for the opportunity you have given me to study it and to teach it!

Eric Hall (2019)