



CUNNING
 Week 16: REVELATION
 2024 WINTER SERIES - Wednesday Night Church

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|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1/3 rd – In the Beginning | 2/14 th RCB -Ordinances? | (Easter is 3/31 st) |
| 1/10 th – O.T. Pent.The Battle Begins: Part I | 2/21 st O – Hist./Wis Lt.? | 4/3 rd O – Acts II |
| 1/17 th RCB Prayer: Having the Conversation | 2/28 th RCB-Wk.8 MIC | 4/10 RCB – Pauline Lit. |
| 1/24 th – O.T. The Battle | 3/6 th - JESUS Says PartI | 4/17 th O – Epistles |
| 1/31 st – RCB Prophetic | 3/13 th O Jesus Says PartII | 4/24 th O – Revelation |
| 2/7 th – Water Baptism | 3/20 th O – What John Saw | |
| | 3/27 th O – Acts I | |

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 WILL THIS SERIES GO UNTIL MAY?
Can You See The End From Here?
It's Been in the Plan Since Genesis

▪ **Chew On This Podcast**-drops Thur pm/Fri am-moving to our radio station **WAJC 91.7/88.1 FM** in February-Thursdays @8:30-9:30a

- STUDY NOTES: Pr. Mike and Pr. Orleen's and Pr. Robin's sermon series and study notes.
- Kingdom Principles – Hayford, J. W. 1995. Hayford's Bible handbook. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville
- BOOK: Cook, W. F., III, & Lawless, C. (2019). *Spiritual warfare in the storyline of scripture*. B&H Academic.
- Handouts: **Week 1:** Angelic Beings, H.O. of Week 1 Outline Notes. **Week 2:** H.O. of Week 2 Outline Notes.
- **Week 3:** Prayer reference; Sequence of Power **Week 5:** Daniel's Timeline
- **Week 9:** Wilderness Lesson H.O. **Week 10:** IN17 H.O **Week 14:**Week 16: Survey and Extensive charted notes.

CUNNING: The Spiritual Battle from Genesis to Revelation

I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves...Matthew 10:16

so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. NRSV

Luke 10:3 *Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.*

Romans 16:19 *For your obedience is known to all; therefore, I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil. NRSV*

Our Definition of CUNNING: Having or showing skill in achieving one's ends by deceit or evasion. Having or showing skill in achieving one's ends by:
Knowledge. Wisdom. Shrewdness. Skill. Resourcefulness. Cleverness. Practice.

WEEK 16: REVELATION

(H.O. Extensive notes)

REVELATION (Apocalypse) 'come from the Latin and Greek words for 'unveiling'¹

The latter gave its name to a whole class of Jewish religious writings which appeared chiefly between 200 BC and AD 100, and which is known as 'apocalyptic literature' or simply 'apocalyptic'. It is generally agreed that the Bible contains examples of this, particularly in the books of Daniel and Revelation.²

Background:

- John is now 80 years old.
- Apocalyptic & Prophetic (1:3)

and expects the activity of God and the moral response of man to be a part of present-day life, as the old prophets (unlike the apocalyptists) did.³

¹ Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (p. 20). InterVarsity Press.

² Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (pp. 20–21). InterVarsity Press.

³ Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (p. 21). InterVarsity Press.

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What we are in for:

Revelation speaks of supernatural and human enemies, such as the devil, demons, the Antichrist, the false prophet, wicked humans, and evil empires, which mount a relentless attack on believers. And because these forces of evil have already lost the war for ultimate control of the universe, they fight the smaller battles viciously, like cornered, wounded animals (12:12). J. Scott Duvall from

Cook, W. F., III, & Lawless, C. (2019). [Spiritual warfare in the storyline of scripture](#) (pp. 181–200). B&H Academic.

A book of Truth

A book of Mysteries

A book of Symbols

A book that leaves us in Wonder

It is a great thing that one's intellect should be captive to the Word of God. But in how many Christian people has the imagination never yet been harnessed for the service of Christ? That, I believe, is something which a renewed appreciation of John's great vision can scarcely fail to achieve.⁴

Done in two parts:

- Encouragement – Enemy is already destroyed, God has and will Triumph. (Apocalyptic)
- Combat – “Subtle forces of evil” within us and around us. (i.e. Emperor worship: Caesar or Christ)

Mindset:

- Where do I find ENCOURAGEMENT?
- What do I find to COMBAT?
- Keep while studying this book:

Revelation 1:3

*The one who reads this is **blessed**, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it are blessed, because the time is near!*

⁴ Wilcock, M. (1986). [Preface](#). In *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (p. 12). InterVarsity Press.

Now the Battle becomes more Personal

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The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches

- Letters that were written to actual churches (in Asia minor) in the final years of the first century. [Persecution & Heresy]
- Every letter starts with a description of Christ – Jesus Statement

CHURCH #1: EPHEBUS

Revelation 2:1-7

“Write to the angel of the church in **Ephesus**:

Jesus Statement: *“The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says: ² I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. ³ You also possess endurance and have tolerated many things because of My name and have not grown weary. ⁴ **But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.** ⁵ Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

⁷ *“Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in God’s paradise.*

- John was a Bishop in Ephesus for many years.
- We can assume that the heartbeat of this church was LOVE – due to John’s other writings.
- AND a touch of his “thunder”/ZEAL – **Mark 3:16-17**

¹⁶ *He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, He gave the name Peter;*

¹⁷ *and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, He gave the name “Boanerges” (that is, “Sons of Thunder”);*

“On the one hand his refusal to stay under the same roof as the heretic Cerinthus, and on the other hand his reduction of all his message to a sermon of one sentence, which in extreme old age he used to repeat at every church meeting: ‘Little children, love one another.’”

Wilcock, M. (1986). [The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened](#) (pp. 43–44). InterVarsity Press.

- Ephesus as the metropolis (mother city of Asia).
- Church at Ephesus = Mother church of that province.
- What is Jesus telling them they have lost?
- They have not grown weary...but they have abandoned their first love.

According to the letter written to the Ephesians not long after this by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the report that has reached him is of a church so well taught in the gospel that no unorthodox sect can gain a hearing among her members, a church which has taken seriously the warnings of Paul at the time of his last contact with her leaders.

Wilcock, M. (1986). [The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened](#) (pp. 43–44). InterVarsity Press.

WHAT are the qualities of FIRST LOVE?

- An unrepentive church is demonically influenced church.

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HISTORICALLY: And the first lamp was indeed removed. Church and city together have vanished; all that remains is the place-name Ayasaluk—and that, ironically, commemorates not Ephesus but John. There is still the promise of life in paradise for the individual who remembers from what he has fallen, and returns to his first works and his first love.

Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (pp. 43–44). InterVarsity Press.

But let the loveless church beware: *‘If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing’*
1 Corinthians 13:2

CHURCH #2: SMYRNA

Revelation 2:8–11 A Synagogue of Satan

⁸ “Write to the angel of the church in **Smyrna**:

Jesus Statement: *“The First and the Last, the One who was dead and came to life, says:*

*⁹ I know your affliction and poverty, yet you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a **synagogue of Satan**. ¹⁰ Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, **the Devil** is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have affliction for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

¹¹ “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor will never be harmed by the second death.

“A synagogue of Satan.”

A local Jewish synagogue that was persecuting the church.

By inciting the Roman authorities to harass the church.

But the inciting force is WHO? (Satan)

What did these words do to show God’s dominance?

- God set time limit.
- God already knows what the enemy is trying to do.

700 yrs prior to John and the church of Ephesus, Smyrna was destroyed and laid waste for 300 years. Still in existence today as Izmir in Asiatic Turkey as their 2nd largest city.

How would you respond to: *Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer*

[Fear v.s. Faith]

- Was this a test allowed by God (book of Job)?
- “Without the Cross, there is no Crown.”

Philippians 1:29-30

For it has been given to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him, ³⁰ having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

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CHURCH #3: PERGAMUM

Revelation 2:12-17

“Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum:

Jesus Statement: “*The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says:*

¹³ I know where you live—where Satan’s throne is! And you are holding on to My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness who was killed among you, where Satan lives. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

¹⁷ “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

- Ephesus = New York of Asia, Pergamum = Washington as Roman imperial power had its seat of government.
- HUGE library (parchment gets in name from this city).
- Home of the earliest temple for the state-sponsored worship of the Emperor. [throne of Satan?]
- Altar of Zeus “the saviour” was a crown of the city.

- **Nicolaitans** (like Balaam): Interrupt faith by purposely placing temptation in front of others (idols&immorality). With the goal of him personally benefitting with worldly treasures.
- Offering a viable life structure here on earth that is outside the Kingdom of God. Non-Christian society.
- One saint has already been martyred.
- Evil is operating by developing a successful NON believing society.
- That “Enlightened” society marginalizes the Christians society.

HOW would you define what Society is doing to hurt this church?

Seduction. Persecution. Segregation. Bigotry.

*So they are surprised that you don’t plunge with them into the same flood of wild living—and they slander you. **1 Peter 4:4***

But there remains a promise to those who do repent and over-come. It is not easy to understand, and many suggestions have been made, especially about the meaning of the white stone (verse 17). Since the context speaks of feasts of idol-meat and the feast of manna which God spread for Israel in the desert, perhaps the reference is to an ancient use of square stones as tickets of admission to some public entertainment. So the promise of eternal life which ends each of the first two Letters is repeated here in terms appropriate to the Christian who will not compromise with worldly pleasures and idol-meat banquets. Christ gives that man a personal invitation to the true pleasures of the banquet of heaven, which are, in fact, himself: for ‘all the promises of God find their Yes in him’, and he is the true manna, the heavenly bread (2 Cor. 1:20; Jn. 6:31–35).

Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (pp. 47–49). InterVarsity Press.

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CHURCH #4: THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29

¹⁸ "Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira:

Jesus Statement: *"The Son of God, the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze, says:*

*¹⁹ I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. Your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: **You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives My slaves to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.** ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality.^[a] ²² Look! I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her^[a] practices. ²³ I will kill her children with the plague.^[a] Then all the churches will know that I am the One who examines minds^[c] and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known the deep things^[s] of Satan—as they say—I do not put any other burden on you. ²⁵ But hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who is victorious and keeps My works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—²⁷ and he will shepherd them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery — just as I have received this from My Father. ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.*

So in Thyatira a particular woman takes on both the evil character of Jezebel and the prophetic role of Balaam, and begins to teach, as if from God, new 'deep things' which some members of this strong and lively church are only too willing to explore.

Wilcock, M. (1986). *The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened* (pp. 49–51). InterVarsity Press.

HOW do we measure:

- Pretense of maturity? Scripture comes against it and we tolerate, yea, even embrace it.
- Signs of Tolerating that? Calling it good.
- Enemy is attacking by poisoning the church from within.

(Jezebel 1 Kings 16, 2 Kings 9)

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CHURCH #5: SARDIS

Revelation 3:1-6

3 "Write to the angel of the church in Sardis:

Jesus Statement: *"The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says:*

I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. ² Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. But if you are not alert, I will come[Ⓜ] like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come against you.Ⓜ ⁴ But you have a few people[Ⓜ] in Sardis who have not defiled[Ⓜ] their clothes, and they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. ⁵ In the same way, the victor will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before My Father and before His angels.

⁶ *"Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Signs of Incomplete works = WHAT?

- Is this church aware of their spiritual state? (Leaders? Members?)
- Is the neighborhood aware?
- FAILURE =

Solution = RECOGNIZE the reality of the present situation, not the past.

There are a few healthy people in the church...but are thy dying?

REPENT

we shall better understand what John demanded of the church at Sardis': secure, complacent, like the city she lived in, untroubled by persecution of heresy, she 'set herself the task of avoiding hardship, by pursuing a policy based on convenience and circumspection, rather than whole-hearted zeal'.

Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (pp. 51–53). InterVarsity Press.

NOTE: There is no wording about the riches nor rewards for the righteous

All that Christ promises to the victors of Sardis is non-deletion from the book of life, and the white robe of his righteousness—simply, that is, their acceptance before God; as if to underline that the church as a whole is likely to forfeit even that.

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CHURCH #6: PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:7-13

⁷ "Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia:

Jesus Statement: *"The Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and closes and no one opens says:*

⁸ **I know your works.** *Because you have limited strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close.* ⁹ *Take note! I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—note this—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.* ¹⁰ **Because you have kept My command to endure,** *I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come over the whole world to test those who live on the earth.*

¹¹ *I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.* ¹² *The victor: I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out again. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God—the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God—and My new name.*

¹³ *"Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Can Jesus say that to me? I KNOW YOUR WORKS and be delighted?

- Apart from Smyrna, Philadelphia is the only church with which Christ has no fault to find.
- ***Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.* = WHAT?**

He refers to the ancient prophecies of how God's people will one day be vindicated and the rest of mankind will bow before them. The fulfilment of these prophecies, he tells the church, will be the reverse of what the Philadelphian Jews expect: *they* will have to 'bow down before *your* feet', and acknowledge 'that I have loved *you*'. Let the Christians take heart, for it is on them that the Lord has set his favour.

- ***I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close* = WHAT?**

Frequently in Revelation John joins the other apostolic writers in teaching that the privileges and promises given to Old Testament Israel have been inherited by the Christian church. The doctrine is here, for example, in the Letter to Philadelphia and its biblical background. Enquiry as to the meaning of the 'key of David' takes us to the book of Isaiah; we shall find allusions from every part of it here in Revelation 3. The 'key' appears in Isaiah 22:22, together with the promise that its custodian Eliakim, steward of the household, shall have the same authority that Christ has here to open or shut. To open or shut what? The entrance to the house of David. And for what purpose? The gates are opened, says Isaiah, 'that the righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in' (26:2).

Then, just as Eliakim himself is fastened 'like a peg in a sure place, and ... a throne of honour to his father's house' (22:23), so in consequence the weak, the despised, and the converted outsider will be given 'in my house and within my walls a monument and a name' (56:5). The nations shall come in too, in humble submission (60:11); 'all who despised you shall bow down at your feet' (60:14; cf. 49:22, 23). The whole group of ideas thus concerns entry to the house of David, the kingdom, city, and temple of God. What happens to it we may follow step by step. The Lord condemns Jewish legalism ('Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees ... you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in', Mt. 23:13) and transfers the doorkeeper's authority to the apostolic church ('I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven', Mt. 16:19). So Peter and his associates have the privilege of first admitting not only Jews, but also Samaritans and Gentiles, to permanent membership of the kingdom (Acts 2, 8, 10). In this way the entire concept—key, door, city, temple, and pillar—becomes a Christian one, and the basis for the reversal mentioned above. The Jews will 'learn that I have loved *you*'.

Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (pp. 51–53). InterVarsity Press.

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FALSE “CHRISTIANS” ...so many problems involves this!

CHURCH #7: LAODICEA

Revelation 3:14-22

14 “Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

Jesus Statement: “*The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Originator of God’s creation says:*

15 *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot.*

16 *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit^u you out of My mouth.* **17** *Because you say, ‘I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,’ and you don’t know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,* **18** *I advise you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see.* **19** *As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed^u and repent.* **20** *Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.* **21** *The victor: I will give him the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I also won the victory and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

22 *“Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

SIGNS OF LUKEWARM =

Jesus, we are great...just doing a new thing – self delusion.

Can rebuke = a sign of love? (Yes, Laodicea has an invitation to repent)

- Be either HOT or COLD – what kind of warning is this?
-

Laodicea was a banking centre and a textile town, famous also for the manufacture of a certain kind of eye ointment (see verse 18);

Elsewhere in Asia we have seen that the state of a church has often corresponded to the state of its city. At Laodicea, however, the two are contrasted. The church is the image of the city reversed in a black negative. Financiers, physicians, clothing manufacturers are among its notable citizens; but ‘poor, blind, and naked’ is the verdict on its church. ‘It has failed to find in Christ the source of all true wealth, splendour, and vision.’ Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (p. 58). InterVarsity Press.

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Promise Images in the Seven Letters with Background in Jewish Literature

Texts\Images	Tree	Paradise	Death	Crown	Stone	Name	Rod	Star	Garments
Revelation 2–3									
Ephesus	2:7	2:7							
Smyrna			2:10, 11	2:10					
Pergamum					2:17	2:17			
Thyatira			2:23				2:27	2:28	
Sardis						3:5			3:4–5
Philadelphia				3:11		3:12			
Laodicea									3:18
Old Testament									
Isaiah 61–62				61:3; 62:3		62:2			61:3, 10
Ezekiel 28 LXX		28:13		28:12	28:13				
Daniel 7									7:9
Zechariah 3				3:5	3:9				3:4, 5
Extrabiblical									
1 Enoch 90							90:18		90:31
4 Ezra 8	8:52	8:52	8:58–59						
Ascension of Isaiah 9				9:11–12, 18, 24–25					9:9, 11, 17–18, 24–26 ⁵

4 After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

There is always MORE....because we are eternal beings.

⁵ Wilson, M. (2007). [*Charts on the Book of Revelation: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*](#) (p. 65). Kregel Academic & Professional.

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Revelation 12

Revelation 12:1-9

The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

12 A great sign^[a] appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head. ² She was pregnant and cried out in labor and agony as she was about to give birth. ³ Then another sign^[b] appeared in heaven: There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and 10 horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.^[c] ⁴ His tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth he might devour her child. ⁵ But she gave birth to a Son—a male who is going to shepherd^[d] all nations with an iron scepter—and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, to be fed there^[e] for 1,260 days.

The Dragon Thrown Out of Heaven

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil^[f] and Satan,^[g] the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.

Now...what do we do with this????

- **There is always MORE....because we are eternal beings.**

THE SURVEY

How Cunning am I?

Knowledge. Wisdom. Shrewdness. Skill. Resourcefulness. Cleverness. Practice.

What have I learned during this Series about the spiritual realm and how it operates in this natural world?

Has my understanding of the devil and demons increased and any fears decreased?

Can I say my Biblical

- Knowledge has grown?
- Wisdom has grown?
- Skill (understanding and applying to my life) has grown?

Has the knowledge and the understanding of the supernatural in my everyday life developed in:

- Shrewdness
- Resourcefulness
- Cleverness
- Practice

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Practice: Any book of the Bible we read, we will find evidence of the supernatural. Go look for it: Our God created, God orchestrated, God defined spiritual life. At the same time, being aware of the practice of evil and its intention to separate us not only from this belief but also from the practice of living God's word. Cunning will identify this move of evil. Cunning will laugh at its insipidness. Cunning will fight it with the everyday practice of just living scripture. Which we can call a proactive battle plan.

The one who reads this is blessed, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it are blessed, because the time is near!

Revelation 1:3

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Chiastic Structure

- A Prologue and Greeting (1:1–8)
 - B Seven Churches (1:4–4:2)
 - C Seven Seals (3:21–8:5)
 - D Seven Trumpets—Angels—Two Witnesses (8:2–11:19)
 - E Woman, Dragon, and Male Child (12:1–17)
 - D' Two Beasts—Angels—Seven Bowls (13:1–16:21)
 - C' Destruction of Babylon (16:18–19:10)
 - B' New Jerusalem, the Bride (19:6–22:9)
- A' Closing and Epilogue (22:6–21)

Sevenfold Drama Structure

Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.

Prologue (1:1–8)

Act 1 The Seven Golden Lampstands (1:9–3:22) → Seven Letters

- The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches,
- and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.⁶

Act 2 The Seven Seals (4:1–8:4)

- The seven seals (Revelation 6:1–17, 8:1–5), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6–13; 11:15–19), and seven bowls/vials (Revelation 16:1–21) are three succeeding series of end-times judgments from God.

The judgments get progressively worse and more devastating as the end times progress. The seven seals, trumpets, and bowls are connected to one another. The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1–5), and the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowls (Revelation 11:15–19, 15:1–8).

The first four of the seven seals are known as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

- 1) The first seal introduces the Antichrist (Revelation 6:1–2).
- 2) The second seal causes great warfare (Revelation 6:3–4).
- 3) The third of the seven seals causes famine (Revelation 6:5–6).
- 4) The fourth seal brings about plague, further famine, and further warfare (Revelation 6:7–8).
- 5) The fifth seal tells us of those who will be martyred for their faith in Christ during the end times (Revelation 6:9–11). God hears their cries for justice and will deliver it in His timing—in the form of the sixth seal, along with the trumpet and bowl judgments.
- 6) When the sixth of the seven seals is broken, a devastating earthquake occurs, causing massive upheaval and terrible devastation—along with unusual astronomical phenomena (Revelation 6:12–14). Those who survive are right to cry out, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16–17).

⁶ Richards, L., Pegoda, D., & Gross, P. (2001). [Every teaching of Jesus in the Bible](#) (p. 280). T. Nelson.

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7) The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1–5),
8:1–2 *When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets.*

Act 3 The Seven Trumpets (8:5–11:18)

The seven trumpets are described in Revelation 8:6–13. The seven trumpets are the “contents” of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1–5).

- 1) The first trumpet causes hail and fire that destroys much of the plant life in the world (Revelation 8:7).
- 2) The second trumpet brings about what seems to be a meteor hitting the oceans and causing the death of much of the world’s sea life (Revelation 8:8–9).
- 3) The third trumpet is similar to the second, except it affects the world’s lakes and rivers instead of the oceans (Revelation 8:10–11).
- 4) The fourth of the seven trumpets causes the sun and moon to be darkened (Revelation 8:12).
- 5) The fifth trumpet results in a plague of “demonic locusts” that attack and torture humanity (Revelation 9:1–11).
- 6) The sixth trumpet releases a demonic army that kills a third of humanity (Revelation 9:12–21).
- 7) The seventh trumpet calls forth the seven angels with the seven bowls of God’s wrath (Revelation 11:15–19, 15:1–8).

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: “The whole world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.” *The seventh angel blew his trumpet*, in essence announcing the arrival of the King. There was now no turning back. The coming judgments were no longer partial but complete in their destruction. God unleashed his full wrath on the evil world that refused to turn to him (9:20–21). When his wrath would begin, there would be no escape.⁷

Act 4 The Seven Tableaux (11:19–15:4)???

Three Woes: The flying eagle had warned of three “terrors” or “woes” to come upon the earth (8:13). The **first woe** was recorded in 9:1–12; the **second woe** in 9:13–21 and 11:1–13. The **third woe is coming very soon**. Most likely, 11:18 hints at the third woe which will include the battle of Armageddon—the final battle between God and Satan. This will begin when the angel sounds the seventh trumpet.⁸

Act 5 The Seven Bowls of Wrath (15:5–16:21)

The seven bowl/vial judgments are described in Revelation 16:1–21.

The seven bowl judgments are called forth by the seventh trumpet.

- 1) The first bowl causes painful sores to break out on humanity (Revelation 16:2).
- 2) The second bowl results in the death of every living thing in the sea (Revelation 16:3).
- 3) The third bowl causes the rivers to turn into blood (Revelation 16:4–7).
- 4) The fourth of the seven bowls results in the sun’s heat being intensified and causing great pain (Revelation 16:8–9).

⁷ Barton, B. B. (2000). [Revelation](#) (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; p. 130). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁸ Barton, B. B. (2000). [Revelation](#) (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; pp. 129–130). Tyndale House Publishers.

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- 5) The fifth bowl causes great darkness and an intensification of the sores from the first bowl (Revelation 16:10–11).
- 6) The sixth bowl results in the Euphrates River being dried up and the armies of the Antichrist being gathered together to wage the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12–14).
- 7) The seventh bowl results in a devastating earthquake followed by giant hailstones (Revelation 16:15–21).⁹

Act 6 The Seven Judgments (17:1–20:3) (Contained within the Seals)

THE COMING SEVEN SEAL JUDGMENTS

JESUS' WORDS	THE SEAL	ITS CONTENTS
Matthew 24:4–5	1st Seal	False peace
Matthew 24:6–7	2nd Seal	Worldwide war
Matthew 24:7	3rd Seal	Famine
Matthew 24:7	4th Seal	Earthquakes—death
Matthew 24:9	5th Seal	Divine judgment
Matthew 24:29	6th Seal	Cosmic darkness—physical destruction
Matthew 24:37ff	7th Seal	Cataclysmic events (the seven trumpets)

⁹“Because the Time is Near” J.M

Act 7 The Seven Great Promises (20:4–22:5)

In contrast, the “victorious” are those who overcome and “stand firm to the end” (Mark 13:13 NIV). They will receive the blessings that God promised:

- 1) eating from the tree of life (2:7),
- 2) escaping the lake of fire (the “second death,” 2:11),
- 3) receiving a special name (2:17),
- 4) having authority over the nations (2:26),
- 5) being included in the Book of Life (3:5),
- 6) being a pillar in God’s spiritual temple (3:12),
- 7) sitting with Christ on his throne (3:21).

Those who can endure the testing of evil and remain faithful will be rewarded by God.¹⁰

⁹ Barton, B. B. (2000). *Revelation* (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; pp. 129–130). Tyndale House Publishers.

¹⁰ Barton, B. B. (2000). *Revelation* (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; p. 258). Tyndale House Publishers.

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4 After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

There is always MORE....because we are eternal beings.

SATAN'S WORK IN THE WORLD

<i>Satan's ...</i>	<i>Reference in Revelation</i>
Hatred for Christ	12:13
Hatred for God's people	12:17
Power and authority	13:2
Popularity among unbelievers	13:4
Blasphemy against God	13:6
War against believers	13:7
Ability to deceive	13:14 ¹¹

CITIZENS OF HELL

Who will be in hell? Sadly, hell will be populated by people who have willingly rebelled against God and stubbornly refused any offer of repentance. (Verses are quoted from NLT.)

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Verse</i>
Matthew 25:41–46	"... Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me ... when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me."
Romans 6:23	"For the wages of sin is death ..."

¹¹ Barton, B. B. (2000). [Revelation](#) (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; p. 152). Tyndale House Publishers.

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1 Corinthians 6:9–11	“... Those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God ... Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers—none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God.”
2 Peter 2:4	“For God did not spare even the angels when they sinned; he threw them into hell ...”
Revelation 20:10	“Then the Devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”
Revelation 20:15	“Anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.”
Revelation 21:8	“But cowards who turn away from me, and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshipers, and all liars—their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death.”
Revelation 21:27	“Nothing evil will be allowed to enter [heaven]—no one who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”

12

THE SEVEN BOWLS

<i>Bowl Judgment</i>		<i>Results</i>	<i>Reference</i>
1.	Horrible malignant sores break out on everyone who has the mark of the beast.	Physical pain comes to those who have not repented.	16:2
2.	The sea becomes blood and everything in it dies.	With the death of the sea, all ecosystems are affected.	16:3

¹² Barton, B. B. (2000). [Revelation](#) (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; p. 168). Tyndale House Publishers.

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3.	Inland waters turn to blood.	With the death of the inland waters, there is no water to drink.	16:4
4.	The sun scorches people.	People burned by the heat curse God for it.	16:8
5.	Darkness covers the earth.	People are in anguish because of the darkness, but they curse God and refuse to repent. They still have the sores from the first plague and the burns from the fourth plague.	16:10
6.	The great Euphrates River dries up.	The drying up of the river provides a way for the armies of the east to march westward without hindrance and gather at the battlefield of Armageddon.	16:12
7.	An earthquake greater than any that has ever occurred changes the face of the earth. Then comes a terrible hailstorm.	The great city of Babylon is destroyed, islands are engulfed, mountains are flattened. People continue to curse God.	16:17–21

13

¹³ Barton, B. B. (2000). [Revelation](#) (G. R. Osborne, Ed.; p. 184). Tyndale House Publishers.

What Are the Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, and Seven Bowls in the Book of Revelation?

The seven seals (Revelation 6:1–17, 8:1–5), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6–13; 11:15–19), and seven bowls/vials (Revelation 16:1–21) are three succeeding series of end-times judgments from God. The judgments get progressively worse and more devastating as the end times progress. The seven seals, trumpets, and bowls are connected to one another. The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1–5), and the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowls (Revelation 11:15–19, 15:1–8).

The first four of the seven seals are known as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. The first seal introduces the Antichrist (Revelation 6:1–2). The second seal causes great warfare (Revelation 6:3–4). The third of the seven seals causes famine (Revelation 6:5–6). The fourth seal brings about plague, further famine, and further warfare (Revelation 6:7–8).

The fifth seal tells us of those who will be martyred for their faith in Christ during the end times (Revelation 6:9–11). God hears their cries for justice and will deliver it in His timing—in the form of the sixth seal, along with the trumpet and bowl judgments. When the sixth of the seven seals is broken, a devastating earthquake occurs, causing massive upheaval and terrible devastation—along with unusual astronomical phenomena (Revelation 6:12–14). Those who survive are right to cry out, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16–17).

The seven trumpets are described in Revelation 8:6–13. The seven trumpets are the “contents” of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1–5). The first trumpet causes hail and fire that destroys much of the plant life in the world (Revelation 8:7). The second trumpet brings about what seems to be a meteor hitting the oceans and causing the death of much of the world’s sea life (Revelation 8:8–9). The third trumpet is similar to the second, except it affects the world’s lakes and rivers instead of the oceans (Revelation 8:10–11).

The fourth of the seven trumpets causes the sun and moon to be darkened (Revelation 8:12). The fifth trumpet results in a plague of “demonic locusts” that attack and torture humanity (Revelation 9:1–11). The sixth trumpet releases a demonic army that kills a third of humanity

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(Revelation 9:12–21). The seventh trumpet calls forth the seven angels with the seven bowls of God’s wrath (Revelation 11:15–19, 15:1–8).

The seven bowl/vial judgments are described in Revelation 16:1–21. The seven bowl judgments are called forth by the seventh trumpet. The first bowl causes painful sores to break out on humanity (Revelation 16:2). The second bowl results in the death of every living thing in the sea (Revelation 16:3). The third bowl causes the rivers to turn into blood (Revelation 16:4–7). The fourth of the seven bowls results in the sun’s heat being intensified and causing great pain (Revelation 16:8–9). The fifth bowl causes great darkness and an intensification of the sores from the first bowl (Revelation 16:10–11). The sixth bowl results in the Euphrates River being dried up and the armies of the Antichrist being gathered together to wage the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12–14). The seventh bowl results in a devastating earthquake followed by giant hailstones (Revelation 16:15–21).

Revelation 16:5–7 declares of God, “You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.... Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”¹⁴

45. Possible Interrelationships Among the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls

I. Simultaneous Perspective

Seals	1			2			3			4			5			6			7
Trum pets	1			2			3			4			5			6			7
Bowls	1			2			3			4			6			6			7

II. Sequential Perspective

Seals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7															
Trum pets								1	2	3	4	5	6	7								
Bowls																1	2	3	4	5	6	7

III. Partial Recapitulation Perspective

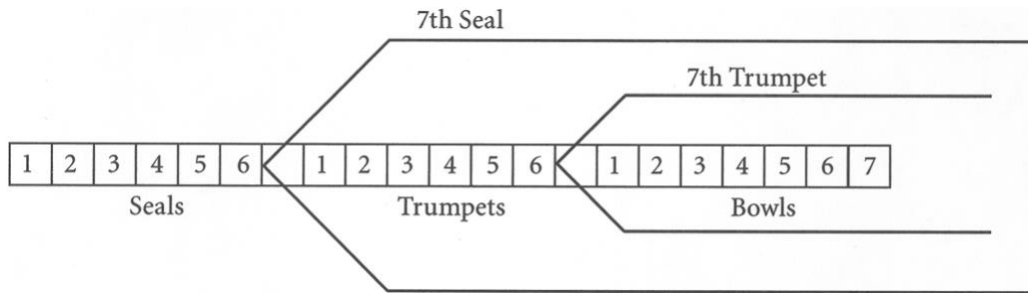
Seals				2				3				4				5				6			7
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¹⁴ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.

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Trumps													1	2	3	4	5	6	7						
Bowls																			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

IV. Telescoping Perspective



15

Suffering for the church: Seven Seals Opened Revelation 4:1 – 8:1

The First Seal: Conquest (6:1, 2)

The visions which follow the breaking open of the first four Seals are linked, as a series within a series, by a number of common features. These we shall deal with later, considering for the moment what is distinctive about each vision.

Many commentaries point on from verse 2 to another Scene much later in the drama, and from there back to a certain passage in the Gospels. In 19:11, as here, a crowned conqueror appears riding a white horse, and there he is actually named as King of kings, Lord of lords, and The Word of God, that is, Jesus Christ. So it is suggested that the horseman of 6:2 also is Jesus Christ. If we then ask what Christ is doing here, in such gruesome company as that of the second, third, and fourth riders, we are referred back to Mark 13:10 and its parallels, which tell us to expect in the course of this age not only the spread of evil but also the spread of the conquering gospel.

We may or may not feel that this is sufficient evidence to identify the first horseman. To this question we shall return. The important thing which John has to record, at all events, is that some kind of conquest follows the opening of the first seal.

¹⁵ Wilson, M. (2007). [*Charts on the Book of Revelation: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*](#) (pp. 78–79). Kregel Academic & Professional.

The Second Seal: Strife (6:3, 4)

If the first horseman is Christ and the conquering gospel, does the second stand for the warfare of the world, as a contrasting evil; or for divisions between men that are caused when the gospel is accepted by some and rejected by others (Mt. 10:34–36); or for persecution of the church by the world? If on the other hand the first horseman is not Christ, is he instead a personification of the glory of war, while the second personifies its horrors?

Biblical evidence has been brought forward for all these views, some of it from verse 4 itself. A more accurate rendering might change ‘slay’ into ‘butcher’, for example, and might explain that ‘sword’ could well mean a sacrificial knife. What the rider is actually said to do, however, is simply to take away peace. Trying once more to see through John’s eyes, we may content ourselves for the present by saying that the vision is in essence simply one of strife and conflict.

The Third Seal: Scarcity (6:5, 6)

With its references to weights and measures, wages and prices, the third vision describes an economic situation; not strictly famine, but certainly scarcity. The RSV’s quarts and denarii do not mean a great deal to us; JB conveys the sense better: ‘A ration of corn for a day’s wages, and three rations of barley for a day’s wages’. Good food (wheat or corn) is available—at the price of a man’s entire wages! He will have to be content with poorer fare (barley) if he is to feed his family as well as himself, but even that does not take into account the cost of clothing and housing. The supply of oil and wine, however, is unaffected. Whether these commodities represent the luxuries, the caviare and champagne, which even in the hardest times continue inexplicably to furnish the tables of the rich, or whether they are staple items which are protected when other foodstuffs become scarce, so that the third rider stands for partial hardship rather than total famine, the situation described is at least one of great economic difficulty and inequality.

The Fourth Seal: Death (6:7, 8)

The meaning of the fourth rider and his fell companion is explicit. Men killed one another in the conflicts of Seal 2; but there we saw strife, the cause, while here we see death, the result.

The wiping out of a quarter of the human race sounds like a disaster of the first magnitude, until one realizes that nothing has been said to indicate that this is a single catastrophic event. After all, every man dies sooner or later, and what is probably meant here is that a sizeable proportion of those deaths are the unnecessary ones caused by war and famine and kindred evils.

The Fifth Seal: The Suffering of God’s Witnesses (6:9–11)

Three phrases call for comment at this stage concerning the events of Seal 5.

‘Under the altar’ the blood of sacrifices was poured out (Lv. 4:7). The martyrs who have given their lives (for ‘the life ... is in the blood’, Lv. 17:11) may represent all who suffer in any way for Christ’s sake, and all such devotion is a sacrifice acceptable to God.

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‘Those who dwell upon the earth’, or rather (as in JB) ‘the inhabitants of the earth’, is a technical term in Revelation. It means not humanity in general, but those who are ‘at home in the present world order’¹ as opposed to those who hold to the Word and Witness of God. John, being in ‘the heavenlies’, sees everything in black and white. ‘He who is not with me is against me’ (Mt. 12:30); there is no middle ground, and all men are either citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) or inhabitants of earth.

‘Avenge our blood’, cry the souls of God’s witnesses, and in the light of the above, their cry becomes not only excusable but right. For the inhabitants of earth are those who are irredeemably committed to the cause of evil, and the martyrs are expressing not personal vindictiveness but an objective desire that justice be done.

The Sixth Seal: The Final Cataclysm (6:12–17)

At last we have a sure reference point. Commentaries sometimes state dogmatically that ‘Of course X means Y’, when a little thought will show that there is no ‘of course’ about it. But here the meaning is unmistakable. Strings of biblical references to the events of this paragraph are gathered together in Christ’s own magisterial discourse (Mark 13 and its parallels), where the description is that of the *parousia*, his return to this earth and the unveiling of the face of God. Verse 17 actually identifies it as ‘the great day of their wrath’.

The question of whether the earthquake, the darkened sun, and so on, are to be taken literally or metaphorically, misses the point. That day will spell the end of the entire universe as we know it (Heb. 12:26), the end of the planets and galaxies as well as the end of the human institutions they may symbolize.

Now we return to the first four seals, and consider not their distinctive features but the ones they share.

Their common pattern may begin to make us rethink our identification of the first horseman as Jesus Christ. That identification is largely based on the vision of 19:11. But is not the meaning of Seal 1 more likely to be of a piece with that of Seals 2, 3, and 4, which are so closely related to it, than with another vision which is not only thirteen chapters away, but thirteen chapters *ahead*—that is, which John himself will not see for some time yet? If he has not yet seen a white rider representing Christ, is it not more natural to assume that he saw all four riders in chapter 6 as evil powers?

Evil though they may be, it is God who allows them to ride forth; each is ‘given’ authority (*cf.* Jb. 1:12; 2:6). It may be said that Christ’s authority also was given him by the Father (Mt. 28:18); but the gift to him was very much more than mere permission, whereas the repeated ‘given’ of 6:1–8 indicates that the first rider’s authority is of the same sort as that of the other three. Again, therefore, it seems he represents something evil, and not the conquering gospel of Christ.

A third bond between the visions—this time between all six, not simply the first four—is the correspondence between them and the Gospel passage already referred to, Mark 13 (= Mt. 24; Lk. 21). This is particularly noticeable if we compare Matthew’s version, the fullest of the three, with the chapter before us. We should not be surprised that these passages correspond, since the same person is dealing with the same subject in each case. There, Jesus speaks; here, the Lamb opens his book. In both places he is revealing something about the future (4:1; Mt. 24:3).

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Since he is 'the faithful witness' (1:5), the truth to which he witnesses must be consistent, and so indeed it proves to be. The two passages are most clearly linked at the events of Seal 6 (6:12–17 = Mt. 24:29–30), but there is no difficulty in connecting those of Seals 2, 3, and 4 also with the earlier part of the Gospel passage. In fact we do not have to strain the text in any way to postulate that Christ is not only expounding the same subject, but expounding it in the same order, in both places. The two chapters engage at point after point like the two sides of a zip. According to this parallel, it is the earthly warfare of Matthew 24:6, not the conquering gospel, which is represented by the rider of Seal 1; the troubles of Matthew 24:7, 8 are those of Seals 2, 3, and 4; the suffering church (Mt. 24:9–12), which nevertheless bears indestructible witness to its sovereign Lord (Mt. 24:13, 14), is described under Seal 5. We skip Matthew 24:15–28, which refers to the fall of Jerusalem, because by the time the prophecies of Revelation 6 were written this event was already past; and so we come on to verses 29, 30, which correspond, as we have noted, to Seal 6.

In the light of Matthew 24, then, we begin to see the over-all meaning of this scene of the drama. What does the future hold? Conquest and strife, scarcity and death; 'but the end is not yet ... all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs' (Mt. 24:6, 8). In view of the frequent misunderstanding which takes the 'wars and rumours of wars' passage to be a prediction of the end, it is worth stressing that that is precisely what Christ says it is not. The terrifying events of the first four Seals, which those who have to live through them might imagine to be signs of Christ's return and of the close of the age (Mt. 24:3), are in fact the commonplaces of history. The four horsemen have been riding out over the earth from that day to this, and will continue to do so.

This may also explain the cry of the four living creatures as these Seals are broken open. On other interpretations, they appear to be little more than a convenient foursome of characters who happen to be available to usher in the riders. But why? And why do they call 'Come!?' They are not calling John: he has already been called to the vantage-point from which he is surveying the whole scene (4:1). They are not calling the riders: remembering that they probably represent nature, God's world, we can hardly believe that they would be inviting the ruin of that world. In any case, three of the horses do not 'come' at all, but are simply revealed to view. Whom then do the living creatures call? There is someone whose coming is both promised and desired. Hear the cry of 22:20: ' "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' Hear the echo of 1:6, 7: 'Amen. Behold, he is coming!' The same Greek word used there, in the first and last chapters of Revelation, is the cry of the living creatures here, and is followed by the corresponding cry of 'How long?' from the souls under the altar. Both God's people and God's creation yearn for the coming of Christ to deliver them from suffering (Rom. 8:19–22).

As the Lamb unseals the book of history the immediate impression we get is of a suffering world. If he is in control, though, surely within that world his church is protected from these woes? Did not Ezekiel, threatening the same 'four sore acts of judgment' as in verse 8, promise nevertheless that the faithful would be delivered (Ezk. 14:21, 22)? The answer of Seal 5 (= Mt. 24:9–12) is No: the church is not exempt. Assaults from without and within will test to the limit those who are prepared to stake everything, even life, on the Word and Witness of God. But how long will this go on? Will there never be a respite for his suffering people? Again the answer is No, not in this world: only with the end of the world, and the completion of the total number

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who are to witness and suffer for Christ, will there come the day of vengeance on their persecutors (verse 11). In other words, rampant evil will be abroad, bringing suffering to the world in general and to the church in particular, through the entire period from the time of John's vision to the time of Jesus's return (Seal 6 = Mt. 24:14b, 29, 30). Seals 1 to 5 portray different aspects of the whole of history; Seal 6 describes the day which will end it.

Now we can see why the scene for these dramatic events was set in such detail. In chapter 6 John is shown the succession of woes which will sweep to and fro across the world throughout the course of history, and which often cause men to wonder whether the forces of evil are not altogether out of control. Even the church is not safe from them; so even Christians may be tempted to think that, as despairing Englishmen said in the anarchy of the reign of King Stephen, 'God and his angels sleep.' The setting in chapters 4 and 5, therefore, is intended to impress on John's mind, and through him on ours also, where the true power lies. Not only in the church's internal affairs (Scene 1) but in the world as a whole, Christ stands at the centre. It is he who is finally in control. God *is* still on the throne.

To reassure Christians of this, chapter 7 takes the general truth of chapters 4 and 5 and makes crystal-clear its particular lesson for them: that though they may, indeed will, have to go through temporal suffering, their eternal safety is never in question.

8. Yet the Church is Indestructible (7:1–17)

a. The sealing: when? (verses 1–3)

'After this', after the events of chapter 6, come the events of chapter 7. Or do they? It is dangerous to assume that the order in which John writes is the order in which the things he describes will happen; and here we have a notable example of that danger. For chapter 6 describes what is surely a 'harming of the earth'; yet 'after this' we come to a vision in which the earth has not yet been harmed (7:3). Chapter 7 may follow chapter 6 in John's visions, but it does not seem to follow it in the order of actual events. It will not do to try and find subtle distinctions between the chapters, and say that, in some mysterious sequence of events, first it is humanity which will suffer (chapter 6), then the church will be sealed, and only then will come the 'harming' of the inanimate creation, earth and sea and trees. For Seal 6, which ends chapter 6, is one of the most readily identifiable items in this Scene, and covers the events accompanying the return of Christ; with it, the history of the world comes to an end; after it, there can be no further harming of the earth—there will be no earth left to harm.

So we are forced back to the plain text of 7:1. John does not say 'After six unsealings of the book comes the sealing of the servants of God, and after that the harming of the earth.' He says 'After the six unsealings I saw ...'. We have seen John's shifts of focus often enough already to imagine the focus changing once more. What the six seals have revealed is in fact a fearful and comprehensive harming of the earth, symbolized by the dread horsemen. In chapter 7 the depth of focus increases, our plane of vision is, so to speak, nearer to God, and where we saw four horsemen, with a veiled reference to a divine permission allowing them to ride forth, we now perceive four winds, which have power to harm the earth, but are controlled by four angels of God. It is a new view of the same thing, and the corresponding visions in the prophecy of

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Zechariah support this identification by linking four horse-drawn chariots with the four winds of God (Zc. 6:1–5, RV). But the further truth which here comes into focus is this: God’s control over the horsemen/winds ensures that his church is sealed and secure *before they ride forth*.

The Old Testament parallel to this is in Ezekiel 9, where ‘a man clothed in linen’ is told to ‘put a mark upon the foreheads’ of God’s faithful people, before the six ‘executioners of the city’ smite it with his wrath (verses 1–4). The New Testament explanation of it is given by Paul in Ephesians 1:13 f. We were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when we first put our faith in Christ. From that moment forward, our ultimate safety was guaranteed. So when the searing winds begin to blow, the servant of God is found to have been sealed already against their power. The horsemen ride out on their career of destruction; but the church has been made indestructible.

b. The sealing: who? (verses 4–12)

There has been much dispute over these verses. Who are the 144,000 of verse 4, who are the innumerable crowd of verse 9, and what is the relation between them? But it is less of a puzzle than might first appear. Verse 3 has told us who are sealed: it is God’s servants. We have no reason to limit this in any way. The servants of God, all of them, Old Testament and New, all his believing people, are sealed. If we are his servants, the message is for us as much as for any (1:1), and we too are sealed.

But if this is so, how can the sealed be described in verse 4 as 144,000 Israelites? Many theories, as wild as they are unnecessary, have been built on this description. The plain fact is that if we are God’s servants, we have been sealed. If we are then told that we number 144,000, when we know very well that there are millions of us, the figure is presumably another of the symbolic figures of Revelation, and indeed it looks too stylized to be anything else—the suspiciously tidy sort of number that is much more likely to be a symbol than a statistic. If we next find ourselves described as 144,000 *Israelites*, when most of us are Gentiles, this is in line with the regular New Testament teaching which applies to the Christian church the titles and privileges of Israel, and which we have already noted in 3:9. If our numbers are specified even more closely, and oddly, in that each of the twelve tribes, whether large or small, contributes just 12,000; and if the tribes are listed in an order found nowhere else in the Bible; and if one of them (Dan) is omitted altogether, and the lack made up by including one of Joseph’s sons as well as Joseph himself; then the description of us is very stylized indeed. But it is the kind of description we should expect if this is a ‘diagram’ of the church. Like every diagram, it sacrifices one kind of accuracy to clarify another; as when a map projection will sacrifice true distance in order to depict true area, or *vice versa*.

Then what about the innumerable crowd of verse 9? What is the relation between them and the 144,000? They are one and the same. For whatever else the white-robed multitude may be, they are certainly servants of God; and if they are servants, they are sealed (verse 3); and if they are sealed, they are the 144,000 (verse 4). But how can this be—how can a limited number, all Israelites, be the same as a numberless multitude drawn from every nation? Yet again, we put ourselves in John’s place. What he *heard* was a voice from heaven, declaring the results of God’s census of his people. More than once in Old Testament times, and again, significantly, at the coming of Christ (Lk. 2:1–7), they were caused to ‘stand up and be counted’; and here is God’s

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own count of them. The total may be a symbolic number, but it is still a *number*. If God can count the very hairs of our head (Mt. 10:30), a counting of the heads themselves is unlikely to be beyond him! 'The Lord knows those who are his' (2 Tim. 2:19), and what John heard was God's declaration of their total, given symbolically as '144,000'. What he *saw*, on the other hand, was that this definite total, known to God, is from the human point of view a numberless multitude. Similarly, from God's standpoint they are all 'Israel', his people; from our standpoint, they come from every nation under heaven.

Now for the third time the group of actors dominating the stage changes. We saw the angels, elders, and living creatures of chapters 4 and 5 give way to the horsemen of chapter 6; they in turn gave way to the four wind-angels of 7:1–10; and now, in 7:11, 12, we are back with the *dramatis personae* with whom the Scene began. God's people, whose final redemption is now guaranteed by their being sealed, are here represented not by the saints beneath the altar (6:9 ff.) or the innumerable '144,000' (7:4, 9), but once more by the twenty-four elders who first appeared in 4:4. God's world, which could not be hurt until its own final redemption had been assured by that same sealing (for its redemption depends on theirs), is represented by the four living creatures, who first appeared in 4:6. And now the myriads of angelic spectators, first seen in 5:11, come into view again also. 'The great congregation His triumph shall sing, Ascribing salvation To Jesus our King'—that was the song of the redeemed in verse 10; here in a yet vaster panorama we see all creation, bringing to God all its worship, for all that he does, through all the ages.

'Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name, evermore praising thee and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory; Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen.'

c. The sealing: why? (verses 13–17)

The representative elder asks for, and gives, a definition of the white-robed throng, in terms of what brings them where they are. 'These are those who have come through the great oppression: they have washed their robes ... That is why they now have their place before the throne' (verses 14, 15, JBP).

Some have thought that the white robes therefore indicate only those who have died, or at least suffered physical persecution, for their faith. Others hold that the 'oppression', or 'tribulation' (RSV), is a particular event still in the future, and thus narrow down even more the number of those who will go through it.² On both these views, of course, the phrase 'These are those who have come through the great oppression' contradicts the view put forward above, that the numberless throng is in fact all the servants of God.

So far from complicating the issue, however, this phrase clarifies it. Why do these stand before God's throne? What qualifies them to be there? The twin facts that they *have washed* their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and *do emerge* from suffering. He who is numbered among that multitude is the man who has been cleansed from his old life of sin (a past event) and been given an irrepressible new life which no tribulation can quench (a present experience).

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For the vision of verses 13 to 17 ‘refers, not only to the glory of the blessed ones in heaven, but to the life of the Christian soul in the world here and now. And who that, in this present pilgrimage, has been granted some glimpse of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” will affirm that the language of the seer is extravagant?’ Indeed the whole point of this Scene is that God’s people are safe amid the troubles of *this* life: ‘More happy, *but not more secure*, The glorified spirits in heaven.’ It is here and now, in this life, that they serve in God’s temple—not in the *hieron*, the outer court, but in the *naos*, the innermost sanctuary. It is in this life that he spreads his tabernacle, his tent, over them (verse 15, RV). Tabernacle and temple, in the Old Testament God’s own dwelling-places, are now the dwelling-place of his people, and the promises of the ninety-first Psalm are theirs:

‘He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
... will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday’ (Ps. 91:1, 5, 6).

Of course neither Psalm 91 nor Revelation 7 means that Christians are insulated against trouble. Seals 1 to 4, which showed us the world suffering, were followed by Seal 5, which reminded us that the church must suffer too, and there will be no escape from suffering till the world ends with Seal 6. But the Christian has an inner security which is not affected by external trials. ‘It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord,’ wrote Spurgeon. ‘Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain.’ Rupert Brooke, a poet of a very different kind from the Psalmist, nevertheless echoed his meaning perfectly:

‘Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death’s endeavour;
Safe where all safety’s lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.’

The Seventh Seal: ‘The Rest is Silence’ (8:1)

Seal 6 covered the end of history; and though we have learnt to beware of treating the sequence of John’s visions as the historical sequence of the events they portray, it is hard to imagine that Seal 7 would cover anything other than the events which follow the end of history. When Seal 7 is actually broken open, however, there is silence—a silence which confirms our interpretation of Scene 2. For in this scene Christ is revealing to John what will be the experience of the church in the world; so concerning what will happen after the end of the world, he naturally at this point has nothing to say. There *is* a seventh Seal; that is, there is another world to come; but the revelations dealing with it are reserved for later Scenes. Meanwhile we are to learn that the church need never expect to be preserved from the common ills of mankind, as long as this world

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endures; but that God is still on the throne, Christ is still at the centre of all things, and his people are indestructible.

So begins a half-hour of silence. In terms of actual history and eternity, half an hour is nothing. But in terms of a drama depicting them, it is a lengthy interval, in which John can meditate on Scene 2 before Scene 3 begins.¹⁶

NOTES :

Revelation 2:13: Satan's Throne

The letter to the church at Pergamum contains the next reference to the devil. The church was in serious danger of theological compromise. The message to the church is that they must know what they believe and why they believe it. Those who know God's Word will not be led astray by false teachers.

I know where you live—where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

What made the location of the church so perilous was that "Satan's throne" was there. The reference to Satan's throne is to be identified with the church's most malevolent enemy—Rome. By the time Revelation was written, emperor worship had been established in Pergamum for at least a century. The first temple to the emperor Augustus was built in Pergamum as early as AD 29. Because Satan was the underlying force in Rome's animosity toward the church, Pergamum could be described as the site of his throne. To the glory of God, a thriving congregation of believers gathered to worship the triune God in the very city where Satan had his throne.

Revelation 2:24: Secrets of Satan

The third letter to mention Satan in the seven letters is the one to the church at Thyatira. The many trade guilds in the city had an influential role in civic life. Jesus warned the church against moral compromise and encouraged them to live holy lives. The reference to Satan in the letter is brief but intriguing.

I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known "the so-called secrets of Satan"—as they say—I am not putting any other burden on you.

¹⁶ Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (pp. 69–84). InterVarsity Press.

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The letter refers to the “so-called secrets of Satan.” Some of the congregation seems to have fallen under the spell of a prophetess named Jezebel. It is likely that she was referred to as Jezebel, not because it was her name, but because of her similarities to Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kgs 16:31–21:25). The Old Testament Jezebel was the Canaanite wife of Israel’s King Ahab. Jezebel not only led Ahab to worship Baal but through Ahab spread the teachings of idolatry throughout Israel. In this letter, Jesus rebuked her because of her heretical teaching. The “so-called secrets of Satan” are likely a reference to esoteric teachings that emphasized the acquisition of divine mysteries. The source of these mysteries, however, was Satan rather than God. The teaching appears to have been antinomian and encouraged sexual immorality much like temple prostitution.⁸ The letter makes it abundantly evident that false teaching has its origin in Satan.

Revelation 3:9: Synagogue of Satan Redivivus

The final reference to Satan in the seven letters is in the letter to the church at Philadelphia.

Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.

The letter refers again to a Jewish synagogue as a “synagogue of Satan.” The reference pictures the ever-widening gap between Judaism and Christianity toward the end of the first century. John’s statement in v. 9, that the Jews who have rejected Jesus as Messiah were not really Jews at all, coheres with Paul’s teaching in Rom 2:28–29 (cf. Gal 6:16). Verse 9 implies that some of the Jews in Philadelphia were persecuting Christians.

The seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor reveal in the opening chapters of Revelation that the ultimate source of the persecution of God’s people and the source of heretical teaching is none other than Satan himself.

The First Letter: To Ephesus (2:1–7)

If the traditions about John are correct, his pulse would have quickened as he heard that the first of the seven Letters was destined for the church at Ephesus, for there, it is widely believed, he himself was for many years bishop. As might be expected, the character of the church came to reflect the character of its leader. The two sides of the John of the New Testament—an apostle of love, yet a ‘son of thunder’—are seen again, interestingly enough, in two stories that have been handed down concerning his later years at Ephesus: on the one hand his refusal to stay under the same roof as the heretic Cerinthus, and on the other hand his reduction of all his message to a sermon of one sentence, which in extreme old age he used to repeat at every church

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meeting: 'Little children, love one another.' We can tell from Acts and Ephesians that the early church there was likewise characterized by both love and zeal. As the city of Ephesus claimed to be the 'metropolis', or mother city, of the whole of Asia, so its church could claim by her evangelistic and pastoral concern to be the mother church of that province, and Paul could write of her 'love toward all the saints' (Eph. 1:15).

By the time John writes, some years have passed. How is the church now? Her zeal is undiminished. Her works, toil, and patient endurance are all commended, and especially the value she places on sound doctrine. Though she gladly endures suffering, she will certainly not endure false teaching, whether from evil men in general or from pseudo-apostles and Nicolaitans in particular. According to the letter written to the Ephesians not long after this by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the report that has reached him is of a church so well taught in the gospel that no unorthodox sect can gain a hearing among her members, a church which has taken seriously the warnings of Paul at the time of his last contact with her leaders. Nor does the message from Christ in any way belittle their concern for purity and soundness; would that all the Lord's people were keen-sighted enough to know when and how to say with the Psalmist (Ps. 139:21), 'Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord?'

But in her keenness for the truth, the church at Ephesus has lost her love, 'the one quality without which all others are worthless'. It is noteworthy that only in the first and last of the seven Letters is a church threatened with actual destruction, and in each case the reason is the unnerving, purely negative one, that *it lacks fervent devotion*. 'You have abandoned the love you had at first', says Christ. Do not misunderstand me; 'you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate'; I commend your zeal. But where is your *love*? For on that your very survival as a church depends.

Such a failure is only too possible. It has to be confessed by all Christians who have cast themselves in the role of Mr Valiant-for-Truth, and forgotten that they are also expected to be Mr Great-heart. To them Christ shows himself as equally zealous for the right. He too shows strength and vigilance—but it is the church he holds and patrols (verse 1). He too has a sharp eye for wrong—but it is in the church that he detects it. He too will not endure evil—but the evil he threatens to destroy is the church herself, if she will not repent.

And the first lamp was indeed removed. Church and city together have vanished; all that remains is the place-name Ayasaluk—and that, ironically, commemorates not Ephesus but John. There is still the promise of life in paradise for the individual who remembers from what he has fallen, and returns to his first works and his first love. But let the loveless church beware. 'If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing' (1 Cor. 13:2).

3. The Second Letter: To Smyrna (2:8–11)

One does not need background knowledge of Smyrna to understand the message to the church there, but still it is illuminating to learn that the beauty of this city, which rivalled Ephesus, was the beauty of a resurrection. Seven hundred years before, old Smyrna had been destroyed, and had lain in ruins for three centuries. The city of John's time was one which had risen from the dead. In sharp contrast to the fields which once were Ephesus, Smyrna thrives even today as

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Izmir, second largest city in Asiatic Turkey. And resurrection was to be the experience of its church also.

The immediate prospect was one of suffering and even death. This was a certainty—a fact which has lessons for those of us who live in comparative ease. Would we be taken aback to find persecution knocking at our door tomorrow? Many a church has had to learn to live with that prospect, and so ought we. For the great tribulation that John sees bringing this age to an end he also sees in miniature, recurring constantly in the experience of God’s people. And it is a test. It is the devil’s action, but God’s intention.

The persecution at Smyrna was made especially poignant by the fact that the great enemy was the local community of Jews. These were God’s people racially, but not really (Rom. 2:28), and were in fact blaspheming God as they persecuted his church under the guise of doing him service (Jn. 16:2). Perhaps it was economic pressure from these Jews that brought the church to poverty, and slanderous accusations by them (for ‘Satan’ means ‘slanderer’) that led to imprisonment and death.

But let the Christians take heart. For the Christ who unveils this dismaying prospect is one who has himself been through a Smyrna-experience. Like their city, their Lord also ‘died and came to life’, and guarantees a resurrection for them too. The enemy is strong. Behind these Jews stands Satan; it is he, not Abraham, who is their spiritual father (Jn. 8:33, 44). But behind Satan stands God, and God is in final control. If one great lesson is that suffering is certain, the other is that it is limited. For the Smyrnaeans, it would be for ‘ten days’ some time in their near future: there would in the goodness of God come an eleventh day, and all would be over. God’s control does not mean that Satan is prevented from inflicting pain and hurt. Nowhere does the New Testament promise freedom from suffering in this life; indeed, without the cross there will be no crown. But what God does guarantee is that though the church may suffer even the death of the body, she will not suffer the death of the soul. So Paul, having himself learnt these two lessons, demonstrates a true Christian sense of proportion in the face of tribulation: ‘I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us’ (Rom. 8:18).

The message therefore is that Smyrna must be not *fearful*, but *faithful*—to look not at the suffering, but beyond it to the all-controlling God.

4. The Third Letter: To Pergamum (2:12–17)

If Ephesus was the New York of Asia, Pergamum was its Washington, for there the Roman imperial power had its seat of government. There also was built the earliest temple for the state-sponsored worship of the Emperor. Whether or not this was what Christ meant by ‘the throne of Satan’, it emphasizes the kind of difficulties the Pergamene Christians had to face. For them Satan is not merely, as at Smyrna, a slanderer working through a group of ill-disposed Jews. He appears as ‘the ruler of this world’, to take a phrase from John’s Gospel (Jn. 14:30); and what John’s first Letter would call ‘the world’ (1 Jn. 2:15 ff.) is in fact the great enemy of the church at Pergamum.

It includes the power of other institutions besides the machinery of state. The enormous Pergamene library (the town gave its name to ‘parchment’), the famous healing ministry of the priests of Aesculapius, and crowning the city’s acropolis the Greco-Asiatic altar of Zeus the

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Saviour—all this paraphernalia of an ‘alternative society’, catering for mind, body, and spirit, is added to the overt demands of the Roman state. (In the same way we shall find in Scene 4 the beast from the earth joined by the beast from the sea to offer men a viable life-structure outside the kingdom of God. But that story must wait its turn: anticipating John’s further revelations is a fruitful way of misunderstanding them.)

In brief, Satan is working here through the pressures of non-Christian society. He persecutes; the suffering which will come to Smyrna has already come to Pergamum, and one at least has died a martyr’s death (verse 13b). He seduces; the Nicolaitans we met at Ephesus are here also, and though we know practically nothing about them, their teaching is apparently of the same kind as that of Balaam, who had led God’s people into sin long before (Nu. 31:16; 25:1–3). Both the sins mentioned in verse 14 may be taken literally. Both appeared in the time of Balaam, both reappeared in the New Testament church (1 Cor. 5 and 8), and the pathway to them is the kind of temptation which is typical of worldliness in any age: ‘Where is the harm in it? Everyone else does it; why shouldn’t you?’

Seduction, or persecution—a choice of evils which the world offers the church. For a soft-centred permissive society can be curiously hard on those who refuse to go along with it. ‘They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you’ (1 Pet. 4:4). The gay streets of Vanity Fair can still lead to prison and a stake: either you buy or you burn. This is not, indeed, the ten days’ reign of terror which Smyrna was to expect. Antipas was apparently the only member of the church at Pergamum who had actually been martyred. But how does Christ’s commendation read? ‘You did not deny my faith *even* in the days of Antipas’; implying that it was always a temptation, though especially of course at that time.

For some the temptation is too strong, and they give way. Compromise creeps in; the distinction between the church and the world is blurred; there is too much tolerance, too little discipline. ‘The fault of Pergamum is the opposite of the fault of Ephesus: and how narrow is the safe path between the sin of tolerance and the sin of intolerance!’

Nevertheless in the end it is Christ they have to reckon with. The power of the sword rests not with the rulers of Rome nor with the ruler of this world, but with him (verse 12). It is the sword of judgment in two senses, discerning the truth (Heb. 4:12) and punishing the evil (Rom. 13:4), and he will use it even against those in the church who will not repent (verse 16).

But there remains a promise to those who do repent and over-come. It is not easy to understand, and many suggestions have been made, especially about the meaning of the white stone (verse 17). Since the context speaks of feasts of idol-meat and the feast of manna which God spread for Israel in the desert, perhaps the reference is to an ancient use of square stones as tickets of admission to some public entertainment. So the promise of eternal life which ends each of the first two Letters is repeated here in terms appropriate to the Christian who will not compromise with worldly pleasures and idol-meat banquets. Christ gives that man a personal invitation to the true pleasures of the banquet of heaven, which are, in fact, himself: for ‘all the promises of God find their Yes in him’, and he is the true manna, the heavenly bread (2 Cor. 1:20; Jn. 6:31–35).

5. The Fourth Letter: to Thyatira (2:18–29)

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The sins in the church at Thyatira, like those at Pergamum, are immorality and compromise with idol worship. Here, as there, we may take them literally, though they also constitute the spiritual adultery of which God's people have often been guilty. The biblical metaphor is that the true God is Israel's husband; the false gods are her lovers (Je. 3; Ezk. 16; Ho. 2, *etc.*). Jezebel, like Balaam, was in the Old Testament story an outsider who seduced God's bride into this kind of unfaithfulness (1 Ki. 16:31; 2 Ki. 9:22).

There are however differences between the two situations. Against beleaguered Christians like those at Pergamum, Satan uses the pressures of the world to 'squeeze' them 'into its own mould' (Rom. 12:2, JBP); but where the church is noted for its growth and vigour (verse 19), he knows that he can do most damage not by pressure without but by poison within. So in Thyatira a particular woman takes on both the evil character of Jezebel and the prophetic role of Balaam, and begins to teach, as if from God, new 'deep things' which some members of this strong and lively church are only too willing to explore.

Bishop Butler was unjust to accuse John Wesley of 'pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost'. But many have so pretended, and their revelations, when divorced from what Scripture has already revealed, can be 'a very horrid thing' indeed. Their sinister voice is often heard in the midst of surging spiritual enthusiasms. As the Reformation gathers momentum, John of Leyden proclaims himself Messiah at Münster. As the idealism of the Children of God makes a bid for the loyalty of modern youth, Christian parents are dismayed to find their offspring being encouraged to abandon their home ties. 'No other gods before me', 'Honour your father and mother'—mere dull traditionalism compared with the exciting voices of the new prophets.

The fact that such voices are to be expected in a lively church is no excuse for her allowing them to go unchecked. Rather the reverse. The more favoured she is, the more severely she will be judged. Christ of the piercing eyes and the trampling feet comes to her like the sun shining in full strength (1:16), infinitely more terrible than the pagan sun-god Apollo, whose temple at Thyatira was famous. His glory searches her mind and heart, and 'there is nothing hid from its heat' (verse 23; Ps. 19:6). Those who will not repent he threatens with suffering and death, certainly in a spiritual sense and possibly also (with these punishments as with the sins of verses 20, 21) in a physical sense. To those who will repent, he promises that with this one major hindrance removed, they will become the splendid missionary church they have it in them to be. Verse 27 is a Greek adaptation of the Hebrew of Psalm 2:9; the first half of the verse is ambiguous in both languages, but the curious wording which results here does express the double effect of the preaching of the gospel. For the 'authority over the nations' which is given to Christ in Psalm 2, and to the church here, is authority to proclaim the rule or kingdom of God. He who rejects that rule will perish; but he who accepts it will live (2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Jn. 20:23; Lk. 24:47). What is more, to the church which is a faithful gospel-lamp in the dark night of this world Christ also promises himself as the morning star (22:16), the assurance of the coming dawn, when lamplight will be swallowed up in the light of eternal day.

6. The Fifth letter: To Sardis (3:1–6)

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In spite of their faults, in all the churches so far addressed Christ has recognized much good. What will he find to commend in Sardis? Nothing. The only 'good' she has is a good reputation, for which there is in fact no basis. Christ's verdict on her is devastatingly brief: in name she is alive, in fact she is dead.

Let us make no mistake about Sardis. She is not what the world would call a dead church. Perhaps even by her sister churches she is considered 'live'. Indeed, since Christ tells her to 'wake up', and warns her that his coming to judge her will be quite unexpected, it seems that she herself is not aware of her real spiritual state. All regard her as a flourishing, active, successful church—all except Christ. Her works do not in fact measure up to the standard he expects; not one of them has really been 'completed' (verse 2, NEB). If he threatens not to confess her before God, the reason is that in spite of all her activities she is not in fact confessing him (verse 5; Mt. 10:32).

Failure to complete? Failure to confess? None would be more surprised at the accusations than she herself. But 'When we remember what "complete" fulfilment of the Christian life meant to the Christians of Smyrna ... we shall better understand what John demanded of the church at Sardis': secure, complacent, like the city she lived in, untroubled by persecution of heresy, she 'set herself the task of avoiding hardship, by pursuing a policy based on convenience and circumspection, rather than whole-hearted zeal'.

It is not quite accurate to say that her reputation is the only good thing she has. There are a few things about her which are not yet dead, though they are dying (verse 2). There are a few people in her whose righteousness is still unstained (verse 4). Above all, there are memories of her first response to the gospel, 'how she received and heard' (verse 3, RV). The word is 'how', not 'what'—if only she can recapture that 'how', the spirit of penitence and commitment of those early days! Otherwise Christ threatens to come in a surprise visitation of judgment, like a thief in the night. What he describes in this way could be his return at the end of the age, as in Matthew 24:36–44, but is likelier to be some more immediate punishment. John 'expected the final coming of Christ to be anticipated in more limited but no less decisive visitations'. The experience of the church of Sardis will be like that of the citadel of Sardis, never taken by assault and thought to be impregnable, but more than once captured by stealth.

Even the promise of verse 5 carries a warning. There is no mention here of the kingdom and the power and the glory which in the other Letters are explicitly the reward of victorious Christians. All that Christ promises to the victors of Sardis is non-deletion from the book of life, and the white robe of his righteousness—simply, that is, their acceptance before God; as if to underline that the church as a whole is likely to forfeit even that.

If Christ alone can see and expose the plight of Sardis, certainly he alone can deal with it. And this he is ready to do. He is the one 'who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars'; and when he brings together the stars, who are the angelic representatives of the churches, and the sevenfold Spirit, two things can happen. The seven spirits are the eyes of God, from whom nothing is hidden (5:6): hence the message of severity we have just heard. But they are also the life-giving power of God; and in Sardis, as in all the seven cities, Christ has in his hands both the needy church and the life-giving Spirit. He can bring the two together, not only to diagnose but also to revive the dead. And we may be sure that if Sardis remembers and heeds and repents, he will do so.

7. The Sixth Letter: To Philadelphia (3:7–13)

Apart from Smyrna, Philadelphia is the only church with which Christ has no fault to find. Whatever sternness there may be in his tone is due not to the finding of faults, but to the facing of facts. For a testing-time approaches—not, surely, the last great tribulation, as though John were mistakenly expecting that to be imminent, nor yet some local persecution, which could hardly be a ‘trial ... coming on the whole world’; but the perennial ordeal, of which all particular trials and especially the last one are embodiments. And the church has no great strength to meet it. Christ does not minimize the difficulties.

But he does encourage the church. It faces both opposition and (possibly) opportunity, and his intention is to overcome the one and to confirm the other.

Philadelphia is again like Smyrna in that it has to face the opposition of the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (2:9). We can catch the flavour of the Greek word for ‘lie’ by thinking of these people as ‘*pseudo-Jews*’. They claim, falsely, to be the holy people of God. In contrast, Christ speaks as the true Holy One (verses 9, 7). He refers to the ancient prophecies of how God’s people will one day be vindicated and the rest of mankind will bow before them. The fulfilment of these prophecies, he tells the church, will be the reverse of what the Philadelphian Jews expect: *they* will have to ‘bow down before *your* feet’, and acknowledge ‘that I have loved *you*’. Let the Christians take heart, for it is on them that the Lord has set his favour.

Frequently in Revelation John joins the other apostolic writers in teaching that the privileges and promises given to Old Testament Israel have been inherited by the Christian church. The doctrine is here, for example, in the Letter to Philadelphia and its biblical background. Enquiry as to the meaning of the ‘key of David’ takes us to the book of Isaiah; we shall find allusions from every part of it here in Revelation 3. The ‘key’ appears in Isaiah 22:22, together with the promise that its custodian Eliakim, steward of the household, shall have the same authority that Christ has here to open or shut. To open or shut what? The entrance to the house of David. And for what purpose? The gates are opened, says Isaiah, ‘that the righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in’ (26:2). Then, just as Eliakim himself is fastened ‘like a peg in a sure place, and ... a throne of honour to his father’s house’ (22:23), so in consequence the weak, the despised, and the converted outsider will be given ‘in my house and within my walls a monument and a name’ (56:5). The nations shall come in too, in humble submission (60:11); ‘all who despised you shall bow down at your feet’ (60:14; cf. 49:22, 23). The whole group of ideas thus concerns entry to the house of David, the kingdom, city, and temple of God. What happens to it we may follow step by step. The Lord condemns Jewish legalism (‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees ... you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in’, Mt. 23:13) and transfers the doorkeeper’s authority to the apostolic church (‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’, Mt. 16:19). So Peter and his associates have the privilege of first admitting not only Jews, but also Samaritans and Gentiles, to permanent membership of the kingdom (Acts 2, 8, 10). In this way the entire concept—key, door, city, temple, and pillar—becomes a Christian one, and the basis for the reversal mentioned above. The Jews will ‘learn that I have loved *you*’.

This undeserved favour is at the root of it all. In a sense, Christ keeps (or preserves) his people because they keep (or observe) his word (verse 10), and the encouragements for Philadelphia, as

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for Smyrna, are intended for all who are loyal to him. But the chain of cause and effect goes further back: they obey his word only because he has first set his love on them. It also goes further on: the final result of his loving care for them will be that this church of 'little power' will be established as an immovable pillar in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem (verse 12). She will be thrice sealed, as belonging to God, belonging to God's city, and belonging to God's Son. His tender promise to those who are painfully aware of weakness and insecurity is that they shall finally *belong*.

Until they reach that destination he calls them to endurance; and also, no doubt, to service. Elsewhere in the New Testament the 'open door' is a picture of opportunity (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12); and though, as we have seen, it here means primarily their own assured entry into the New Jerusalem, it is also the way by which others are to be brought in—even (if the picture in Isaiah is totally reversed) Jews converted from the synagogue of Satan. So they are doubly encouraged, for Christ who nullifies the opposition also magnifies the opportunity. The door has been opened by him, and none can shut it. Let them again take heart, and use the strength they do have in the service he sets before them.

8. The Seventh Letter: To Laodicea (3:14–22)

Archaeology has filled in much interesting background to this Letter. Laodicea was a banking centre and a textile town, famous also for the manufacture of a certain kind of eye ointment (see verse 18); lime-laden water flowed, tepid and sickly, from nearby springs (see verse 16). So Christ's words to the church there were uncomfortably apt. But even without such background knowledge, we could not mistake his judgment on her. 'If only you were cold or hot!'—what more terrible condemnation could there be of a church's condition, than that the Lord would prefer even a cold Christianity to the sort he actually finds in her?

Elsewhere in Asia we have seen that the state of a church has often corresponded to the state of its city. At Laodicea, however, the two are contrasted. The church is the image of the city reversed in a black negative. Financiers, physicians, clothing manufacturers are among its notable citizens; but 'poor, blind, and naked' is the verdict on its church. 'It has failed to find in Christ the source of all true wealth, splendour, and vision.'

The lukewarmness of Laodicea is the worst condition to which a church can sink. It is worse even than Sardis, where a glimmer of life remained. The only good thing in Laodicea is the church's thoroughly good opinion of herself—and that is false. She claims to have everything, and has nothing; and did we not remind ourselves that in 1:16, yes, there *are* seven stars held in the hand of Christ, we might well doubt whether she is a true church at all. Can we therefore be shocked by Christ's outspoken opinion? We may find it hard to accept what in effect he says in verse 16: 'You make me sick.' But it is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, who speaks these words, and they are of a piece with those other frightening scriptures which speak of the Lord's loathing (Ps. 95:10) and his derision (Ps. 2:4).

Yet even Laodicea has a chance. The fact that he rebukes her shows that he still loves her (verse 19); and the threat of total rejection if she will not repent is balanced by the promise of total reinstatement if she will. For the sake of this disastrous church, he presents himself in verse 14 as the beginning, or (less misleadingly) the origin, of God's creation, the one who is able to go

right down into the chaotic abyss of Laodicea's failure and make her anew, as he once made the world.

But *if she will*: that is the nub of the matter. Divine sovereignty is by no means undercut by this. Christ alone can provide the riches and the robes and the ointment; his is the persuasive voice which counsels Laodicea to accept his offer; he comes, he stands, he knocks, he calls. His sovereignty is implicit in his being the 'origin of creation', and that truth she had been taught long since, when Paul's Letter to Colosse had come to her also (Col. 1:15–18; 4:16). But the question for her is whether *she* will open the door and let him in again. For 'the only cure for lukewarmness is the re-admission of the excluded Christ.'

Should the church even yet be deaf to his appeal, he addresses himself to its members one by one, for 'when Christ says *if any man* ... he is appealing to the individual. Even if the church as a whole does not heed the warning the individual may.' And to any in the Laodicean church who give evidence of this hoped-for repentance, he promises in verses 20 and 21 perhaps the most majestic reward of all, a seat at the divine banquet and a place on the throne of heaven.¹⁷

Chapter 7

Spiritual Warfare in Revelation

The book of Revelation is the culmination of the spiritual warfare theme that runs throughout the Bible. J. Scott Duvall comments this way:

Revelation speaks of supernatural and human enemies, such as the devil, demons, the Antichrist, the false prophet, wicked humans, and evil empires, which mount a relentless attack on believers. And because these forces of evil have already lost the war for ultimate control of the universe, they fight the smaller battles viciously, like cornered, wounded animals (12:12).

Satan is mentioned more frequently in Revelation than in any other biblical book. In addition to the references to Satan, though demons are mentioned in only four passages in the book, their diabolic influence is seen in many places. Revelation itself is unique in that it contains three different genres: apocalyptic, epistolary, and prophetic. The apocalyptic genre makes the book

¹⁷ Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (pp. 42–58). InterVarsity Press.

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more difficult to interpret for modern readers. The purpose of this section is not to unravel the debates concerning the second coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom, but to remain focused on the theme of spiritual warfare.

The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches

The second and third chapters contain seven letters from Christ to seven actual churches in Asia Minor. These letters help us catch something of the situation the churches in Asia Minor faced in the final years of the first century. The churches of Asia Minor were encountering a powerful one-two punch of rising persecution and encroaching heretical teaching.

Revelation 2:9–10: A Synagogue of Satan

The letter to the church at Smyrna refers to the devil twice: once in v. 9 and the other in v. 10.

I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The first reference is very brief and refers to “a synagogue of Satan.” This statement should not be understood in an anti-Semitic way. Jesus (the author of the letter) and John (the author of the book) were both Jewish! The statement is directed against a local Jewish synagogue that was persecuting the church.

In this verse, the leaders of the Jewish synagogue appear to have been inciting the Roman authorities to persecute the church. John said that although they claimed to be Jews, they were not really, and that they “slander[ed]” (*blasphēmia*) the church. For the first of many times in Revelation, Satan is identified as the ultimate source of the persecution of Christians, which is seen further in the phrase, “the devil is about to throw some of you into prison.” The devil himself will obviously use people to accomplish his diabolical purpose. Whether the reference to the “ten days” refers to ten actual days or is a Semitic expression for an indefinite but relatively brief period of time is not as important as understanding that God knows what is about to happen and sets a time limit for what will take place. Satan is unable to make any move that God does not already know.

Revelation 2:13: Satan's Throne

The letter to the church at Pergamum contains the next reference to the devil. The church was in serious danger of theological compromise. The message to the church is that they must know what they believe and why they believe it. Those who know God's Word will not be led astray by false teachers.

I know where you live—where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

What made the location of the church so perilous was that “Satan's throne” was there. The reference to Satan's throne is to be identified with the church's most malevolent enemy—Rome. By the time Revelation was written, emperor worship had been established in Pergamum for at least a century. The first temple to the emperor Augustus was built in Pergamum as early as AD 29. Because Satan was the underlying force in Rome's animosity toward the church, Pergamum could be described as the site of his throne. To the glory of God, a thriving congregation of believers gathered to worship the triune God in the very city where Satan had his throne.

Revelation 2:24: Secrets of Satan

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The third letter to mention Satan in the seven letters is the one to the church at Thyatira. The many trade guilds in the city had an influential role in civic life. Jesus warned the church against moral compromise and encouraged them to live holy lives. The reference to Satan in the letter is brief but intriguing.

I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known "the so-called secrets of Satan"—as they say—I am not putting any other burden on you.

The letter refers to the "so-called secrets of Satan." Some of the congregation seems to have fallen under the spell of a prophetess named Jezebel. It is likely that she was referred to as Jezebel, not because it was her name, but because of her similarities to Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kgs 16:31–21:25). The Old Testament Jezebel was the Canaanite wife of Israel's King Ahab. Jezebel not only led Ahab to worship Baal but through Ahab spread the teachings of idolatry throughout Israel. In this letter, Jesus rebuked her because of her heretical teaching. The "so-called secrets of Satan" are likely a reference to esoteric teachings that emphasized the acquisition of divine mysteries. The source of these mysteries, however, was Satan rather than God. The teaching appears to have been antinomian and encouraged sexual immorality much like temple prostitution.⁸ The letter makes it abundantly evident that false teaching has its origin in Satan.

Revelation 3:9: Synagogue of Satan Redivivus

The final reference to Satan in the seven letters is in the letter to the church at Philadelphia.

Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.

The letter refers again to a Jewish synagogue as a "synagogue of Satan." The reference pictures the ever-widening gap between Judaism and Christianity toward the end of the first century. John's statement in v. 9, that the Jews who have rejected Jesus as Messiah were not really Jews at all, coheres with Paul's teaching in Rom 2:28–29 (cf. Gal 6:16). Verse 9 implies that some of the Jews in Philadelphia were persecuting Christians.

The seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor reveal in the opening chapters of Revelation that the ultimate source of the persecution of God's people and the source of heretical teaching is none other than Satan himself.

Trumpet Judgment and the Great Conflict

Revelation 9:1–11: The Fallen Star

After the seven letters, Satan and demons do not appear again in Revelation until chapter 9 in connection with the fifth trumpet. Scholars debate whether Satan is referred to in the chapter or not. Demonic forces are mentioned in both the fifth and sixth trumpets.

The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth. The key for the shaft to the abyss was given to him. (Rev 9:1)

The fifth trumpet corresponds to the first of John's three woes. When the fifth angel blew his trumpet, John saw a star (*astēr*) fall from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the abyss (*abyssos*). The Gadarene demoniac begged Jesus not to cast them into the abyss (bottomless pit). The fallen star can represent a demon (Jude 13) or even Satan (Luke 10:18; Rev 12:9); however, the more likely interpretation here is that it corresponds to an angelic messenger sent by God. We see a similar angel in Rev 20:1: "Then I saw an angel coming down

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from heaven holding the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand.” John’s point was that God is sovereign even over the underworld.

While the star that fell from the sky unlikely represents Satan, the locusts clearly represent demonic beings (9:3–5). The imagery is drawn from the eighth plague against the Egyptians (Exod 10:1–20) as well as the locusts in Joel 1–2. The origin of the locusts and their hideous description reveals the inner nature of these demonic beings (Rev 9:7–9). The phrase “and power was given to them” (v. 3) is a divine passive suggesting that ultimately God grants them the authority to torment. God limited their destructiveness, determining they would inflict pain on those who did not know him but not upon nature. The targets were those who did not have God’s seal on their foreheads (9:3–5).

The leader of this demonic horde is described as “the angel of the abyss” (9:11). Scholars debate if this angel is a reference to Satan or to a high-ranking demonic spirit. The reference is slightly more probable to be to a high-ranking demon rather than to Satan. Satan was referred to in the seven letters, but the next clear reference to him does not come until 12:9. The “king of the abyss” is named Abaddon or Apollyon—the former is Hebrew for “the place of death and destruction,” and the latter is Greek for “destroyer.”

The passage teaches that even in the midst of devastation and destruction, when demonic forces are wreaking havoc and bringing pain on large numbers of people, God is still in control. John’s use of the divine passive indicates God’s sovereignty over the demon locusts (9:1, 3, 5). His sovereignty is revealed as well in the limits he places on the scope of their devastation (9:4–6, 10). In the final stages of human history, demons will be God’s instruments to punish the wicked.

The horsemen in vv. 13–19 should again be understood as demonic beings considering their grotesque description. The same is likely true of the four angels who had been bound (9:14). These demonic spirits are agents of divine judgment. Once again evil spirits bring suffering, pain, and death to those who do not know God. That they were kept for this very day, month, and year indicates God’s sovereignty over them (9:15). Satan and his demons have little concern whose lives they destroy and who are the objects of their venom.

Revelation 12: Cosmic War and God’s Victory

Revelation 12–14 are a peek behind the scenes at the cosmic war between God and Satan. These chapters would be a great encouragement to God’s persecuted people, as John described God’s ultimate victory over the forces of darkness (10:1–11:13). John wanted the church to know the underlying reason for Satan’s hatred of the church. In one sense, chapter 12 answers the question, Why does Satan hate the church and want to destroy it? He hates the church because he was defeated at the cross, and his time is limited until he is vanquished forever. Until that day, Satan is determined to destroy the church.

The chapter has four main sections. Admittedly, depending upon one’s eschatological perspective, some of these thoughts can be interpreted in various ways. I will attempt to remain focused on the cosmic conflict motif throughout. The opening verses are normally understood to be the messianic community giving birth to Jesus the Messiah (12:1–2). The description reveals

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that the birth of Jesus had significant cosmic importance. Satan is described with graphic imagery in Rev 12:3–4:

There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth it might devour her child.

John made clear the identity of the dragon in v. 9: “So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan.” The devil’s depiction as a dragon was intended to communicate his destructive nature. The seven heads topped with seven crowns suggest the great authority the dragon is permitted to exercise. His ten horns symbolize his great power. John described the dragon in v. 4 as such an immense creature that with one sweep of his tail he can brush a third of the stars out of their heavenly places. John was clearly describing spiritual realities using apocalyptic images. The imagery reveals Satan to be the horrific “god of this age.”

Satan situates himself before the woman, expecting certain victory over the messianic child (12:4). The image instructs the church to beware of Satan’s attempts to undermine God’s purposes in history. The dragon attempted to destroy the messianic child beginning with the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16–18) and culminating with the crucifixion. John describes the child being taken up to heaven, indicating the victory of God’s Son over every satanic effort to destroy him. The dragon’s frustration at his failure to destroy the Messiah causes him to turn his attention to the heavenly woman, but his efforts are futile (Rev 12:6).

The second major section of chapter 12 describes a war in heaven (12:7–12). The passage can be divided into three sections: Satan’s heavenly defeat (vv. 7–9), the significance of Satan’s defeat (vv. 10–11), and Satan’s fury turned toward the church (v. 12). The opening section describes a heavenly battle between Michael with his angels and the dragon with his angels. The dragon and his forces are defeated in this heavenly battle and must forfeit their place in heaven. Because of his defeat, the dragon and his angels are thrown down to the earth. The dragon is identified clearly as the ancient serpent that deceived Eve with lies in the garden (Gen 3:1–6). John identified the dragon as the devil and Satan.

The hymn in vv. 10–12 interprets the apocalyptic image of the heavenly battle. In reality, the battle took place just outside Jerusalem on Golgotha and in the garden tomb. At the cross, Christ paid the penalty for his people’s sins, so Satan no longer has grounds to accuse them before God (see Job 1:6–9; 2:1–6; Zech 3:1–2). Therefore, he was thrown down to the earth (Rev 12:10). Verses 11–12a indicate that God’s martyrs, who loved him more than their own lives, did not experience defeat in their deaths but victory. The final part of v. 12 warns that Satan is like a furious wounded animal that knows its end is near and is intent on doing as much damage to the church as possible.

The third section depicts the war on earth between Satan and the church (12:13–17). The opening verse resumes the dragon’s attempt to destroy the heavenly woman. The woman now represents the church, the bride of Christ. Earlier John described the woman as fleeing to the wilderness to escape the dragon (12:6). While the imagery can be confusing and has been

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interpreted in various ways, the main point is clear: God will protect his people from spiritual harm against the devil's attacks (12:14).

The final section of the chapter describes Satan's continued attack on the church and God's faithful deliverance of his people (12:15–16). The serpent first spews water from his mouth in an attempt to drown the woman. In the Old Testament, water symbolizes destruction by an enemy. Just as the desert absorbed the flood of water from the serpent's mouth, God will protect his people from spiritual harm. God's protection of the woman only infuriates the serpent more as he goes off to wage war against God's people (12:17).

This chapter provides several insights into the cosmic conflict taking place behind the scenes. First, John's depiction of cosmic conflict reveals the battle that is being played out on earth. Second, this chapter explains that Satan hates the church and seeks to destroy her because he has been defeated in heavenly combat at the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Third, even though the church's great enemy is described in the most horrific imagery imaginable—a great red dragon—the church should be greatly encouraged to persevere in her suffering because the dragon's time is limited. Fourth, at the same time, the church must be on guard and continually alert because the dragon knows that his time is limited. By any and every means possible, he will seek to do as much damage to the people of God as he can. But just as God protected the woman by soaking up the flood spewed from the dragon's mouth, he will not allow spiritual harm to come to his people. The chapter ends with the imagery of Satan preparing to go to war against the people of God: “So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17 NASB).

Revelation 13:1–14:20: Satan's Henchmen and Strategy

Revelation 13 answers the question, How will Satan attempt to destroy the church in the final days of human history? The final verse of chapter 12 describes the dragon standing on the seashore, waiting to call forth a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. The dragon brings forth two henchmen to help him in his pursuit of those who believe in Jesus. Satan's goals are twofold: to destroy the church by waging a war against the saints (13:7, 10–11) and to capture the worship of those “who live on the earth” (v. 6 NIV, meaning, unredeemed humanity; see 13:8, 12, 15). Counterfeit signs and wonders will deceive those “who live on the earth” into worship of the beast (13:3, 12–16). John clearly communicates, however, using the divine passive (13:5, 7, 15), that God remains in control.

Scholars debate the identity of these two beasts. The beast from the sea is often identified either as the Antichrist or a corrupt political system or empire. Empires are represented often by a tyrannical leader such as Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, Domitian, or an Adolf Hitler. While in Revelation the beast is never identified with the Antichrist, he is commonly understood to be the same individual as Paul's “man of lawlessness” and 1 John's “antichrist” (2 Thess 2:3; 1 John 2:22; 4:3). This understanding explains how the beast can appear to be a person on the one hand, but much larger than any individual on the other.

The second beast is often called the “false prophet.” This beast is something akin to the propaganda machine for the first beast, seeking to seduce people to worship the first beast.

Along with Satan they serve as an unholy trinity seeking to destroy the church in the final days of human history.

Bowl Judgments and the Second Coming

Revelation 15:1–18:24: Satan’s Kingdom and the Coming Judgment

While the references to Satan and demons are relatively few in these chapters, they remain important to a study on spiritual warfare. These chapters again take the reader behind the scenes and expose the true nature of Satan’s kingdom. Beginning with chapter 16, John described in rapid-fire succession the pouring out of the seven bowls of God’s undiluted wrath, including an unusual scene between the sixth and seventh bowls:

Then I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming from the dragon’s mouth, from the beast’s mouth, and from the mouth of the false prophet. For they are demonic spirits performing signs, who travel to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God, the Almighty. (Rev 16:13–14)

The three unclean spirits are in the form of frogs. Frogs were considered unclean by the Jews (Lev 11:41). These demons perform miraculous signs like the false prophet (Rev 13:13–14). Since these demons come from the mouths of each member of the satanic trinity, their words should be understood to be lying and deceptive. The purpose of these demons is to gather the kings of the world for the great day of God’s judgment (16:14). God’s sovereignty is demonstrated in that demons gather together the wicked for the final outpouring of God’s wrath. Once again, Satan and his demons are shown to be those who kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10).

Chapters 17–18 expand on the pouring out of the seventh bowl. The kingdoms of this world under the dominion of Satan are compared to a harlot (17:1–17 KJV), or prostitute, and the ancient city of Babylon (18:1–24). In 17:1–6 John is astonished when he sees a vision of Babylon the Great, the mother of all prostitutes, adorned with power, opulence, and depravity. The image of a prostitute stands in striking contrast to the bride of the Lamb presented in Revelation 21. Everyone must choose between these two women. The prostitute in chapter 17 is described as having widespread economic influence over the nations. She uses her power to promote idolatry and sexual promiscuity. These are the same sins that Satan has used to tempt humanity since the garden. The prostitute blasphemes God and persecutes his people. The true nature of Satan and wickedness is on display in this image. The kingdoms of the world, which appear innocuous, are in fact nothing less than a deceptive harlot seducing people into everlasting judgment.

In chapter 18, John turns from the image of a harlot to the seemingly invincible city of Babylon the Great. Although she performed mighty works of industry, demonstrated unparalleled craftsmanship, wielded extraordinary political power, and tremendous artistic skill, beneath the surface she is nothing more than a harlot seeking to seduce humanity to worship the beast rather than the one true God. From a human perspective, the kingdom of Babylon seems invincible, but God destroys her in one hour. The image of one hour is not intended to communicate exactly sixty minutes but a brief period of time. God calls his people to separate from this harlot-city that

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has been corrupting the earth since the fall in the garden. While its allure seems irresistible, God reveals its true nature.

Revelation 19:1–22:5: The Return of the King

John has withheld the description of Christ's second coming. He now describes it in all its glory and splendor (19:11–16), along with the defeat of God's enemies at Armageddon (19:17–21; cf. 16:12–16). John depicts "the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war" against Christ and his army (19:19). The long-awaited battle of Armageddon has arrived! Earlier John stated that demons amassed this army, led here by the two beasts (16:12–16). No battle, however, is fought. What is described is the judgment of the two beasts as they are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). Their followers are slain—not by human weapons but by the sword from the mouth of Christ. This confrontation between Christ and his enemies brings to an end the anti-Christian forces that have assailed God's people and defamed the name of Christ.

The ease by which the two beasts and their army are defeated demonstrates their powerlessness against Christ and his vast superiority and sovereignty in comparison to them. As mentioned, no battle is fought; John only describes the gathering of the forces of evil. The ultimate battle took place outside Jerusalem, and Christ conquered his enemy through his death and resurrection.

In Rev 20:1–3, John describes an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, also described as the ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan. He was bound by the angel and thrown in the abyss for a thousand years. Whether the thousand years should be interpreted literally or figuratively is debated.

Whether one holds to premillennialism, amillennialism, or postmillennialism, all agree that Rev 20:7–9 depicts the final judgment of Satan. While specific details can be debated dependent upon one's millennial perspective, these verses demonstrate the depth of Satan's corruption. The fire that came down from heaven and consumed God's enemies is reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The devil, who remains the great deceiver, is thrown into the lake of fire. There he joins the beast from the sea and the false prophet. The remainder of the book describes the judgment of the dead (20:11–15) and the new heaven and the new earth (21:1–22:5).

The cosmic war is finished once and for all! The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and his Christ (see 11:15). While in the present the battle is fierce and at times the outcome may seem to be in doubt, the final chapters of Revelation confirm what was stated at the fall—the serpent's head will be crushed in his ultimate destiny, an eternal lake of fire!

New Testament Summary

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The New Testament teaching on spiritual warfare touches on a significant number of issues related to the church and the Christian life. This brief summary will focus on the following areas: the Christian life, the church, the defeat of Satan, and the lost.

Spiritual Warfare in the Christian Life

The Christian life is to be characterized by a great degree of victory in the spiritual realm. Christ defeated Satan and the forces of darkness at the cross (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8–12), and all who are united with him share in that victory (Col 1:13; 1 John 2:13–14). Yet, in the present age, Satan and his demons remain aggressive in their assault on believers and the church (John 10:10; Eph 6:10–12). Christians are warned to be watchful of him and his deceptive activity (1 Pet 5:8–9; 1 John 3:8–12; 2 Cor 11:3–4, 11:12–14). Like a skilled fisherman, Satan seeks to lure Christians away from heartfelt devotion to Jesus by tempting them through their sinful inclinations (Jas 1:13–15). While believers are taught to expect satanic attacks, they are given assurance as well that if they resist the devil he will flee (Jas 4:7).

Believers have no need to fear their enemy because the Holy Spirit in them is greater than the one (Satan) that is in the world (1 John 4:1–6). In addition, the believer's Savior is Lord over all, especially over spiritual powers (Col 1:15–16; Eph 1:20–23). Christians are aided in their spiritual battles with the words of Scripture (Eph 6:17; Luke 4:1–13). Through the Word of God believers come to recognize the devil's schemes and are enabled to achieve daily victory over him (1 John 2:13–14).

Finally, believers are provided with the armor of God (Eph 6:10–20). This armor is to be put on within the community of faith as believers pray for one another and for themselves as they prepare for certain enemy attack (Acts 4:23–31; Eph 6:18–20; 1 Thess 3:3). A significant portion of spiritual warfare is defensive in nature. Satan looks for just the right "opportunity" to establish a possible "foothold" in a believer's life (Eph 4:27 NIV). Believers must take a stand of resistance as the evil one shoots "flaming arrows" and attempts to leverage sinful tendencies such as anger, resentment, lust, greed, or fear (Eph 6:16). The avenue Satan often uses is a believer's closest relationships: marriage, children, work, and the church (Eph 5:22–6:9) to gain that opportunity. In light of Satan's attack strategies, Christians must be filled with God's Spirit, vigilant, and alert.

The Christian's victory over Satan and his forces in spiritual warfare is not only a means of great rejoicing in the believer's life but also a warning. Pride was the undoing of those angels who abandoned their positions of authority and fell from heaven. As such, we are warned that pride may likewise be the undoing for Christians as well (Jude 6). Deception is one of the enemy's chief weapons and one often thinks he is what he knows, leaving a believer vulnerable to hypocrisy (2 Cor 11:3–4, 12–14).

Spiritual Warfare in the Church

Satan hates the church and is continually seeking to destroy it (Rev 12:13–17). He tries to find means to derail the church from its mission. This attempted destruction can be done through hypocrisy, false teaching, and persecution (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Tim 1:18–20; Rev 2:9–10, 13; 3:9).

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Satan hates the church because God's glorious wisdom is manifest through the church, and the church's mission is to take the gospel to the lost (Eph 3:10–11; Matt 28:19–20). Those who are saved are set free from the dominion of darkness and transferred into Jesus's kingdom (Gal 1:4; Col 1:12–14). Even when the church acts in obedience to God, as in the excommunication of those engaged in habitual unrepentant sin and false teaching (1 Cor 5:1–5), the devil seeks to bring division through a failure to forgive the repentant (2 Cor 2:5–11). So, even when the church does what is right, it must be alert to Satan's schemes.

The church must recognize that truly heretical teaching has its origin in demonic activity (1 Tim 4:1–2; Rev 2:24). Satan, however, will even use a desire for orthodoxy to seek to cause believers to fight and separate over matters where genuine godly believers sometimes disagree on second- and third-level issues. Unlike the wisdom of the Lord, which brings unity to the church, the wisdom from below (satanic in origin) fosters envy and ambition, leading to division (Jas 3:14–16). The final days of human history will see Satan making his final attempt to destroy the church (2 Thess 2:8–11; Revelation 13); however, he most certainly will utterly fail (Rev 19:11–21; 20:1–10).

The Defeat of Satan

Through his death and resurrection, Christ has defeated Satan once and for all (Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 2:13–14). The victory of Christ on the cross, moreover, has both a present and a future reality. Although presently the power of Satan has been rendered ineffective and believers can live with a great deal of victory over him (Heb 2:14–15; Rom 8:38–39), his ultimate and eternal doom is still in the future (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 15:24–25; Rev 20:1–11). Though Christians live in a world under the dominion of Satan, the evil one is unable to touch them (1 John 5:18–19). The reality of this victory ought to embolden and encourage believers to withstand persecution for the kingdom and advance the gospel throughout the world (1 Pet 3:18–21). The present diminishment of Satan's power is a foretaste of the greater victory to come. The demons shudder at the knowledge of their ultimate judgment and doom (Jas 2:19). At the same time, Christians ought to take heart, knowing that with the conquest of Satan and sin there awaits no eternal judgment for them (Heb 2:14–15).

Spiritual Warfare and the Lost

The lost live under the dominion of Satan and reflect that subjugation in their orientation toward sin (Gal 1:4; Eph 2:1–3; 1 John 3:8–12; 1 John 5:18–19). Moreover, as children of the devil, they work unknowingly toward the purposes of their father (John 8:44). Their eyes are blinded to their need of the gospel (Mark 4:12; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:18–19). Yet the Spirit of God and the power of the gospel open blind eyes, soften hard hearts, and set captives free (Luke 4:18–19; John 8:32; Eph 2:4–13):

One aspect of spiritual warfare that is not defensive is taking the gospel to the lost, be they down the street or across the globe (Eph 6:15). The book of Acts demonstrates time and time again that no matter how hard Satan tried to stop the gospel from making significant advancement, he failed miserably.

Conclusion

The examination of the biblical material obviously is not intended to be exhaustive but to provide an overview for understanding the important role spiritual warfare plays in the Bible. Every passage could have been examined in much more detail, but in-depth examination was not the goal. Many people seek to understand the topic of spiritual warfare without looking closely at what the Bible actually says on the topic. Understanding the biblical teaching on spiritual warfare allows one to see how it works its way out in daily living. It is imperative to know what the Bible teaches on this subject and to be determined to live it out. The following chapters are built on this biblical-theological understanding of spiritual warfare and suggest how one can apply it to various aspects of the Christian life.¹⁸

2. The First Seal: Conquest (6:1, 2)

The visions which follow the breaking open of the first four Seals are linked, as a series within a series, by a number of common features. These we shall deal with later, considering for the moment what is distinctive about each vision.

Many commentaries point on from verse 2 to another Scene much later in the drama, and from there back to a certain passage in the Gospels. In 19:11, as here, a crowned conqueror appears riding a white horse, and there he is actually named as King of kings, Lord of lords, and The Word of God, that is, Jesus Christ. So it is suggested that the horseman of 6:2 also is Jesus Christ. If we then ask what Christ is doing here, in such gruesome company as that of the second, third, and fourth riders, we are referred back to Mark 13:10 and its parallels, which tell us to expect in the course of this age not only the spread of evil but also the spread of the conquering gospel.

We may or may not feel that this is sufficient evidence to identify the first horseman. To this question we shall return. The important thing which John has to record, at all events, is that some kind of conquest follows the opening of the first seal.

3. The Second Seal: Strife (6:3, 4)

If the first horseman is Christ and the conquering gospel, does the second stand for the warfare of the world, as a contrasting evil; or for divisions between men that are caused when the gospel is accepted by some and rejected by others (Mt. 10:34–36); or for persecution of the church by the world? If on the other hand the first horseman is not Christ, is he instead a personification of the glory of war, while the second personifies its horrors?

¹⁸ Cook, W. F., III, & Lawless, C. (2019). [*Spiritual warfare in the storyline of scripture*](#) (pp. 181–200). B&H Academic.

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Biblical evidence has been brought forward for all these views, some of it from verse 4 itself. A more accurate rendering might change 'slay' into 'butcher', for example, and might explain that 'sword' could well mean a sacrificial knife. What the rider is actually said to do, however, is simply to take away peace. Trying once more to see through John's eyes, we may content ourselves for the present by saying that the vision is in essence simply one of strife and conflict.

4. The Third Seal: Scarcity (6:5, 6)

With its references to weights and measures, wages and prices, the third vision describes an economic situation; not strictly famine, but certainly scarcity. The rsv's quarts and denarii do not mean a great deal to us; JB conveys the sense better: 'A ration of corn for a day's wages, and three rations of barley for a day's wages'. Good food (wheat or corn) is available—at the price of a man's entire wages! He will have to be content with poorer fare (barley) if he is to feed his family as well as himself, but even that does not take into account the cost of clothing and housing. The supply of oil and wine, however, is unaffected. Whether these commodities represent the luxuries, the caviare and champagne, which even in the hardest times continue inexplicably to furnish the tables of the rich, or whether they are staple items which are protected when other foodstuffs become scarce, so that the third rider stands for partial hardship rather than total famine, the situation described is at least one of great economic difficulty and inequality.

5. The Fourth Seal: Death (6:7, 8)

The meaning of the fourth rider and his fell companion is explicit. Men killed one another in the conflicts of Seal 2; but there we saw strife, the cause, while here we see death, the result.

The wiping out of a quarter of the human race sounds like a disaster of the first magnitude, until one realizes that nothing has been said to indicate that this is a single catastrophic event. After all, every man dies sooner or later, and what is probably meant here is that a sizeable proportion of those deaths are the unnecessary ones caused by war and famine and kindred evils.

6. The Fifth Seal: The Suffering of God's Witnesses (6:9–11)

Three phrases call for comment at this stage concerning the events of Seal 5.

'Under the altar' the blood of sacrifices was poured out (Lv. 4:7). The martyrs who have given their lives (for 'the life ... is in the blood', Lv. 17:11) may represent all who suffer in any way for Christ's sake, and all such devotion is a sacrifice acceptable to God.

'Those who dwell upon the earth', or rather (as in JB) 'the inhabitants of the earth', is a technical term in Revelation. It means not humanity in general, but those who are 'at home in the present world order'¹ as opposed to those who hold to the Word and Witness of God. John, being in 'the heavenlies', sees everything in black and white. 'He who is not with me is against me' (Mt. 12:30); there is no middle ground, and all men are either citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) or inhabitants of earth.

'Avenge our blood', cry the souls of God's witnesses, and in the light of the above, their cry becomes not only excusable but right. For the inhabitants of earth are those who are

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irredeemably committed to the cause of evil, and the martyrs are expressing not personal vindictiveness but an objective desire that justice be done.

7. The Sixth Seal: The Final Cataclysm (6:12–17)

At last we have a sure reference point. Commentaries sometimes state dogmatically that ‘Of course X means Y’, when a little thought will show that there is no ‘of course’ about it. But here the meaning is unmistakable. Strings of biblical references to the events of this paragraph are gathered together in Christ’s own magisterial discourse (Mark 13 and its parallels), where the description is that of the *parousia*, his return to this earth and the unveiling of the face of God. Verse 17 actually identifies it as ‘the great day of their wrath’.

The question of whether the earthquake, the darkened sun, and so on, are to be taken literally or metaphorically, misses the point. That day will spell the end of the entire universe as we know it (Heb. 12:26), the end of the planets and galaxies as well as the end of the human institutions they may symbolize.

Now we return to the first four seals, and consider not their distinctive features but the ones they share.

Their common pattern may begin to make us rethink our identification of the first horseman as Jesus Christ. That identification is largely based on the vision of 19:11. But is not the meaning of Seal 1 more likely to be of a piece with that of Seals 2, 3, and 4, which are so closely related to it, than with another vision which is not only thirteen chapters away, but thirteen chapters *ahead*—that is, which John himself will not see for some time yet? If he has not yet seen a white rider representing Christ, is it not more natural to assume that he saw all four riders in chapter 6 as evil powers?

Evil though they may be, it is God who allows them to ride forth; each is ‘given’ authority (*cf.* Jb. 1:12; 2:6). It may be said that Christ’s authority also was given him by the Father (Mt. 28:18); but the gift to him was very much more than mere permission, whereas the repeated ‘given’ of 6:1–8 indicates that the first rider’s authority is of the same sort as that of the other three. Again, therefore, it seems he represents something evil, and not the conquering gospel of Christ.

A third bond between the visions—this time between all six, not simply the first four—is the correspondence between them and the Gospel passage already referred to, Mark 13 (= Mt. 24; Lk. 21). This is particularly noticeable if we compare Matthew’s version, the fullest of the three, with the chapter before us. We should not be surprised that these passages correspond, since the same person is dealing with the same subject in each case. There, Jesus speaks; here, the Lamb opens his book. In both places he is revealing something about the future (4:1; Mt. 24:3). Since he is ‘the faithful witness’ (1:5), the truth to which he witnesses must be consistent, and so indeed it proves to be. The two passages are most clearly linked at the events of Seal 6 (6:12–17 = Mt. 24:29–30), but there is no difficulty in connecting those of Seals 2, 3, and 4 also with the earlier part of the Gospel passage. In fact we do not have to strain the text in any way to postulate that Christ is not only expounding the same subject, but expounding it in the same order, in both places. The two chapters engage at point after point like the two sides of a zip. According to this parallel, it is the earthly warfare of Matthew 24:6, not the conquering gospel, which is represented by the rider of Seal 1; the troubles of Matthew 24:7, 8 are those of Seals 2, 3, and 4;

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the suffering church (Mt. 24:9–12), which nevertheless bears indestructible witness to its sovereign Lord (Mt. 24:13, 14), is described under Seal 5. We skip Matthew 24:15–28, which refers to the fall of Jerusalem, because by the time the prophecies of Revelation 6 were written this event was already past; and so we come on to verses 29, 30, which correspond, as we have noted, to Seal 6.

In the light of Matthew 24, then, we begin to see the over-all meaning of this scene of the drama. What does the future hold? Conquest and strife, scarcity and death; ‘but the end is not yet ... all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs’ (Mt. 24:6, 8). In view of the frequent misunderstanding which takes the ‘wars and rumours of wars’ passage to be a prediction of the end, it is worth stressing that that is precisely what Christ says it is not. The terrifying events of the first four Seals, which those who have to live through them might imagine to be signs of Christ’s return and of the close of the age (Mt. 24:3), are in fact the commonplaces of history. The four horsemen have been riding out over the earth from that day to this, and will continue to do so.

This may also explain the cry of the four living creatures as these Seals are broken open. On other interpretations, they appear to be little more than a convenient foursome of characters who happen to be available to usher in the riders. But why? And why do they call ‘Come!’? They are not calling John: he has already been called to the vantage-point from which he is surveying the whole scene (4:1). They are not calling the riders: remembering that they probably represent nature, God’s world, we can hardly believe that they would be inviting the ruin of that world. In any case, three of the horses do not ‘come’ at all, but are simply revealed to view. Whom then do the living creatures call? There is someone whose coming is both promised and desired. Hear the cry of 22:20: ‘“Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!’ Hear the echo of 1:6, 7: ‘Amen. Behold, he is coming!’ The same Greek word used there, in the first and last chapters of Revelation, is the cry of the living creatures here, and is followed by the corresponding cry of ‘How long?’ from the souls under the altar. Both God’s people and God’s creation yearn for the coming of Christ to deliver them from suffering (Rom. 8:19–22).

As the Lamb unseals the book of history the immediate impression we get is of a suffering world. If he is in control, though, surely within that world his church is protected from these woes? Did not Ezekiel, threatening the same ‘four sore acts of judgment’ as in verse 8, promise nevertheless that the faithful would be delivered (Ezk. 14:21, 22)? The answer of Seal 5 (= Mt. 24:9–12) is No: the church is not exempt. Assaults from without and within will test to the limit those who are prepared to stake everything, even life, on the Word and Witness of God. But how long will this go on? Will there never be a respite for his suffering people? Again the answer is No, not in this world: only with the end of the world, and the completion of the total number who are to witness and suffer for Christ, will there come the day of vengeance on their persecutors (verse 11). In other words, rampant evil will be abroad, bringing suffering to the world in general and to the church in particular, through the entire period from the time of John’s vision to the time of Jesus’s return (Seal 6 = Mt. 24:14b, 29, 30). Seals 1 to 5 portray different aspects of the whole of history; Seal 6 describes the day which will end it.

Now we can see why the scene for these dramatic events was set in such detail. In chapter 6 John is shown the succession of woes which will sweep to and fro across the world throughout the course of history, and which often cause men to wonder whether the forces of evil are not

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altogether out of control. Even the church is not safe from them; so even Christians may be tempted to think that, as despairing Englishmen said in the anarchy of the reign of King Stephen, 'God and his angels sleep.' The setting in chapters 4 and 5, therefore, is intended to impress on John's mind, and through him on ours also, where the true power lies. Not only in the church's internal affairs (Scene 1) but in the world as a whole, Christ stands at the centre. It is he who is finally in control. God *is* still on the throne.

To reassure Christians of this, chapter 7 takes the general truth of chapters 4 and 5 and makes crystal-clear its particular lesson for them: that though they may, indeed will, have to go through temporal suffering, their eternal safety is never in question.

8. Yet the Church is Indestructible (7:1–17)

a. *The sealing: when? (verses 1–3)*

'After this', after the events of chapter 6, come the events of chapter 7. Or do they? It is dangerous to assume that the order in which John writes is the order in which the things he describes will happen; and here we have a notable example of that danger. For chapter 6 describes what is surely a 'harming of the earth'; yet 'after this' we come to a vision in which the earth has not yet been harmed (7:3). Chapter 7 may follow chapter 6 in John's visions, but it does not seem to follow it in the order of actual events. It will not do to try and find subtle distinctions between the chapters, and say that, in some mysterious sequence of events, first it is humanity which will suffer (chapter 6), then the church will be sealed, and only then will come the 'harming' of the inanimate creation, earth and sea and trees. For Seal 6, which ends chapter 6, is one of the most readily identifiable items in this Scene, and covers the events accompanying the return of Christ; with it, the history of the world comes to an end; after it, there can be no further harming of the earth—there will be no earth left to harm.

So we are forced back to the plain text of 7:1. John does not say 'After six unsealings of the book comes the sealing of the servants of God, and after that the harming of the earth.' He says 'After the six unsealings *I saw ...*'. We have seen John's shifts of focus often enough already to imagine the focus changing once more. What the six seals have revealed is in fact a fearful and comprehensive harming of the earth, symbolized by the dread horsemen. In chapter 7 the depth of focus increases, our plane of vision is, so to speak, nearer to God, and where we saw four horsemen, with a veiled reference to a divine permission allowing them to ride forth, we now perceive four winds, which have power to harm the earth, but are controlled by four angels of God. It is a new view of the same thing, and the corresponding visions in the prophecy of Zechariah support this identification by linking four horse-drawn chariots with the four winds of God (Zc. 6:1–5, RV). But the further truth which here comes into focus is this: God's control over the horsemen/winds ensures that his church is sealed and secure *before they ride forth*.

The Old Testament parallel to this is in Ezekiel 9, where 'a man clothed in linen' is told to 'put a mark upon the foreheads' of God's faithful people, before the six 'executioners of the city' smite it with his wrath (verses 1–4). The New Testament explanation of it is given by Paul in Ephesians 1:13 f. We were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when we first put our faith in Christ. From that moment forward, our ultimate safety was guaranteed. So when the searing winds begin to

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blow, the servant of God is found to have been sealed already against their power. The horsemen ride out on their career of destruction; but the church has been made indestructible.

b. The sealing: who? (verses 4–12)

There has been much dispute over these verses. Who are the 144,000 of verse 4, who are the innumerable crowd of verse 9, and what is the relation between them? But it is less of a puzzle than might first appear. Verse 3 has told us who are sealed: it is God's servants. We have no reason to limit this in any way. The servants of God, all of them, Old Testament and New, all his believing people, are sealed. If we are his servants, the message is for us as much as for any (1:1), and we too are sealed.

But if this is so, how can the sealed be described in verse 4 as 144,000 Israelites? Many theories, as wild as they are unnecessary, have been built on this description. The plain fact is that if we are God's servants, we have been sealed. If we are then told that we number 144,000, when we know very well that there are millions of us, the figure is presumably another of the symbolic figures of Revelation, and indeed it looks too stylized to be anything else—the suspiciously tidy sort of number that is much more likely to be a symbol than a statistic. If we next find ourselves described as 144,000 *Israelites*, when most of us are Gentiles, this is in line with the regular New Testament teaching which applies to the Christian church the titles and privileges of Israel, and which we have already noted in 3:9. If our numbers are specified even more closely, and oddly, in that each of the twelve tribes, whether large or small, contributes just 12,000; and if the tribes are listed in an order found nowhere else in the Bible; and if one of them (Dan) is omitted altogether, and the lack made up by including one of Joseph's sons as well as Joseph himself; then the description of us is very stylized indeed. But it is the kind of description we should expect if this is a 'diagram' of the church. Like every diagram, it sacrifices one kind of accuracy to clarify another; as when a map projection will sacrifice true distance in order to depict true area, or *vice versa*.

Then what about the innumerable crowd of verse 9? What is the relation between them and the 144,000? They are one and the same. For whatever else the white-robed multitude may be, they are certainly servants of God; and if they are servants, they are sealed (verse 3); and if they are sealed, they are the 144,000 (verse 4). But how can this be—how can a limited number, all Israelites, be the same as a numberless multitude drawn from every nation? Yet again, we put ourselves in John's place. What he *heard* was a voice from heaven, declaring the results of God's census of his people. More than once in Old Testament times, and again, significantly, at the coming of Christ (Lk. 2:1–7), they were caused to 'stand up and be counted'; and here is God's own count of them. The total may be a symbolic number, but it is still a *number*. If God can count the very hairs of our head (Mt. 10:30), a counting of the heads themselves is unlikely to be beyond him! 'The Lord knows those who are his' (2 Tim. 2:19), and what John heard was God's declaration of their total, given symbolically as '144,000'. What he *saw*, on the other hand, was that this definite total, known to God, is from the human point of view a numberless multitude. Similarly, from God's standpoint they are all 'Israel', his people; from our standpoint, they come from every nation under heaven.

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Now for the third time the group of actors dominating the stage changes. We saw the angels, elders, and living creatures of chapters 4 and 5 give way to the horsemen of chapter 6; they in turn gave way to the four wind-angels of 7:1–10; and now, in 7:11, 12, we are back with the *dramatis personae* with whom the Scene began. God's people, whose final redemption is now guaranteed by their being sealed, are here represented not by the saints beneath the altar (6:9 ff.) or the innumerable '144,000' (7:4, 9), but once more by the twenty-four elders who first appeared in 4:4. God's world, which could not be hurt until its own final redemption had been assured by that same sealing (for its redemption depends on theirs), is represented by the four living creatures, who first appeared in 4:6. And now the myriads of angelic spectators, first seen in 5:11, come into view again also. 'The great congregation His triumph shall sing, Ascribing salvation To Jesus our King'—that was the song of the redeemed in verse 10; here in a yet vaster panorama we see all creation, bringing to God all its worship, for all that he does, through all the ages.

'Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name, evermore praising thee and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory; Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen.'

c. *The sealing: why? (verses 13–17)*

The representative elder asks for, and gives, a definition of the white-robed throng, in terms of what brings them where they are. 'These are those who have come through the great oppression: they have washed their robes ... That is why they now have their place before the throne' (verses 14, 15, JBP).

Some have thought that the white robes therefore indicate only those who have died, or at least suffered physical persecution, for their faith. Others hold that the 'oppression', or 'tribulation' (RSV), is a particular event still in the future, and thus narrow down even more the number of those who will go through it.² On both these views, of course, the phrase 'These are those who have come through the great oppression' contradicts the view put forward above, that the numberless throng is in fact all the servants of God.

So far from complicating the issue, however, this phrase clarifies it. Why do these stand before God's throne? What qualifies them to be there? The twin facts that they *have washed* their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and *do emerge* from suffering. He who is numbered among that multitude is the man who has been cleansed from his old life of sin (a past event) and been given an irrepressible new life which no tribulation can quench (a present experience).

For the vision of verses 13 to 17 'refers, not only to the glory of the blessed ones in heaven, but to the life of the Christian soul in the world here and now. And who that, in this present pilgrimage, has been granted some glimpse of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" will affirm that the language of the seer is extravagant?' Indeed the whole point of this Scene is that God's people are safe amid the troubles of *this* life: 'More happy, *but not more secure*, The glorified spirits in heaven.' It is here and now, in this life, that they serve in God's temple—not in the *hieron*, the outer court, but in the *naos*, the innermost sanctuary. It is in this life that he spreads his tabernacle, his tent, over them (verse 15, RV). Tabernacle and temple, in the Old Testament God's

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own dwelling-places, are now the dwelling-place of his people, and the promises of the ninety-first Psalm are theirs:

‘He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
... will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday’ (Ps. 91:1, 5, 6).

Of course neither Psalm 91 nor Revelation 7 means that Christians are insulated against trouble. Seals 1 to 4, which showed us the world suffering, were followed by Seal 5, which reminded us that the church must suffer too, and there will be no escape from suffering till the world ends with Seal 6. But the Christian has an inner security which is not affected by external trials. ‘It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord,’ wrote Spurgeon. ‘Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain.’ Rupert Brooke, a poet of a very different kind from the Psalmist, nevertheless echoed his meaning perfectly:

‘Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death’s endeavour;
Safe where all safety’s lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.’

9. The Seventh Seal: ‘The Rest is Silence’ (8:1)

Seal 6 covered the end of history; and though we have learnt to beware of treating the sequence of John’s visions as the historical sequence of the events they portray, it is hard to imagine that Seal 7 would cover anything other than the events which follow the end of history. When Seal 7 is actually broken open, however, there is silence—a silence which confirms our interpretation of Scene 2. For in this scene Christ is revealing to John what will be the experience of the church in the world; so concerning what will happen after the end of the world, he naturally at this point has nothing to say. There *is* a seventh Seal; that is, there is another world to come; but the revelations dealing with it are reserved for later Scenes. Meanwhile we are to learn that the church need never expect to be preserved from the common ills of mankind, as long as this world endures; but that God is still on the throne, Christ is still at the centre of all things, and his people are indestructible.

So begins a half-hour of silence. In terms of actual history and eternity, half an hour is nothing. But in terms of a drama depicting them, it is a lengthy interval, in which John can meditate on Scene 2 before Scene 3 begins.¹⁹

¹⁹ Wilcock, M. (1986). [*The message of Revelation: I saw heaven opened*](#) (pp. 69–84). InterVarsity Press.

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MARANATHA'S MEMBERSHIP

Essential Doctrines Week #7

The Blessed Hope · The Millennial Reign of Christ · The Final Judgment · The
New Heavens and The New Earth

(This session can be started or combined w/#12. This session contains #13-#16 so plan accordingly.)

Doctrine #13

THE BLESSED HOPE (2ND COMING)

{student manual pages 30-34}

One of the four cardinal doctrines {*Salvation, Baptism in Holy Spirit, Divine Healing*}

[Ask students to pull out Kingdom of God Chart. Use the large Chart Poster and as you teach an End Time Principle, place it on the Timeline.]

- What is the blessed hope? {*Jesus' imminent return. Aka the 2nd Coming*}

Titus 2:11-15

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

- Why would we call it blessed? {*Be with Him. The big payoff: enemies judged, rewards for obedience.*}
- When is He coming back? {*No one knows - Matthew 24*}
- What is the important thing to know about His 2nd coming? {*That we are ready for it.*}

{Student workbook has all the answers from this point on so can be taught interactively w/o them taking notes per say. They can still note their timeline. }

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The three basic truths of our church's doctrine of the 2nd Coming:

- 1.) *There will be a resurrection of the dead.*
- 2.) *Not everyone will die a physical death.*
- 3.) *The return of the Lord is imminent.*

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Rapture means: *To Catch up*

- What does pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib refer to? [Highlight Trib handout]

{Pre: Raptured before the seven year tribulation begins.

Mid: Raptured 3.5 years into the tribulation.

Post: Raptured after the seven year tribulation.}

[ASK: Where would you put Rapture on your chart?]

Tribulation: (Used in two places Mt. 24:21 & Rev 7:14)

thlipsis. Pressure, oppression, stress, anguish, tribulation, adversity, affliction, crushing, squashing, squeezing, distress. Imagine placing your hand on a stack of loose items and manually compressing them. That is *thlipsis*, putting a lot of pressure on that which is free and unfettered. *Thlipsis* is like spiritual bench-pressing. The word is used of crushing grapes or olives in a press.

¹Hayford, J. W., & Hayford, J. W., III. (1994). *Focusing On the Future: Key Prophecies and Practical Living*. Spirit-Filled Life Kingdom Dynamics Study Guide. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.)

Matthew 24:21 ESV

²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. **Cross references:** a. [Matthew 24:21](#) : [ver. 29](#); [Dan. 12:1](#); [[Rev. 7:14](#)] b. [Matthew 24:21](#) : [Rev. 16:18](#)

Matthew 24:29 ESV

²⁹ “Immediately after ^(A)the tribulation of those days ^(B)the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and ^(C)the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Cross references: a. [Matthew 24:29](#) : [ver. 21](#) b. [Matthew 24:29](#) : [Isa. 13:10](#); [24:23](#); [Ezek. 32:7](#); [Joel 2:10, 31](#); [3:15](#); [Acts 2:20](#); [[Amos 5:20](#); [8:9](#); [Zeph. 1:15](#); [Rev. 6:12](#); [8:12](#)] c. [Matthew 24:29](#) : [Rev. 6:13](#); [[Isa. 14:12](#); [34:4](#)]

Daniel 12:1 ESV

“At that time shall arise ^(A)Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And ^(B)there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, ^(C)everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

Cross references: a. [Daniel 12:1](#) : [See ch. 10:13](#) b. [Daniel 12:1](#) : [Jer. 30:7](#); [Matt. 24:21](#); [Mark 13:19](#); [[Rev. 16:18](#)] c. [Daniel 12:1](#) : [Ex. 32:32, 33](#); [[Ezek. 13:9](#); [Luke 10:20](#); [Rev. 20:12](#)]

Revelation 7:14 ESV

¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of ^(A)the great tribulation. ^(B)They have washed their robes and ^(C)made them white ^(D)in the blood of the Lamb. **Cross references:** a. [Revelation 7:14](#) : [See Matt. 24:21](#) b. [Revelation 7:14](#) : [ch. 22:14](#); [[Isa. 1:18](#); [Zech. 3:3-5](#)] c. [Revelation 7:14](#) : [[Dan. 12:10](#); [1 John 1:7](#)] d. [Revelation 7:14](#) : [ch. 1:5](#)

TRIBULATION, THE GREAT—a short but intense period of distress and suffering at the end of time. The exact phrase, *the great tribulation*, is found only once in the Bible (Rev. 7:14). The great tribulation is to be distinguished from the general tribulation a believer faces in the world (Matt. 13:21; John 16:33; Acts 14:22) or the age-long difficulties Jesus forecast (Mark 13:7-8, et al). It refers to God’s specific wrath upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age (Matt. 24:29-30; Mark 13:24). Those references clearly separate the age-long “tribulation,” which increases in intensity throughout, from the final calamities described here and in Revelation 6:12-17 and 16:1-21. The great tribulation fulfills Daniel’s prophecies (Daniel 7-12). It appears to describe a time of evil from false christs and false prophets (Mark 13:22) when natural disasters will occur throughout the world. (Hayford, J. W., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

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- What do we believe will be the two phases of the Second Coming?

Phase One: Will be the rapture, that moment just before the seven-year Great Tribulation when the believers of all time – dead and alive- will be caught up to be with Jesus.

Phase Two: Will be when Jesus literally sets His feet on earth again and reclaims it as His kingdom.

Death and Eschatology:

- What end-time significance does the following scripture have:

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But in this order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." [G] Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

{We know Christ has been raised from the dead. With the same conviction we can know He is returning for those who belong to Him. Then, the end will come.}

- Where does your body go when it dies? {In the ground to await its resurrection}

1Corinthians 15:53-55

⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

- Where does your soul go when your body dies? (Christian = Paradise)

➤ Christian/Believer = **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Luke 23:42-43 ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in **paradise**."

A Parable Christ Told: Luke 16:19-31

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¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

²⁵“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ ²⁷“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ³⁰“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

SHEOL [SHE ole] — in Old Testament thought, the abode of the dead. Sheol is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *Hades*, which means “the unseen world.”

Sheol was regarded as an underground region (Num. 16:30, 33; Amos 9:2), shadowy and gloomy, where disembodied souls had a conscious but dull and inactive existence (2 Sam. 22:6; Eccl. 9:10). The Hebrew people regarded sheol as a place to which both the righteous and unrighteous go at death (Gen. 37:35; Ps. 9:17; Is. 38:10; death, NIV; Deut. 32:22; the realm of death, NIV), a place where punishment is received and rewards are enjoyed. Sheol is pictured as having an insatiable appetite (Is. 5:14; Hab. 2:5; the grave, NIV).

However, God is present in sheol (Ps. 139:8; hell, NKJV; the depths, NIV). It is open and known to Him (Job 26:6; Prov. 15:11; Death, NIV). This suggests that in death God’s people remain under His care, and the wicked never escape His judgment. Sheol gives meaning to Psalm 16:10. Peter saw the fulfillment of this messianic psalm in Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:27).²⁰

HELL—the place of eternal punishment for the unrighteous. The NKJV and KJV use this word to translate *sheol* and *hades*, the Old and New Testament words, respectively, for the abode of the dead.

Hell as a place of punishment translates *Gehenna*, the Greek form of the Hebrew word that means “the vale of Hinnom”—a valley just south of Jerusalem. In this valley the Canaanites worshiped Baal and the fire-god Molech by sacrificing their children in a fire that burned continuously. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this terrible, idolatrous practice (2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6).

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that God would visit such destruction upon Jerusalem that this valley would be known as the “Valley of Slaughter” (Jer. 7:31-34; 19:2, 6). In his religious reforms, King Josiah put an end to this worship. He defiled the valley in order to make it unfit even for pagan worship (2 Kin. 23:10).

In the time of Jesus the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Into it were thrown all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. To consume all this, fires burned constantly. Maggots worked in the filth. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its awfulness was quite evident. At night wild dogs howled and gnashed their teeth as they fought over the garbage.

Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of hell. In effect he said, “Do you want to know what hell is like? Look at the valley of Gehenna.” So hell may be described as God’s “cosmic garbage dump.” All that refuse to be made fit for heaven will be turned away into hell.

The word *Gehenna* occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Each time it is translated as “hell.” With the exception of James 3:6, it is used only by Jesus (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5).

²⁰ *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*. 1995 (R. F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison & Thomas Nelson Publishers, Ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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In Matthew 5:22, 18:9; and Mark 9:47, it is used with “fire” as “hell fire.” So the word hell (*Gehenna*) as a place of punishment is used in the New Testament by Him who is the essence of infinite love.

In Mark 9:46 and 48, hell is described as a place where “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” Repeatedly Jesus spoke of outer darkness and a furnace of fire, where there will be wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Obviously this picture is drawn from the valley of Gehenna.

The Book of Revelation describes hell as “a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). Into hell will be thrown the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20). At the end of the age the devil himself will be thrown into it, along with death and hades and all whose names are not in the Book of Life. “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

Because of the symbolic nature of the language, some people question whether hell consists of actual fire. Such reasoning should bring no comfort to the lost. The reality is greater than the symbol. The Bible exhausts human language in describing heaven and hell. The former is more glorious, and the latter more terrible, than language can express.²¹

Hell (“conceal”), the place of woe for the departed. “Hades” is the New Testament name for “Sheol,” which was conceived as a place where the souls of all dead resided (Ps. 16:10; Matt. 11:23; Acts 2:27). The KJV also has hell as its translation of Gehenna, a valley outside Jerusalem that Jesus used as a symbol of woe for lost souls. For believers, He said that Hades would be Paradise (Luke 23:43); for the godless, it would be “Gehenna” (cf. Luke 16:22, 23).²²

Matthew 12:40

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- So, what was Jesus doing during these three days?

The Nonbeliever/Unrighteous spend eternity in the Lake of Fire according to **Matthew 13:49-51**.

- What would this verse personally motivate you to do? {*Evangelize*}
- Where are those souls prior to the end of the age (See box on Sheol, Hades, Hell)

⁴⁹ *This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous*⁵⁰ *and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* ⁵¹ *"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.*

[Stop here for MAG MM](#)

Matthew 24:27-44 (Luke 17:24-37)

²⁷ *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* ²⁸ *Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.* ²⁹ *Immediately after the distress of those days*

*"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."*³⁰

³⁰ *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear*

²¹ Hayford, J. W., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

²² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.) (xlviii). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth ^[b] will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

³² "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it ^[c] is near, right at the door. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁶ "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, ^[d] but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Footnotes: a. [Matthew 24:29](#) Isaiah 13:10; 34:4 b. [Matthew 24:30](#) Or the tribes of the land c. [Matthew 24:33](#) Or he d. [Matthew 24:36](#) Some manuscripts do not have *nor the Son*.

- What does verse 27 say the coming of Jesus will be like? What do you think this means? {Jesus' return will be 'as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west'. This statement could imply that Jesus' coming will be instantaneous, but it most likely refers to the worldwide visibility of His return. Unlike the first coming, no one on earth will be unaware when Jesus comes again.}

- What will take place immediately before Jesus appears (v.v. 29-30)? {Jesus spoke of "the distress of those days" which we equate with the entire Great Tribulation, as immediately preceding His return and the accompanying disruption of the universe.}

- Why will the ungodly react differently to Jesus' return than believers, for whom His return is a blessed hope?

{All the nations of the earth will mourn (verse 30) because they have only judgment to look forward to. For believers, however, Jesus' return will bring only blessing and reward.}

- According to verse 31, Jesus will gather all believers at His visible return. Since we believe the Rapture will have happened seven years before, what are we to make of this verse?

{The Old Testament prophecies seemed to point to a single coming by the Messiah, but we know now that only parts of these prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus' first coming. In the same way, we believe that New Testament prophecies of the end times do not always neatly separate the phases of Jesus' second coming.}

- What would Jesus say about the timing of His return?

{Despite Jesus' instruction to read the signs of the time (v.v. 32-33), He prophesied that His return will take everyone by surprise, allowing no last minute changes of heart (vv.36-41).}

- How did Jesus say we are to prepare for His return (v.v. 42-44)?

{We can only live in constant readiness, as if He could return within the next moment.}

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CHART:

Revelation 1:7 (1st or 2nd Phase of the 2nd Coming?)

⁷"Look, he is coming with the clouds," ^[a] and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." ^[b] So shall it be! Amen.

[Revelation 1:7](#) Daniel 7:13 b. [Revelation 1:7](#) Zech. 12:10

Footnotes: a.

Revelation 17:14 (Faithful Followers) (1st or 2nd Phase of the 2nd Coming?)

¹⁴ They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

Zechariah 14:5

⁵ You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake ^[a] in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

Footnotes: a. [Zechariah 14:5](#) Or ⁵My mountain valley will be blocked and will extend to Azel. It will be blocked as it was blocked because of the earthquake

Revelation 19:6-9 (Marriage Supper of the Lamb)

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

was given her to wear."

⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's people.)

⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' " And he added, "These are the true words of God."

- What is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?

{An actual meal in Heaven, is the final manifestation of the marriage of Christ and His wife. This culminates their initial relationship, likened to an engagement which was a legal arrangement in Jewish culture. This follows the coming of Christ as Bridegroom in the Rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation and precedes His return seven years later to establish His millennial kingdom.}

- When does it happen? {Follows the Rapture and before His Triumphal Coming.}

- What are we really doing? {What we doing during the Tribulation.}

{Passover as foreshadowing the marriage supper of the Lamb: **Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:7-20.** Verse in whole at the end of this section.}

Revelation 19:11-21 (White Horse) The Heavenly Warrior Defeats the Beast

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white

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and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." ¹⁶ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. ¹⁷ And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Footnotes: a. [Revelation 19:15](#) Psalm 2:9

2 Corinthians 11:2 (Presentation of the Bride of Christ)

² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (Judgment Seat of Christ) [highlight REWARD handout]

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Luke 14:14

And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (Rapture)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

- Why does Jesus' return give us hope about those believers who die (v.v. 13)?
{Though we will not see our saved loved ones for some time, we can be certain that we will all meet again at the Rapture (v.v. 14).}

- How will Jesus announce His return?

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{“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.” (v.v.16).}

- What will happen to those believers who are living when the Rapture occurs?
{All living believers will join the dead in Christ and be caught up together in the clouds to meet Jesus.}

The Pretribulation Rapture

Our church holds a premillennial view of Jesus’ second coming. This means we believe Jesus will return and gather all believers before the Millennium—the thousand-year reign on earth (Revelation 20). Most Pentecostals also hold a pretribulation view of the Rapture. That is, we believe Jesus will “catch away” the faithful before the Great Tribulation. All believers will gather in heaven to participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb before returning with Jesus to defeat the forces of the enemy (Revelation 19). End-time prophecy is difficult to understand, but we believe this is the best interpretation of what will occur.

CLOSING PRAYER: Romans 8:22-25

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

HANDOUTS: Tribulation Chart; Daniel’s Timeline; End Times Chart; AoG Position Paper on The Rapture; Rewards Document

HOMEWORK:

- **1Corinthians 15:51-52**

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ^[a] ⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ^[b]

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Footnotes: a. [1 Corinthians 15:54](#) Isaiah 25:8 b. [1 Corinthians 15:55](#) Hosea 13:14

- What is the mystery that Paul shares in verse 51?
{We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” That is, though not every believer will survive until Jesus’ return, all believers – dead or alive – will be glorified when He comes.}
- What do you think it means that “the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable (v.v. 53)?
{Right now, our bodies are mortal because of the Fall. We are subject to death, illness, and injury. But when Jesus returns, our bodies will become transformed into the immortal, supernatural bodies in which we will live for eternity.}
- Why do you think the Rapture will remove the “sting” of death (v.v. 55)?
{Death is not a threat to believers, but the pain of losing loved ones in a sinful world remains (v.v 56). At the Rapture, however, believers will never have to experience the “sting” of spiritual or physical death again.}

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2 Timothy 3:1-5 (Conditions of the last days)

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

List the conditions of the last days that Paul records in the above scripture.

Write down a current event, situation, or cultural attitude that corresponds in some way to the listed conditions.

CONDITIONS

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE

Revelation 19:11-14 The Heavenly Warrior Defeats the Beast – Lake of Burning Fire

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." [a] He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

¹⁷ And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Footnotes: a. [Revelation 19:15](#) Psalm 2:9

Essential Doctrines Week #7

The Blessed Hope · The Millennial Reign of Christ · The Final Judgment · The
New Heavens and The New Earth

(Doctrine #14, #15, #16 can be taught lecture style. All notes are in the Students Manual.)

Now the Battle becomes more Personal

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Doctrine #14

THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST

{student manual pages 35}

- What is the Millennial Reign of Christ?

{A literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth without the influence of Satan..}

mil·len·ni·um [mi lénnee əm] noun

1. **1,000 years:** a period of 1,000 years, especially a period that begins or ends in a year that is a multiple of 1000.
Also called millenary
2. **CHRISTIANITY prophesied rule by Jesus Christ:** the thousand-year period of peace on earth that, according to one interpretation of prophecies in the book of Revelation, will follow the Second Coming of Jesus Christ
3. **hoped-for utopian age:** an imagined future utopian period of joy, peace, and justice, especially one created through revolution
4. **thousandth anniversary:** a thousand-year anniversary, especially the one in the year 2000

[Mid-17th century. From modern Latin , formed from Latin *mille* “thousand” + *annus* “year” (see annual).]

- What will it demonstrate?

{God’s reign and government is perfect. It will replace all failed systems of human government.}

- **Revelation 20:1-7**

¹ And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. ⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison

The word THOUSAND – Actual or Representative?

The phrase “thousand years” might mean “a very long time” once or twice in a passage, but it is used six times in just seven verses. Also, verse 3 says Satan will be released for “a short time” – an inexact phrase in contrast to the repeated “a thousand years”. The Millennium is not a general era of godly influence, but a specific, future time period.

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Postmillennialism and Amillennialism

Postmillennialists

believe Christ will return after the Millennium, which they consider an extension of the present Church Age. The spread of the gospel will cause a gradual binding of evil, leading to a great period of revival in which most people will be Christians. Amillennialists believe in no earthly Millennium. Some of them interpret the binding of Satan as Jesus' victory at Calvary or a person's salvation. Others think the Millennium is happening now in heaven. Both amillennialists and premillennialist (our position) believe things on earth will only get worse and Jesus will return to rescue us from judgment.

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Doctrine #15

{ Student manual 36}

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The Judgment of Satan

Revelation 20: 7-10

⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and everyone was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ All whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire.

The basis for judgment at the Great White Throne is that EACH PERSON will be judged according to what they have done. The first question is do they belong to Christ (Vs. 15).

Are there punishments in Hell just like there are rewards in Heaven? Is this what is being judged as well? Notice the list of what goes into the Lake of Fire (Vs.14-15).

The Great White Throne Judgment

According to **2 Corinthians 5:10**, believers will face the “judgment seat of Christ”. Only those not in the book of life will be judged at the Great White Throne (**Revelation 20:11-15**). Some think this judgment may determine degrees of punishment according to each person’s sins. What is certain is that the lost will suffer “second death” in the lake of fire – cut off forever from God’s presence. While this may seem harsh, it is the forewarned culminations of His righteous judgments on sinfulness. God does not glory in those who will come under this judgment, but in those who will escape it through His grace.

Remember Matthew 13:49-51 (listed already in Chpt. 13)

⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

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[Matthew 13:49-51 The Separation of the Wicked and The Righteous & 2 Corinthians 5:10; Luke 14:14; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; The Judgment Seat of Christ]

Doctrine #16

{ Student manual 37-38 }

THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

2 Peter 3:13

¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

John 14:2-3

² My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Why a New Heaven and New Earth?

Our future world will be a beautiful place where there will be no sickness, no death, and no tears.

The Old Order of things (Vs. 4) is filled with the effects of the Fall so a New Heaven and Earth are needed.

Revelation 21 A New Heaven and a New Earth

¹ Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," [a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' [b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a

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jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² *It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.* ¹³ *There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.* ¹⁴ *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

¹⁵ *The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.* ¹⁶ *The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia ^[c] in length, and as wide and high as it is long.* ¹⁷ *He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits ^[d] thick, ^[e] by human measurement, which the angel was using.* ¹⁸ *The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.* ¹⁹ *The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ^[f] ²¹ *The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.**

²² *I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* ²³ *The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.* ²⁴ *The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.* ²⁵ *On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.* ²⁶ *The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.* ²⁷ *Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

Footnotes:

- a. [Revelation 21:1](#) Isaiah 65:17
- b. [Revelation 21:4](#) Isaiah 25:8
- c. [Revelation 21:16](#) That is, about 1,400 miles or about 2,200 kilometers
- d. [Revelation 21:17](#) That is, about 200 feet or about 65 meters
- e. [Revelation 21:17](#) Or *high*
- f. [Revelation 21:20](#) The precise identification of some of these precious stones is uncertain.

There Was No More Sea

When John wrote Revelation 21:1, most of his readers would have understood a new earth without seas as a place without fear or dangers. Among ancient peoples, sea travel was avoided as much as possible. Mariners had no chart or compasses and were subject to the hazards of storm and reef. The Mediterranean did not accommodate sea travel during the winter months (see Acts 27:12). Psalm 107:25-30 describes the terror of a violent storm at sea. Isaiah 57:20 describes the turbulence of the wicked like a sea casting up mire, churning in a rolling storm. In contrast, the new earth will be serene.

List your interpretation of what the New Jerusalem will be like (vs. 11-21):

Why is there no temple or no sun in the New Jerusalem (vs. 22)? *“the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple”.* We had the temple to help us understand something of the majesty of God's presence and remind us that we cannot yet live in that presence. In the new creation, we will be perfected, able to commune face to face with our creator and Savior. *“The glory of God give it light, and the Lamb is its lamp”* (vs. 23). Physical light is a created representation of God's uncreated glory. Perfected, we will be able to bear the “light “ of His full glory.

**Revelation 22
Eden Restored**

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¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

John and the Angel

⁶ The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

⁷ "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who keep the words of the prophecy in this scroll."

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹ But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"

¹⁰ Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. ¹¹ Let those who do wrong continue to do wrong; let those who are vile continue to be vile; let those who do right continue to do right; and let those who are holy continue to be holy."

Epilogue: Invitation and Warning

¹² "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴ "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you ^[a] this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let those who hear say, "Come!" Let those who are thirsty come; and let all who wish take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If any one of you adds anything to them, God will add to you the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if any one of you takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from you your share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Footnotes: a. [Revelation 22:16](#) The Greek is plural.

What two features of the new creation are described in verses 1 and 2? {Revelation 22 describes the "river of the water life" that flows from God's throne, and the "tree of life" that grows around this river.}

The River and the Tree of Life: Two Features of the New Creation

The "river of the water of life" of Revelation 22:1 is living water – constantly flowing with an unending supply – and a clear allusion to the river that flowed from Eden (see Genesis 2:10). In this new Eden, believers will not be barred from the tree of life, but will enjoy its continual abundance. The river flowing from God's throne and the tree that grows around it make explicit what we have always known by faith: God is the Source and Substance of all life. No matter what else the new creation will be, it is all about the God of life.

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Why do you think verse 11 tells both the ungodly and the righteous to keep on living like they have been? *{Without Christ, not even good deeds will help you, do not bother.}*

The Timing of the End Times

Our anticipation of Jesus' return must be based on the promise of Revelation 22:20. Some claim that Jesus was really saying, "I will come quickly", meaning that when He does come back, everything will occur in rapid succession. But a better understanding is that His coming is truly imminent – ready to take place. It has been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus said these words to John. It may seem to us that this is not very soon. But in the scope of all history, it will not be long at all before Jesus' return leads to earth's end, the judgment, and the establishment of an eternal home for all those who love Him.

According to this chapter, what is our response to be to Jesus' promise that He is "coming soon"?

*{“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’...”Amen. Come, Lord Jesus”
MARANATHA!}* **See Also: 1 Corinthians 16:22**

²² *If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord ^[a]!*

Footnotes: a. [1 Corinthians 16:22](#) The Greek for *Come, Lord* reproduces an Aramaic expression (*Marana tha*) used by early Christians.

Archangel

In the celestial hierarchy, the archangel seems to be a spiritual being higher in rank than angels in general. We see archangels referred to a number of times throughout the Bible. Michael the archangel argued with the devil about Moses' body (Jude 9) and is seen to have great power and authority in the Old Testament. Michael is said to be the guardian of Israel, especially in the times of trouble predicted for the Jews during the end days (Daniel 12).

Salvation of Israel as a nation:

Ezekiel 37:21-22

²¹ *and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.*

Zephaniah 3:19-20

¹⁹ *At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. ²⁰ At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes ^[a] before your very eyes," says the LORD.*

Footnotes: a. [Zephaniah 3:20](#) Or I bring back your captives

Romans 11:26-27

²⁶ *and in this way ^[a] all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is ^[b] my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ^[c]*

Footnotes: a. [Romans 11:26](#) Or and so b. [Romans 11:27](#) Or will be c. [Romans 11:27](#) Isaiah 59:20,21; 27:9 (see Septuagint); Jer. 31:33,34

Establishment of universal peace:

Psalms 72:3-8

³ *May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. ⁴
May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy;*

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may he crush the oppressor. ⁵ May he endure ^[a] as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. ⁶ May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. ⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more. ⁸ May he rule from sea to sea and from the River ^[b] to the ends of the earth.

Footnotes: a. [Psalm](#)

[72:5](#) Septuagint; Hebrew You will be feared b. [Psalm 72:8](#) That is, the Euphrates

Isaiah 11:6-9

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling ^[a] together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ Infants will play near the hole of the cobra; young children will put their hands into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Footnotes: a. [Isaiah 11:6](#) Hebrew; Septuagint lion will feed

Micah 4:3-4

³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

Luke 22:7- 20

The Last Supper

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ **For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.**"

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."