
Inside

the

Book of

Revelation

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Revelation 1:1 through 1:3

CHAPTER ONE

News of the Future

The book of Revelation or the Apocalypse has fascinated the Western world more than any other part of the Bible. Many familiar expressions come from this last New Testament book: The Four Horsemen, bottomless pit, mark of the beast, lake of fire, Millennium, Babylon the great.

The word Apocalypse comes from the Greek *apokalypsis*. It means an uncovering, exposing or revealing of something hidden behind a curtain or cover. In the popular imagination, the Apocalypse stands for death, terror and destruction.

Revelation and Our Times

Before our time, Revelation's nightmarish visions of worldwide destruction and death seemed bizarre. That's hardly true today. We have the means to destroy life on planet earth in several ways. Reality is catching up to Revelation's images and taking on the form of its apocalyptic prophecies.

Yet, most people have heard about Revelation only in passing. The book remains a mystery, especially to those who haven't had an opportunity to study the Bible. Those interested in Revelation often say: "There's no sense reading it. You can't understand what it means."

One commentary says: "The last book of the Bible is, for most Christians, one of the least read and most difficult. . . . For the most part modern readers find the book unintelligible." The reason for this, the commentary continues, is that Revelation is full of symbols "of a type that we do not use and to which we no longer possess the key" (*New Bible Dictionary*, "Book of Revelation," page 1027).

This brochure introduces the reader to those symbols found in the book of Revelation. It points out several important keys that unlock the book's meaning. The following pages also explain those themes that help us understand how Revelation's contents apply to our own lifetime.

One important key to the book of Revelation is its time frame. The book is written in a way that propels the reader—in whatever age he or she may live—into a yet future "end time." Revelation tells us that mankind will then be suffering through a worldwide holocaust.

The Writer of the Book

Let's begin our journey through Revelation by looking at the book's author. He calls himself, simply, John. Early traditions unani-



mously declared that Revelation was written by the apostle John. The Apocalypse was probably written during the latter part of the Roman Emperor Domitian's reign (A.D. 81-96).

John was a prisoner on the Greek island of Patmos (Revelation, from now on abbreviated

as *Rev.*, 1:9). Patmos is a rocky, 16-square-mile island in the southeast Aegean Sea. It is 30 miles (about 50 kilometers) west of Asia Minor, modern Turkey. Patmos was a Roman penal colony to which authorities sent political offenders.

While imprisoned, John was transported in vision to a specific future time. He said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (*Rev.* 1:10, New King James Version throughout unless otherwise noted). What was this "Lord's day"? There are dozens of prophetic visions in various books of the Hebrew Bible, called the Old Testament in the Christian world. These describe incredible events to occur during this "day of the Lord" or "Lord's day."



ROMAN
EMPEROR
DOMITIAN

The book of Isaiah, for example, tells us, "The day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it" (*Isaiah* 13:9). It is a time of frightening atmospheric and celestial disturbances. "For the stars of heaven and their

constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine" (verse 10).

The Lord's day is the time when God intervenes in the affairs of mankind. The Messiah's dramatic arrival on earth is the central event of this period. Thus, the day of the Lord (or the Lord's day) refers to what is called the end time or last days of human-directed civilization.

John uses the expression *the Lord's day* to refer to this future time. He did not have some day of the week in mind, such as Sunday. The purpose of Revelation underscores this point. The book aims to put the reader on the scene, as it were. He or she is to become an observer of (and, in the mind's eye, a participant in) the coming world-shaking events of the day of the Lord.

Revelation is like the script for a film about the future. John is the secretary writing down the details of the movie's script, which he receives in vision. Yet, he is not simply taking dictation. John is describing what he sees us-

ing his own references, experiences and feelings. Revelation is a book of visions imparted through the mind of a man chosen by God for this monumentally important task.

The readers of Revelation, then, are to see themselves as part of the events unfolding in the book. They are vicariously living in the last days before the intervention of the Messiah. The message of the book is one of extreme urgency. John says the book contains "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place" (*Rev.* 1:1).

Again John urges, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are

The Apocalypse is like a series of scripts written for a film about future events to take place on this earth.

written in it: for the time is near" (*Rev.* 1:3). The book of Revelation prods the reader to view the events described in its pages as imminent. John records the words of an angel who announces that the final events of the Lord's day should begin. "There should be delay no longer," the angel says (*Rev.* 10:6).

The episodes described in Revelation are often written as though the reader is an eyewitness to what has already begun to happen. We are told "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (*Rev.* 14:8); "Your wrath *has come*" (*Rev.* 11:18); "the devil *has come* down to you, having great wrath" (*Rev.* 12:12); "the hour of His judgment *has come*" (*Rev.* 14:7).

A Compelling Message

In the final chapter of Revelation, we have the urgent words of Jesus Christ, the one who will return as the Messiah. He is admonishing the reader to consider the events described in Revelation as looming ahead.

The visions of Revelation are "the things which must shortly take place" (*Rev.* 22:6).

The words of the book are not to be sealed from view, “for the time is at hand” (verse 10). Jesus is saying, “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me” (verse 12). This statement is repeated for emphasis in the book’s next to last verse: “Surely, I am coming quickly” (verse 20).

A sense of moral urgency underscores the Apocalypse or book of Revelation. Time is fleeting. Events are rapidly moving to the crisis at the close when the Messiah puts down those who oppose him. Havoc and destruction are engulfing everyone. The only way to find safety in this life and salvation in the next, says Revelation, is through Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:10-11).

As readers, we are to flow with the movement of Revelation’s visions. This concept helps us understand an important verse that tells us where we are chronologically in the book’s prophecies.

That crucial verse is found in this vision: “The angel said to me [John] . . . I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast

Revelation propels
its readers—at
whatever time they may
be living—into a future
“end time.”

that carries her. . . . Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, *one is, and the other has not yet come*. And when he comes, he must continue a short time” (Rev. 17:7, 9-10, italics added). After that the Messiah returns in power to take over the reins of world government.

The book of Revelation addresses a certain reader—the one who has wisdom and a mind to understand. Verse 10 gives such a person an important pivot point or reference to help him or her understand Bible prophecy. He or she is to imagine living: (1) *After* five kings have fallen; (2) *During* the current or passing exist-

tence of another king; (3) *Before* the last king who has not yet appeared.

The book of Revelation allows readers to place themselves in the very midst of the closing years of this age. That is, the time just before the present age ends and the Messiah begins his rule.

That is the intended statement of the three-verse introduction to the book of Revelation. The time is short. Terrible events are soon to occur on this earth. Those readers who want to place their trust in God for protection, Revelation admonishes, are to heed the book’s insistent warning:

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. . . . Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and *keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near*” (Rev. 1:1-3, italics added).

A Book of Symbols

Another important key to understanding Revelation is that it is a book of *symbols*. It presents events, moral concepts and symbols of the future through vivid allegories or images. For example, we see the victorious king, Jesus, riding on a horse (Rev. 19:11-16). He wields a sword with which he smites the nations. That is symbolic of an *event*. It describes the return of the Messiah in power to destroy the forces of evil.

In some cases, we do not exactly know what each symbol represents or how certain symbolic events will take place. Their meaning may remain cloudy until the march of history itself makes them clear. For example, the destructive power of modern war machines has rendered understandable certain parts of Revelation which must have seemed obscure until this century.

The book of Revelation has a unique approach. The rest of the New Testament is comprised of letters or books that detail the work of Jesus or the Church. They discuss and correct problems in the Church. The contents of these epistles are grounded in events that had already or were then taking place.

Revelation is an “apocalyptic” writing. It is a book of symbols. The “vision” is a major explanatory instrument of Revelation. It describes events most of which *have not yet taken place*. That makes Revelation essentially a book about the future.

CHAPTER OUTLINE OF REVELATION

- 1** John's introduction. Christ glorified as head of his Church.
- 2&3** Messages to the seven churches.
- 4** The throne room of heaven.
- 5** Jesus as the revelator.
- 6** The first six seals.
- 7** God's people protected from his wrath.
- 8** The first four trumpet plagues of the seventh seal.
- 9** The fifth and sixth trumpet plagues.
- 10** Prelude to God's wrath.
- 11** The work of the two witnesses and seventh trumpet proclaimed.
- 12** History of God's persecuted Church.
- 13** The two beasts.
- 14** Preliminary messages announcing God's wrath.
- 15&16** The seven last plagues.
- 17** The false church and the beast it rides.
- 18** The fall of the world's political-economic system, Babylon the great.
- 19** The second coming of Christ.
- 20** The Millennium and beyond.
- 21&22** The new heavens and new earth, new Jerusalem and conclusion to Revelation.

Contrasts in Revelation

Another helpful key for understanding Revelation is the book's use of comparison and contrast. Let us look at a few of these, in brief summary.

Throughout the book, Satan's forces are pitted against the powers of God. Revelation describes two distinct ages of human existence. Satan, the remorseless adversary of God, dominates this present world. Jesus Christ will rule

a 1,000-year-long future time of world peace and abundance, popularly known as the Millennium.

Revelation portrays and compares two opposing ways of life. Two groups of people embody these conflicting life-styles. A harlot pictures the deceived group, deluded by what's called her "spiritual fornication." This refers to her illicit spiritual liaisons with political rulers. Another group of people follows the Lamb—a symbol for Jesus. These are collectively called the spiritually pure "Bride of Christ."

An enormous metropolis—"Babylon the great"—stands for the corrupt system that seduces the whole world. Revelation contrasts this city, so full of wickedness, with the purity and perfection of the "new Jerusalem." This glorious city, the New Jerusalem, also stands for the future ruling headquarters of God's perfect government.

Revelation has a story flow. This is another important key. The book strides through human history and leads us to a perilous age. We come face to face with "the last days" when the world is buffeted by an increasing outbreak of Satanic activity. The book's fulcrum is the final battle between the returning Messiah and Satan's system.

Revelation is a book about bad news and good news. There is much bad news because of the sinful work of Satan and his system. The good news is that righteousness will triumph in the end.

Let us take note of how descriptively one commentator summarized the book of Revelation. He wrote: "The Apocalypse is a broad canvas upon which the Seer paints without restrictions the ultimate triumph of God over evil. There is progress in the book, but it is more a progress that moves the reader to a fuller experience of the divine plan for final victory. . . . Like a mounting storm at sea each new crest of the wave moves history closer to its final destiny" (*New International Commentary on the New Testament*, "Revelation," Robert H. Mounce, page 46).

That destiny is one in which the perfect government of God banishes evil from the human family. That is, in essence, the final message of Revelation. Let's now see how we are to understand the symbols, the message and meaning of the Apocalypse as we make our way through this fascinating book, chapter by chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Christ's Message to His People

Revelation is a book about the future, first and foremost. However, it also has the same purpose as the gospels, Acts and the letters of the apostles. All these were specifically written to members of the Church of God. They explain the work of Jesus and the meaning of the Christian faith. The book of Revelation is also directed to members of God's Church, called "his servants" (Rev. 1:1).

Originally, Revelation was written to and read before churches of God in seven specific cities. John, in vision, was given precise instructions on this point. He first heard a loud trumpet. This was followed by a thunderous voice proclaiming, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last . . . *What you see write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea*" (Rev. 1:11, italics added).

Asia was a Greek-speaking Roman province in what is today western Turkey. It stretched across western Asia Minor from the sea to the Anatolian Plateau.

A specific congregation of God's people existed in each of the seven cities John mentioned. Revelation contains seven stylized letters to these churches. They give us a picture of the spiritual condition of God's people at the time the book was written.

The letters summarize the spiritual works,

the trials, the problems, the hopes and the rewards of God's people in these seven church congregations. The contents, no doubt, were read to their members.

John Addresses his Letter

Immediately after a short introduction, John greets his readers, those in the seven churches. He writes: "John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace . . . from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:4-5).

The message of Revelation discloses events to occur on this earth before Jesus' return. It is specifically addressed to his Church, as a warning and hope to his own people. The Church in question is the one Jesus founded (Matthew 16:18). He is its living head (Ephesians 1:21-22).

The first chapter contains a vision of the risen Jesus—the Son of Man—in his glorified state. He is pictured as dwelling among seven lamp stands. These represent the seven churches or congregations mentioned above (Rev. 1:13, 20). The vision emphasizes who their true spiritual leader is.

Christ holds seven stars, representing the angels of the seven churches, in his right hand (Rev. 1:20). This portrays Jesus' sovereign control over his Church. Christ also walks among the lamp stands. He is present in the midst of the Church and is aware of its activities. This recalls Jesus' promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

Seven Churches in Prophecy

The seven churches could also represent the *progressive* state of God's Church through the centuries. In that sense, they link God's people through time.

That linkage began when the Church was

CHURCH
FOUNDED

SMYRNA

A.D. 31

A.D. 500

EPHESUS

PERGAMOS

founded on the momentous day of Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2). The chain stretches through history down to the day of the Lord. The seven congregations, in that sense, could represent the *consecutive* and differing spiritual states of the Church throughout that time.

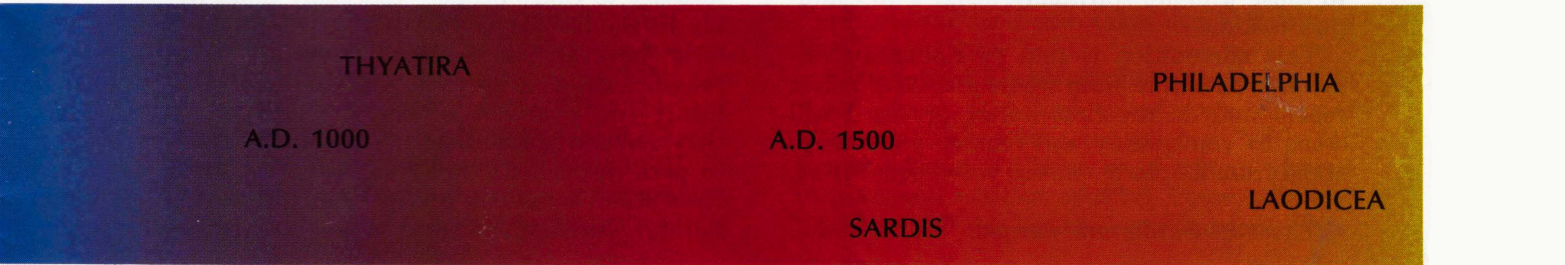
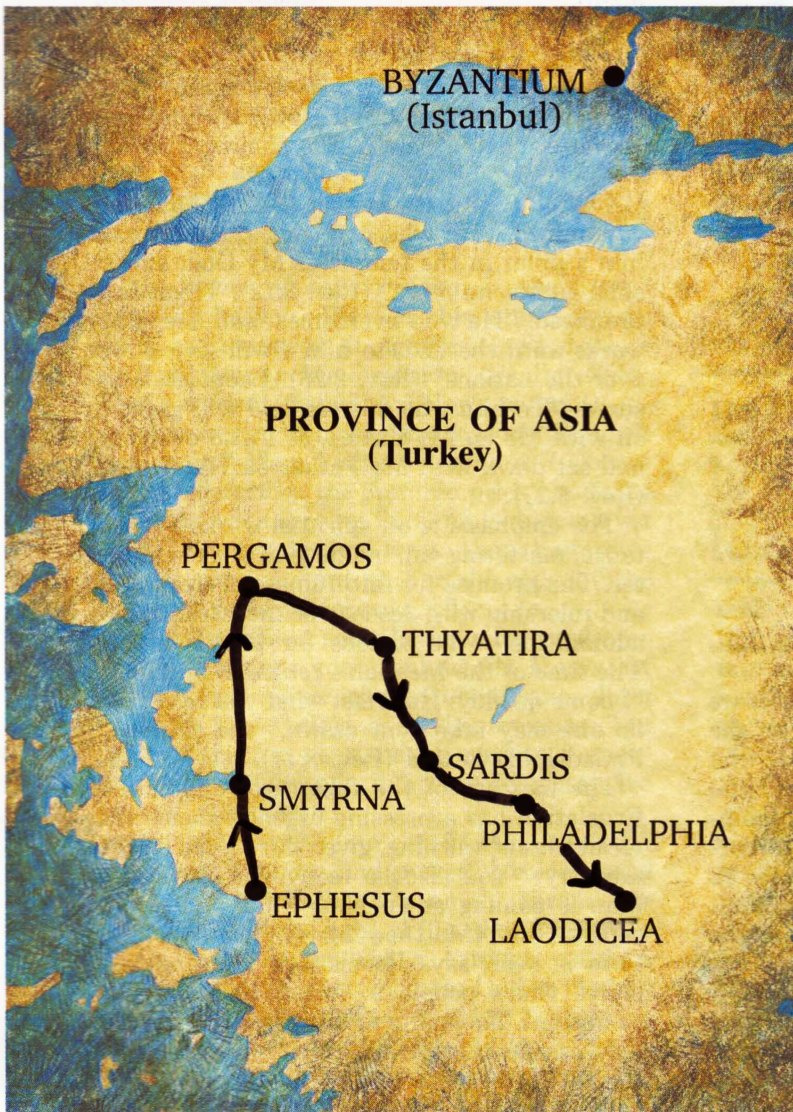
There is yet a third way to perceive the intended meaning of these seven churches. We've seen that the book of Revelation portrays events from the point of view of the "last days." That being so, the characteristics in the seven churches of Revelation, chapters two and three, could *all exist simultaneously* among God's people as the world treks toward the crisis at the close.

All the characteristics of the seven churches could be seen as existing within the time frame of Revelation's main emphasis—the approaching day of the Lord. In the "last days" we would find among God's people those who:

- Lose their first love and zeal for God's way (Rev. 2:4).
- Suffer poverty and persecution (Rev. 2:9), but are strong in faith, not denying God (Rev. 2:13).
- Are morally weak and compromise spiritual truth (Rev. 2:14, 20).
- Have greatly improved in the depths of their spiritual works (Rev. 2:18).
- Are nominally members but are spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1).
- Are persevering in God's way (Rev. 3:10).
- Are spiritually proud and possess works with no spiritual value (Rev. 3:17).

The admonitions, praises and promises given to each of the seven churches contain the statement:

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION—Letters written to Church of God congregations in seven cities of Asia Minor discuss their major spiritual characteristics. Each of the seven congregations can represent dominant traits of the church in successive periods of history.



“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This applies to all of God’s people in whichever era they might live. Certainly, true Christians in all ages should be concerned about each of the spiritual conditions described above.

Characteristics of Seven Churches

Revelation, chapters two and three, contain the actual letters to the seven churches. In each case, the letter begins with Jesus speaking to members of his Church.

One of several attributes of Jesus’ glory and majesty, as described in the first chapter, is repeated and placed at the heading of each

The book of Revelation is written to God’s people of every age as a message of warning and hope.

letter to the seven churches. For example, we read the following words addressed to the church at Ephesus: “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands” (Rev. 2:1). These statements are borrowed from Revelation, chapter one, verses 13 and 16. They underscore an important intent of the book: Its information comes from the spiritual head of the Church—the risen Jesus Christ.

The letters respectively commend the churches for their strong spiritual works and reprimand them about their specific problems and shortcomings. Forceful warnings are given to those who are spiritually weak. Two examples follow.

This admonition is sent to Ephesus: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp-stand from its place—unless you repent” (Rev. 2:5).

Those at Sardis are warned: “Be watchful,

and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Rev. 3:2-3).

The Call to a Godly Life

A promise is made to each church. If its members overcome their spiritual problems they will have a part in the coming kingdom of God.

Those in the Church at Philadelphia are guaranteed, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more” (Rev. 3:12). Thyatira is promised: “He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26). Laodicea is assured: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

The emphasis is on spiritual works—repentance, mastering sin, building God-like character. The promise for faithfulness is eternal life and rulership with Jesus over the nations. The admonition to be zealous for God is urgent. The time of the Messiah’s return is imminent. “I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown,” the church at Philadelphia is told (Rev. 3:11).

The message of the first three chapters of Revelation has a pressing urgency about it. It recalls Jesus’ warning, given during his earthly ministry. “You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matthew 24:44). The day of the Lord is near, says Revelation. The book implores God’s people to watch their spiritual condition. They are to be prepared so they may escape the terrible things to come upon the earth.

We have seen that Revelation addresses its message to God’s people—especially those living in the last days. The warning is to those “who have an ear to hear.” They are being provided with a scenario of the immediate future—an overview of the dreadful things they may see or experience. The world is ready to pass through its own time of mortal trial. Revelation holds out a way of escape to the faithful Christian.

The book of Revelation has not yet offered us any details about world conditions or the future. Up to this point in the Apocalypse, we still haven't seen what is to happen during the Lord's day or crisis at the coming of the Messiah. Chapters four and five of Revelation are a prelude to the book's real prophetic content.

In chapter four, John writes about a vision that placed him in the presence of God. "I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this'" (Rev. 4:1).

Headquarters of the Universe

The scene of John's vision is the throne room of heaven. We see this scene several times in Revelation. It signifies God's absolute authority over his creation (Psalm 47:8). That's evident from the vision's content.

John sees a brilliant throne with 24 spirit beings, or "elders," sitting around it. I Chronicles 24 describes the Aaronic priesthood's 24 divisions, each serving the temple during a set time. The apostle Paul wrote that the temple and its service were an earthly copy of the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5).

John, in vision, sees the actual throne area and records some important details. Four great spirit beings hover about this throne. John describes these beings as "living creatures." In front of the throne stands a massive foundation. Revelation calls it a "sea of glass, like crystal" (Rev. 4:6).

The throne area manifests incredible energy. Lightning, thunder and powerful voices issue forth. God the Father sits on the throne. He appears as radiant light, diffused and reflected in all its prismatic beauty through precious jewels. Scripture often pictures God as clothed with dazzling light (Psalm 104:2; I Timothy 6:16). What John sees in vision, then, is nothing short of the seat of government of the entire universe.

This scene is important to another theme of Revelation: Man's present system, with its many corrupt practices, is to be shut down and closed out. Today's world, inspired by the devil, will be replaced by the Messiah's just and merciful rule. This theme runs consistently like a thread through the book.

Chapter five directs the reader's attention to those who will be responsible for this change.

CHAPTER THREE

Prelude to the Day of the Lord

John observes God the Father sitting on a throne, holding an important object. "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Rev. 5:1).

In Roman law, documents were sometimes sealed by seven witnesses. This emphasized that the contents of the documents were certain and true. In the Bible the number *seven* has the symbolic meaning of completeness (the seven days of creation, for example).

Jesus Opens the Scroll

An unexpected problem appears in John's vision. No one seems able to open and read the scroll's contents. John weeps because no one is found worthy. Then an angel proclaims that someone is deserving after all. "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Rev. 5:5).

The Apocalypse identifies this someone as "a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). Revelation applies this title to Jesus. John, in his gospel, also describes Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Peter uses the lamb symbol as well. He said those whom God had called were cleansed from sin. This was accomplished "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19).

Isaiah 53:7 also has the same imagery. Here,

THE SCROLL WITH SEVEN SEALS—A large portion of Revelation’s prophecies depicting events to occur in the “last days” of human-directed civilization were disclosed to the apostle John as a scroll being opened and its seven seals being broken.

the then-future sacrifice for sin was pictured as a lamb being led to the slaughter. This same lamb, Revelation tells us, is returning to demand the blood of all who oppose his righteous rule (Rev. 19:11-16).

In John’s vision, the Lamb takes “the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (Rev. 5:7). John then hears many voices praising and glorifying Jesus. Their message is: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood” (Rev. 5:9). Jesus is worthy because of what he did, giving his life for sinning humans.

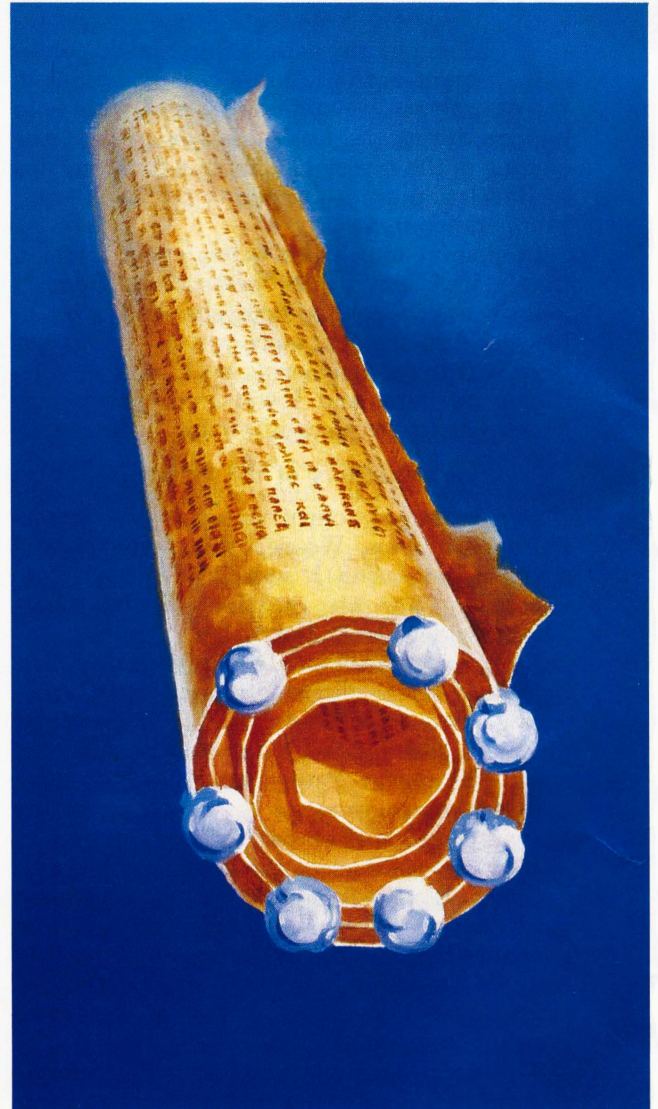
John then sees the glorified Jesus unrolling the scroll and breaking each of its seven seals. Here we see yet another theme of Revelation.

Mankind’s present system, with its corrupt practices, is to be shut down and closed out by the Messiah.

The risen Jesus has the central role in God’s plan. He offers himself as a sacrifice for sin and brings justice and perfect government to the earth (Philippians 2:5-11).

The agent of that change will be the returning Lamb, the Messiah. He will usher in the climactic event described in the visions of Revelation—the kingdoms of the world coming under his rule. As we shall see, the information on the scroll sealed by seven seals makes up the prophetic part of the Apocalypse. The book will later dramatize the material through a series of visions. As John experiences the visions, he describes them, and these words become our book of Revelation.

In chapter one, John pointed out that Jesus



Christ was the source of the Revelation and that he would reveal the scenario of the future to John (Rev. 1:1). The fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation once again highlighted the central position of the risen Jesus.

The preliminaries have now been covered. We know to whom the book of Revelation is written. The message is primarily directed to God’s people who have “ears to hear.” God and Jesus Christ are the source for the information in John’s visions.

We must properly orient ourselves to the contents of the Apocalypse. The visions are meant to graphically place the reader on the scene, as a bystander watching the events leading to the day of the Lord and beyond.

A motion picture we could title *Future World* now begins. We are in a darkened theater, waiting for the opening scenes. Suddenly four frightening cinematic images gallop across the screen. They are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The Four Horsemen have a symbolic message. They represent four strands of human suffering throughout the centuries. The effects which the horsemen depict continue through time and into the last days. They are followed by two other events to occur during this time—the cry of the martyrs and cosmic disturbances. (Rev. 5:9-17).

All these events fall under six “seals.” They are briefly described in a single chapter of Revelation, the sixth. They are part of a script written on both sides of a scroll (Rev. 5:1). The scroll referred to in Revelation was not the same kind of book we use today, made up of many pages bound together. It was one long sheet of parchment, rolled into a scroll. Words were written on both sides. The Revelation scroll had seven seals that had to be “opened” as a reader proceeded through it.

The Four Horsemen of Revelation

Jesus (the Lamb) is unrolling the scroll and opening each seal. John is invited to see its contents graphically depicted in a vision. John writes at the beginning of chapter six: “I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals [the first] and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see’” (Rev. 6:1).

Each of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is riding a different colored steed. They are a white horse, red horse, black horse and pale horse (Rev. 6:1-8). The horse colors take on specific symbolic meanings, such as red for war. Let’s take a brief look at the four portraits.

The white horse is mounted by a rider who “had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2). Some have confused this image with the one in Revelation 19, also a rider on a white horse. A quick comparison of chapters six and 19 reveals the two riders have little in common besides riding on white horses.

The horse in chapter six, for example, is bent on conquest. The intent of the rider in chapter 19 is to exact divine and *just* retribution for sin. “He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Six Seals Opened

judges and makes war” (Rev. 19:11). This rider is called “the Word of God” and “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:13,16). The rider on the white horse in Revelation 19 is unmistakably Jesus, the triumphant Messiah coming to rule the world.

Who, then, is the rider of the white horse in Revelation 6? He is accompanied by three other horses. Their riders portray destruction and death. It would not make sense for this rider to represent the returning Christ who restores *peace* to earth. The white horse of Revelation 6 represents those who claim they can bring humanity what only the true Messiah—Jesus—is capable of delivering. These imposters seek to conquer and destroy those who disagree with them.

The second horseman’s meaning is clear. He is a symbol of war. The red horse has a rider who takes “peace from the earth” and wields a “great sword.” In his wake, people “kill one another” (Rev. 6:4).

A Time of Great Famine

The black horse has a rider with “a pair of scales in his hand.” A voice accompanies the vision. It announces, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine” (Rev. 6:5-6).

The denarius was a Roman silver coin and was equal in value to the daily wage of a working man (Matthew 20:2). Anciently, oil

and wine were not luxuries. They were basic commodities of life. Grain, new wine and oil was a standard threesome describing the staples of life (Deuteronomy 7:13; 11:14; Hosea 2:8, 22).

We can see that this rider represents hunger and famine. He carries a scale to measure and carefully dole out food. This rider stands for a time when basic goods are sold at greatly inflated prices. There is a scarcity of things to eat. People are told to be careful not to harm precious foodstuffs.

The pale horse has a rider called "Death, and Hades followed with him" (Rev. 6:8). Commentator Robert H. Mounce called this pale horse "the color of a corpse." The Greek word for "pale," *chloros*, elsewhere in Revelation describes the yellow-green of vegetation (Rev. 8:7; 9:4). It is here used for the telltale and sickly look of death due to a virulent pestilence.

The Four Horsemen bring immense suffering to the human race. John writes, "And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Rev. 6:8).

Jesus' Olivet Prophecy

That's all that Revelation tells us about these Four Horsemen. However, Jesus also speaks of the conditions represented by the Four Horsemen. (See Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.)

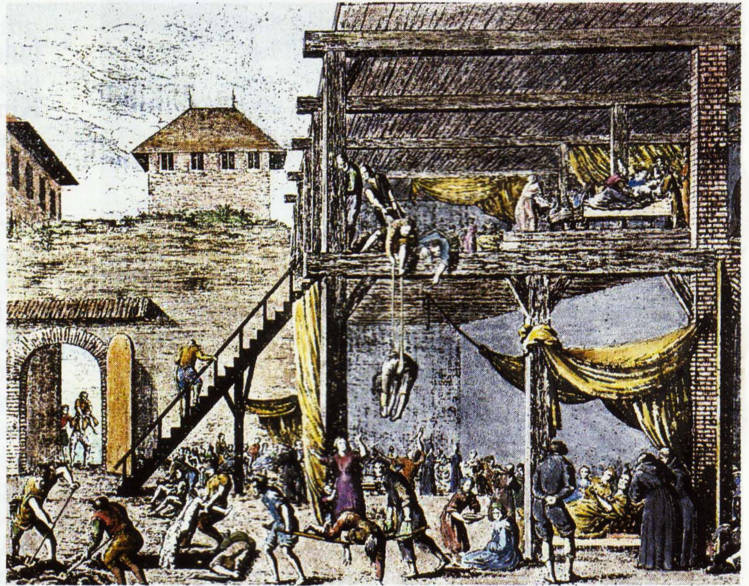
The disciples of Jesus had approached him, asking: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus then outlined the events to occur prior to the end of the age and the return of the Messiah. Most of the occurrences would come *before* and lead to the singular "sign" of Christ's return (Matthew 24:30). As does Revelation, the Olivet prophecy contains a *story flow* relating one event to another in general time order.

Notice how Jesus began his outline of world events and how it corresponds to what is written in the book of Revelation. Jesus told his disciples: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For

nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be *famines, pestilences*, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:3-8, italics added).

Observe that Christ said there would be: (1) Individuals falsely usurping his authority and power, masquerading as deliverers and saviors, political and religious; (2) Wars and rumors of wars; (3) Famines; (4) Pestilences and earthquakes. Wars, of course, sometimes lead to politically induced famines. Famines can lead to pestilences as can natural disasters such as earthquakes.

Notice carefully. The four conditions that Jesus described in Matthew 24 parallel the Four Horsemen visions as described in Revelation 6. These disasters come before and only anticipate or look forward to the last days. Jesus said "The end is not yet" and these are



only "the beginning of sorrows."

Various false saviors have come "in Jesus' name" throughout the centuries. These may have promised "deliverance" in terms of better religious, political, social or economic conditions. Wars have ravaged humans down through the centuries, and so have famines and disease epidemics.

The Black Death alone killed upwards of one third of the people living in Europe in the 14th century. The worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918 killed twice as many people—perhaps 20 million—as did World War I itself.



THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF REVELATION—*False ideologies, war, famine and disease epidemics striking the human race are symbolized by the Four Horsemen. Left, rendering of a “Plague Hospital” for victims of the Black Death in 14th century Europe.*

In more recent times, millions have died or been wounded in just three wars—in Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf region and Kampuchea.

As appalling as all these events have been, Jesus said we should not see them as necessarily synonymous with “the last days.” They only give us a hint of what to expect in the end times just prior to Jesus’ second coming.

Now we come to the fifth and sixth seals of the book of Revelation. These are also in the sixth chapter. John writes, “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls

of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6:9).

In the Olivet prophecy Jesus also referred to this event described under the fifth seal. He mentioned it immediately after detailing the events of “the beginning of sorrows.” Said Jesus, speaking to his own followers: “They will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. . . . For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:9, 21).

The Fifth and Sixth Seals

The fifth seal pictures a time of great tribulation—including a martyrdom for religious convictions. The New Testament, along with Revelation, emphasizes its impact on *the spir-*

itual people of God—his own Church. The great tribulation also falls on what was God's *physical* nation—the House of Israel, or the descendants of Jacob's 12 sons.

Jeremiah wrote of this period and the events that immediately follow. He cried out: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). Daniel called it "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1). It is the same time described by Jesus in Matthew 24:21. This distress would climax in the death of mankind if Christ failed to intervene in human affairs (verse 22).

Immediately following the great tribulation of the fifth seal come the cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal. These herald the beginning of the *very* last days. As Robert H. Mounce put

The Four Horsemen represent four strands of suffering afflicting humans throughout the centuries.

it, this is the "grim announcement that the end of the world was at hand."

John writes: "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth" (Rev. 6:12-13).

Compare this description of the sixth seal with what Jesus said followed the great tribulation. Jesus explained: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). Both in Revelation and in Matthew 24, these heavenly signs *follow* the great tribulation.

In the sixth chapter of Revelation, then, we have these six conditions mentioned. Each is described under its own seal: (1) False Christs; (2) Wars; (3) Famines; (4) Disease epidemics; (5) The great tribulation; (6) The heavenly

signs or cosmic disturbances. So far, these events parallel those Jesus cited in the Olivet prophecy.

After Heavenly Signs—God's Wrath

What follows the heavenly signs according to the book of Revelation? The last verse of chapter six tells us, "The great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The prophet Joel put the day of God's wrath into chronological perspective. He wrote, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood"—two heavenly signs—"before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Here we have an important sequence. The heavenly signs occur immediately *after* the great tribulation, or Satan's wrath, and before the day of the Lord.

Disturbing portents in the atmosphere and environment begin shortly before the return of the Messiah. Great earthquakes are striking the earth. These are persistent features of divine visitation in the Bible (Isaiah 2:19; 13:13; 24:17-20; Haggai 2:6). The atmosphere is darkened as sunlight is blocked out. The moon appears blood-red. The "stars"—meteors—fall to the earth. The sky is "receding as a scroll." The mountains and islands are moved out of their places.

Everyone will be mortally afraid when God's final wrath or the day of the Lord strikes. People will scream in terror, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:16). The "wrath of the Lamb" is an unusual expression—used only once here in Revelation. Elsewhere the Bible calls this time "the wrath of God."

This wrath of God is a basic theme in the Bible. The "day of the Lord" is a day of wrath and retribution (Isaiah 2:10-21; 13:6-16; Zephaniah 1:14-18). It isn't spiteful hate, but God's response to stubbornly unrepented-of sin that has caused untold misery and suffering among humans.

The sixth chapter of Revelation then takes us right up to the time when God fully intervenes in the affairs of mankind during the last days. He does this by sending plagues and destruction of increasing severity to our planet. However, God cannot send the full fury of his wrath on the earth before he provides protection for his people. The scene temporarily switches in Revelation to show us what is happening to those who are obedient to him.

Revelation 7:1 through 9:21

The first six seals represented the calamitous events breaking out in the world at large. They showed humanity facing the consequences of its own sinful actions as well as the impending judgment of God.

Chapter seven breaks away to a different scene. It picks up the story of God's people and answers the question of Revelation 6:17: "His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" John, in vision, now sees the security of the faithful in contrast to a sinful world facing almost total destruction.

Wrath of God Temporarily Restrained

As the seventh chapter of Revelation begins, we find that the wrath of God—the day of the Lord—is temporarily being held up. John sees "four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth" (verse 1).

These winds, from the four directions of the compass, represent the retribution of God. Specifically, the four winds are restrained from blowing on the earth, sea and trees (Rev. 7:1). The first three angels blowing on trumpets will strike these ecological targets (Rev. 8:7-10).

Immediately after the "four winds" vision, John hears another angel say, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (Rev. 7:3). This seal leaves "His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1).

The prophet Ezekiel experienced a similar vision. He saw human figures in Jerusalem (standing as a symbol for all the tribes of Israel) disturbed over the sins being committed in the city (Ezekiel 9:4). They received "a mark on the forehead." What does it mean to be "marked" and "sealed"?

Those Who Are "Sealed"

To be "sealed" is a symbolic way of saying that these people are identified as belonging to God. They are "marked" for protection from the afflictions to come. The servants' "mark" or seal is also to be contrasted, in a vision John will shortly see, with the mark the followers of the "beast" receive. They are branded with the mark of its name (Rev. 14:11; 16:2; 19:20). This singles out and labels such people as the enemies of God.

The 144,000 is the first group to be sealed and protected from what is coming (Rev. 7:3-

CHAPTER FIVE

God's People In a Time of Wrath

8). Who are these individuals? They are the servants of God, the Apocalypse tells us. That means they obey him. They could certainly be part of the same group discussed in chapters two and three of Revelation. That is, they would be the people of God, members of his Church.

Revelation, chapter 14, again mentions the 144,000. John says of this group: "These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. . . . These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4). In this context the 144,000 symbolize those who are true to God and his way.

This group is composed of *spiritual* virgins. They do not commit spiritual fornication by following false religious and philosophical teachings. They have repented of ungodly behavior. They are true to God's perfect way. This group, however, is only the first to come under God's grace. They are the "firstfruits," as Revelation 14:4 points out, of a much greater spiritual harvest to come.

In his defense before the Roman authorities, Paul said he was being judged for the hope of the resurrection. Said Paul, "To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to obtain" (Acts 26:7).

Paul clearly tells us that the physical tribes of Israel were not then serving God (Romans 9:31; 11:25). The 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel described in Revelation must be con-



verted Israelites and members of his Church (Galatians 6:16), organized into 12 tribes.

The emphasis in Revelation is on the *spiritual* people of God or his Church. The 144,000, then, comprise the generation of faithful believers who live at this final turbulent period of human history. This group would be supernaturally protected from the trials and tribulations of God's wrath to come at the end times.

In the next vision, John sees another group being sealed for protection. This much larger assembly is "a great multitude which no one could number." They come from "all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues" and they are all "clothed with white robes" (Rev. 7:9).

The innumerable multitude is made up of individuals "who come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14). If they came "out of" *the* great tribulation, they must have been in it. The definite article *the* is used here. The subject is *the* great tribulation at the close of the age, the one to which Jesus referred (Matthew 24:21).

While some of God's people must suffer through the great tribulation—as we shall see later—God protects all of them from his earth-shattering wrath. This protection having been afforded to God's true servants, the time for the real day of the Lord—God's wrath on a sinning humanity—now begins.

God's Wrath Begins

We now come to the eighth chapter of Revelation and the opening of the seventh and final seal. John here records another vision. "When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and

to them were given seven trumpets” (Rev. 8:1-2).

The judgments to fall on the world are so shocking that a time of silence must be taken to commemorate what is to come. It’s a dramatic pause or lull before the final storm of God’s wrath. The *trumpet* plagues are poised to strike.

Trumpets played a prominent part in events recorded in the Hebrew Bible. They were used to call people together, to move the tribes and to celebrate the festivals. They were also used to sound the alarm in time of war and in the coronation of kings.

Trumpets herald the day of God’s wrath. It is a time of alarm in the world (Zephaniah 1:14-16). Lightning, thunder, great noises and mighty tremors announce the beginning of God’s wrath (Rev. 8:5). The world trembles before the presence of God as ancient Israel did at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16).

The first four seals depicted judgments that were the inevitable result of human sinfulness. God now directs the trumpet plagues against a world unyielding in its hostility toward him. These trumpet plagues affect a significant portion of earth. The stylistic “one-third” occurs a number of times in verses 7-12.

These punishments are intended to lead the human race to repentance. Tragically, for the most part humanity refuses to heed (Rev. 9:20). Before Pharaoh would release ancient Israel from captivity, plagues devastated Egypt (Exodus 10:7). In the end time, horrifying events will strike fear in those holding world power. This will result in the release of God’s people as well (Rev. 18:4). Both the remaining fragments of the physical nation and God’s spiritual children will be freed from the oppressive “beast” that rules the world.

John sees seven trumpet visions. They constitute the seventh seal. Each trumpet follows the other and represents real world events of the future. These trumpets depict plagues, afflictions or calamities which God will bring on a world that refuses to repent.

We saw that the “great day of God’s wrath” was announced at the end of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:17). These seventh-seal trumpets, then, portray events to take place during the day of the Lord. It is the time when God begins to directly assert control over a sinning world.

It will be a time of great confusion. The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah wrote of this

time. “The great day of the Lord is near, it comes with speed. . . . That day is a *day of wrath*, a day of anguish and affliction, a day of destruction and devastation . . . a *day of trumpet* and battle-cry over fenced cities and lofty battlements” (Zephaniah 1:14-16, New English Bible, italics added).

First Four Trumpet Plagues

The first four trumpet plagues strike the earth itself, creating an ecological catastrophe of global proportions. The visions present stylized scenes in which one third of whatever is struck is destroyed.

- The first angel’s trumpet sounds. A roaring firestorm destroys one third of the world’s

The group of
144,000 faithful
believers live at the tur-
bulent period of history
when Christ returns.

forests and vegetation (Rev. 8:7).

- The second angel’s trumpet sounds. John sees “something like a great mountain burning with fire” thrown into the sea. One third of all ocean life dies and a third of all ships are destroyed (Rev. 8:8-9).




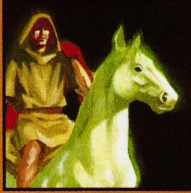


- The third angel’s trumpet sounds. John sees “a great star”—perhaps a meteor—fall from the sky “burning like a torch.” It destroys one third of the world’s water supply (Rev. 8:10-11).

- The fourth angel’s trumpet sounds. Great disturbances in atmospheric conditions occur (Rev. 8:12).

The final three angelic trumpet soundings are immediately preceded by an announcement. They have come to be known by a special title—the “three woes”—because of their extreme severity. John looks and hears “an angel flying through the midst of heaven.” He cries out, “*Woe, woe, woe* to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!” (Rev. 8:13).

Seven Seals of Revelation

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

First Seal	Second Seal	Third Seal	Fourth Seal	Fifth Seal	Sixth Seal	
White Horse	Red Horse	Black Horse	Pale Horse	Great Tribulation	Heavenly Signs	Silence in heaven (Revelation 8:1-6)
						
Deception	War	Famine	Pestilence	Captivity		First Trumpet One third of trees and all grass burned
Revelation 6:1-2	Revelation 6:3-4	Revelation 6:5-6	Revelation 6:7-8	Revelation 6:9-11	Revelation 6:12-17	Revelation 8:7

Sealing of God's People
Revelation 7; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ezekiel 9:4

The "first woe," or the fifth trumpet, is described in Revelation 9:1-11. The power that causes the destruction labeled as the "first woe" emerges out of the "bottomless pit." We see this later interpreted in Revelation 17:8 as a final rebirth of a great empire. This force surfaces to take political and military control of a large part of the world.

Here's what John sees as the *fifth angel* sounds his trumpet. A "star" falls from heaven and is given a key to the abyss. This is a reference to Satan himself who is called "the angel of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:11). "He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. . . . Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power. . . . And the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. . . . and their faces were like the faces of men. . . . and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots. . . . They had tails like scorpions, and

there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men five months" (Rev. 9:1-10).

The fifth trumpet, then, introduces a major cataclysm. It portrays a vast military-political superpower exacting punishment on other nations in war.

The Sixth Trumpet or "Second Woe"

"One woe is past," John suddenly hears. "Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things" (Rev. 9:12).

Immediately after this angelic statement, John hears the sixth angel sound. What he sees and hears next staggers the imagination: an army of horsemen numbering 200 million (verse 16).

John continues to write: "And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their

The Day of the Lord — Time of God's Wrath

(Joel 2:1; Revelation 6:15-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:1)

Seventh Seal: Seven Trumpet Plagues (Revelation 16:1)

Second Trumpet	Third Trumpet	Fourth Trumpet	Fifth Trumpet	Sixth Trumpet	Seventh Trumpet: Seven Last Plagues						
					First Plague	Second Plague	Third Plague	Fourth Plague	Fifth Plague	Sixth Plague	Seventh Plague
One third of sea becomes blood, one third of sea creatures die, one third of ships destroyed	One third of rivers become wormwood	One third of sun, moon, stars darkened	Locusts, symbolic of beast's military power (Revelation 17:8-14)	200 million horsemen; one third of humanity killed, humanity refuses to repent	Sores on those who accepted mark of the beast	Sea turns to blood, all sea creatures die	Rivers turn to blood	Sun scorches humanity with great heat, humanity blasphemes God	Beast's seat of government afflicted	Euphrates dried up, world's armies gathered to Armageddon (Joel 3:9-17)	Great earthquake and hail
Revelation 8:8-9	Revelation 8:10-11	Revelation 8:12	Revelation 9:1-12	Revelation 9:13-21	Revelation 16:2	Revelation 16:3	Revelation 16:4-7	Revelation 16:8-9	Revelation 16:10-11	Revelation 16:12-16	Revelation 16:17-21
			First Woe	Second Woe	Third Woe (Revelation 8:13)						

Return of Jesus Christ

Revelation 10:7; 11:15-19; 19:1-21;
 Matthew 24:30-31; I Corinthians 15:51-52;
 I Thessalonians 4:16; Zechariah 14:1-4

mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone" (Rev. 9:17). In vision, John sees this army advancing west across the Euphrates river, which runs through the modern-day Middle East nation of Iraq.

The Euphrates river has great symbolic importance in history. It marked in Solomon's time the boundary between ancient Israel and nations to the east. In 539 B.C., the Medo-Per-sian king Cyrus diverted the Euphrates river preventing it from running through the center of Babylon. As a result, Cyrus and his troops were able to steal into the city unobserved along the dry riverbed. They surprised and captured the city, bringing down the Babylo-nian empire.

The 200 million strong army of horsemen John portrays in Revelation is symbolic of a major invasion from the east, during a world war. This vast horde moves across the Eu-phrates and toward the Holy Land. One third of the humans alive are killed (verses 15, 18).

Apparently what John witnesses is the second stage of a total world war in proportions not known to this day.

One Trumpet Must Yet Sound

The world's troubles do not end with chap-ter nine. One final trumpet plague—the "third woe"—yet remains. John now sees an angel standing with one foot on the land and the other on the water. John then writes the words he hears, that "there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel . . . the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets" (Rev. 10:6-7).

However, before John receives the visions of this seventh angel, he sees other events that need to be recorded. These are things about the history of God's people and the preaching of the gospel. They occur during the tumultuous times of the great tribulation and wrath of God.

CHAPTER SIX

The Two Witnesses

The progression of prophetic events in Revelation is temporarily interrupted after the sixth angel blows his trumpet (the second “woe”) (Rev. 9:13-21). Revelation now gives us two inset chapters. They bring the reader up to date on a very important happening during the last days. That landmark event is the final and most powerful stage in the preaching of the gospel—the good news of the coming kingdom of God—to the world.

In chapter 10, a voice from heaven tells John to take an open book out of the hand of an angel. It instructs him to eat this small, bittersweet volume. The leaves are honey to his taste, signifying that the judgments and plan of God are just and righteous. But the digested book causes bitter distress to his stomach. This implies that the world would neither accept God’s judgments nor his call to repentance.

Thus, proclaiming the saving gospel would lead to persecution and, sometimes, to the death of God’s servants. Yet John is told to preach the good news in spite of the possible repercussions. His commission is: “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings” (Rev. 10:11). Prophetically, the two witnesses of Revelation 11 accomplish that same task in the last days.

In vision, John hears an angelic spokesman say the following about these two individuals: “I will give power to my two witnesses, and

they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 11:3). If we allow a prophetic year to have 12 months of 30 days each, the two witnesses would be carrying out their warning message for 3½ years.

During their witness, the holy city—Jerusalem—is under the sway of foreign armies. The time of this control is stated as being 42 months (Rev. 13:5). With 12 months equaling a year, this would also give us 3½ years.

God must protect his people during this time or they will suffer intense persecution. This period of protection, we are told, lasts for “a time and times and half a time” (Rev. 12:14). If a “time” equals one year, we again have a period of 3½ years: a time + (two) times + half a time.

The supernatural power of God accompanies the preaching of the two witnesses. John writes, “These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire” (Rev. 11:6).

The two witnesses must exhort people to repent and obey God. They will not be well received either by the citizens of the world or the controlling political-religious authority. Their fate is evident.

The two witnesses will be martyred: “The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them” (Rev. 11:7). For the first time in Revelation we formally meet the major earthly adversary and foe of the Church in the last days. It is “the beast.”

The dead bodies of the martyred two witnesses lie for 3½ days in the streets “of the great city . . . where also our Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:8). That’s an obvious reference to Jerusalem—a city then, as now, at the center of the world’s attention. Jerusalem is here figuratively called “Sodom” and “Egypt.” This identifies the city as a place of sin, from God’s viewpoint. (See Isaiah 1:10, where Jerusalem is called Sodom.)

There are several references in Revelation to another “great city,” called “Babylon, the great” (Rev. 16:19; 17:5). The political-religious power of one “great city,” Babylon, kills the two witnesses in the other “great city.”

In the crisis at the close of this age, invaders from outside the Middle East will dominate the city of Jerusalem. However, it is to become

the future city of God from whence true religion originates (Isaiah 2:3). By contrast, God will permanently obliterate the seat of false religion—Babylon the great (Isaiah 47:1-11).

The nations declare a universal holiday when they learn that the two “tormentors of the world” are dead. The world applauds the death of the two witnesses. They “rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another.” That’s because the hated two witnesses had “tormented” the world by speaking God’s truth and bringing plagues on the earth (Rev. 11:6, 10). The people of the world, however, are about to experience the surprise of their lives.

Resurrection of Righteous Dead

“But, wait! The impossible is happening,” onlookers in Jerusalem say. People are astonished at what they see. The two corpses are suddenly coming back to life. The bodies are stirring—the two witnesses are alive once again!

They stand on their feet and hear a loud voice, saying, “Come up here.” They rise into the sky in a cloud, and their enemies see them (Rev. 11:12). Pictured here is none other than the event immediately preceding the resurrection of the righteous dead. It occurs at the seventh and last trump—the next prophetic event Revelation describes (Rev. 11:15).

It is the time during which the righteous dead receive eternal life. The apostle Paul wrote of that time: “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:16).

In his epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said the resurrection of the dead would occur: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible” (I Corinthians 15:52, italics added).

The preaching of the gospel by two witnesses ends just 3½ days before that seventh and last trumpet sounds. It announces the pouring out of the final plagues on mankind and the coming of the Messiah. Jesus referred to this event also: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world”—certainly fulfilled in major part by the two witnesses in great power—“as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

The two witnesses are apparently modeled after Moses and Elijah. They perform signs similar to what Moses and Elijah performed in their day (compare verses 5 and 6 with I Kings 17:1; II Kings 1:10; Exodus 7:14-21).

The Apocalypse also identifies the two witnesses as two olive trees and the two lamp stands before the Lord (Rev. 11:4). Compare this designation with Zechariah’s vision of the two olive trees. They are called “the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:3, 11, 14). Not much else can be said about the identity of these two individuals. As you read this their recorded period of prophesying is yet future.

To keep us moving with the flow of world events as they are vividly described, John inserts a chronological marker in Revelation 11. It connects us directly to the final verse in chapter nine. “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and

The supernatural power of God will accompany and confirm the preaching of the two witnesses.

ever!” (Rev. 11:15). This is the time when the existing age-of man’s government comes crashing down.

The Messiah takes over political and religious power. His “wrath has come” (Rev. 11:18). The resurrection of the righteous dead occurs. The 24 heavenly elders announce “that You [Christ] should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great” (Rev. 11:18).

The book of Revelation, however, is not quite ready to describe the final intervention of Jesus in world affairs. We now look at the political and religious powers dominating the world during the “last days” and their war against God’s people.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Beast Versus God's Church

Chapters 12 through 14 of Revelation introduce us to a major religious struggle. This conflict is destined to dominate the world stage in the “last days.” John shows us how and why God’s government—represented on earth by his Church—endures deadly assault from the political, economic and religious system controlled by Satan the devil.

This section marks a major turning point in Revelation. John now defines the underlying cause for the hostility about to engulf God’s Church. It is kindled by the struggle of a defeated enemy. His death rattle creates one final severe time of tribulation. The outcome, however, is certain. God will come in judgment to destroy his enemies (chapters 15 through 19) and reward his own people (chapters 20 through 22).

The stage is prepared for the final conflict. Chapters 12 through 14 introduce the actors who play the major roles. The “woman” of Revelation 12 is God’s pure Church. She is known as spiritual Israel, Zion and “the mother” (Galatians 4:26; 6:16; Ephesians 5:23-24, 30-32; Hebrews 12:22).

Revelation also reveals the major opponent of the Church. He is the terrifying red dragon with seven heads, 10 horns and seven diadems on his heads. He is the devil—the archenemy of God’s people (Rev. 12:3, 9; 20:2). The diadems on Satan’s seven heads represent his spurious claim against Christ. As the Lord of

Lords, it is to Jesus that all crowns of authority belong (Rev. 19:12, 16).

The Good Woman—God’s Church

In Revelation 12, John records a vision of the woman clothed with the sun. She has the moon under her feet. On her head is a wreath made up of 12 stars (Rev. 12:1). What can this strange symbolism mean?

The biblical patriarch Joseph dreamed a similar scene almost 2,000 years before Revelation was written. He told his brothers: “I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me” (Genesis 37:9).

The context explains these figures. They are Joseph’s father Israel (the sun), his mother Rachel (moon) and his eleven brothers (the stars) (Genesis 37:10). Joseph, in this case, would be the 12th brother or “star.” Thus, we have a clear reference to the physical family of Israel. Israel grew into a nation and became God’s own special people (Deuteronomy 14:2). God later temporarily rejected the nation for its sins until Christ should appear as the delivering Messiah (Romans 11:25-27).

The parallel reference in Revelation 12 is primarily to *spiritual Israel*—the Church, the congregation or the spirit-begotten people of God (Galatians 6:16). In Revelation 12 we see the Church of God—the Church that Jesus began—as it has come into conflict with Satan and the corrupt empire under his control.

Satan, of course, tried to have Jesus himself put to death shortly after his human birth (Matthew 2:16). The devil failed, the biblical account tells us. Jesus lived a perfect life, paid for human sin by his death and was resurrected. He began his Church and it grew both in numbers and spiritual power.

However, during the Roman persecution God’s people had to flee the confines of the empire for 1,260 years. (This is based on counting a day for each year according to John’s vision—see Rev. 12:6 and also Ezekiel 4:5-6.)

John carries us historically to the “end times” in the 12th chapter. The struggle between Satan’s forces and the people of God increases to fever pitch.

Satan Attacks the Church

Satan wages a titanic battle against God. God defeats Satan when he attacks God’s universe-ruling headquarters. John tells us, “The

great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth” (Rev. 12:9).

Jesus mentioned a similar defeat of Satan in his initial attempt to overthrow God (Luke 10:18). See also Isaiah 14:12-15 which recounts Lucifer’s (Satan’s) fall from heaven. Compare that pre-Adamic event with Revelation 12, verse three and the first part of verse four.

In Revelation, the heavens are said to rejoice because Satan is cast out permanently in the last days (Rev. 12:12). However, the inhabitants of earth suffer woes because of his presence. Satan now begins his final offensive. It is a fruitless attempt to subvert God’s plan for mankind.

The devil turns his full attention toward gaining control of the entire human race. Satan’s goal is a complete martyrdom of God’s people. John hears a loud voice, saying: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:12).

God rescues those of his people who show faith, love and obedience toward him. John uses the symbol of a woman to stand for God’s Church. He says, “The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place . . . from the presence of the serpent” (Rev. 12:14). This is a symbolic act of Godly protection, portraying divine deliverance (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:10-11; Isaiah 40:31).

Satan attempts to expunge God’s people before they can escape—kill them to a man and woman! He sends a “flood” after the Church (Rev. 12:15). The flood is a common Old Testament metaphor for overwhelming evil or armies (Isaiah 59:19; Daniel 11:22). Satan’s attempt fails. God prevents harm from coming to those he is protecting (Rev. 12:16).

Not all of God’s people are protected, however. Many have not fully heeded the warning to repent and overcome. These individuals now enter their time of supreme trial. They must prove their faith and love toward God by facing extreme persecution and death for his name.

Satan is the instigator. “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the *rest of her offspring*, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17, italics

added). Some of God’s own people must suffer in this great tribulation or holocaust.

The Beasts of Revelation 13

By what means does Satan make war against God’s Church? How does he attempt to control the world? Revelation, chapter 13, answers both questions.

John sees a repulsive monster in his next vision. “I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns” (Rev. 13:1). This symbol of Satan’s earthly power—the beast that rises from the sea—is a political power shaped in Satan’s image (Rev. 12:3).

The creature of Revelation 13 is a grotesque composite of parts from a leopard, bear and lion (verse 2). One of the heads was mortally wounded but its critical injury miraculously healed (verse 3).

Satan will attempt to
gain control of the
human race and martyr
all those who trust in
and obey God.

John writes, “All the world marveled and followed the beast. . . . Saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” (Rev. 13:3-4). This beast is given authority “over every tribe, tongue and nation. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him” (Rev. 13:7-8).

This is the earthly foe of the Church—the *political-military* agent through which Satan carries out his war against believers. The power and authority of the beast, however, comes directly from the dragon, Satan the devil (Rev. 13:2).

Here is a superpower of immense might. It achieves at least a temporary control of the world. Satan uses this political power as the agent to stamp out and destroy the work of God’s people. God allows this power “to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev. 13:7).

A Second Beast Emerges

John also sees another beast that has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon (Rev. 13:11). That is to say, it is a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing. This beast pretends to be something it is not, morally and spiritually.

This beast represents religious power intimately associated with the first beast—a great military and political force. John writes of the second beast: “He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (Rev. 13:12). This second beast performs great miracles and it “deceives those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 13:14).

Its role is to bring people to worship the first beast. This beast uses miracles, economic boycott and threats to achieve its aim. Like a false Elijah, this second beast paves the way for the first beast.

This false political and religious system also wields tight *economic control* over those whom it dominates. It causes everyone to receive a “mark” on the right hand and on the forehead.

A mighty military,
political, religious
and economic superpower
will wield international
authority.

“No one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Rev. 13:16-18).

No one is exempt from this harsh economic control. Whether small, great, rich, poor, free, bond—all must acquiesce. Individuals who refuse to serve the “beast” are not allowed to carry out the smallest economic transactions.

What is this “mark?” It is a parody of the sealing, in chapter seven, of the servants of God. The mark serves to identify those who worship the beast. The metaphor could have come from several practices.

In Roman times, disobedient slaves were often branded with marks of ownership, much like cattle are today. Religious tattooing was

also widespread. Devotees of a god labeled themselves with tattoos to designate their loyal devotion.

The word *mark* was also used for seals attached to commercial documents and stamped with the name and date of the emperor.

This beast is also identified by the number 666. To what does this numerical cryptogram refer? The mark or name is the same as the *number* of its name (Rev. 13:17). Many languages have letters which also are used as numbers. Latin, for example, has been one of those languages. The Roman number X equals 10, V equals 5 and so forth. A piece of graffiti from Pompeii reads: “I love her whose number is 545.” The number stood for the name. This principle is what Revelation 13:17 is referring to.

The World Just Before “The End”

Up to this point, Revelation gives us a glimpse, through John's visions, of the state of the world in the last days. An incredibly powerful military, political, religious and economic superpower will wield international authority. It will be the tool of Satan in his final bid for mastery over God.

Meanwhile, let us remember the true Church will also be here on earth. Some of its members will have overcome and grown spiritually. God will protect them from the great tribulation (Satan's wrath) and all of the wrath of God (Rev. 3:10).

But some will not be developing godly character. God will be forced to expose them to persecution and death in order to make them spiritually perfect (Rev. 3:18).

God's people do not suffer martyrdom only because of spiritual laxness. For example, the two witnesses will be martyred to fulfill God's purpose. The apostle Peter was crucified to “glorify God” (John 21:19). In any case, the martyred are “slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6:9). Their martyrdom is a powerful testimony for God.

The nations will not be without a witness during this time. They will be educated about the true God and his way. The world will be told it is willingly following the devil's way of life and should repent. God will empower the two witnesses to preach that gospel for 3½ years during the worst of the end times. Then comes the seventh trumpet—composed of seven last plagues—and God's intervention in human society.

Revelation now carries us to the end of thousands of years of human history. God has allowed an unseen power, Satan the devil, to influence a world willing to be deceived (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; Rev. 12:9). That epoch is almost over. God is about to completely shatter the tool of Satan—the political and religious power that has dominated the world.

We have come to the seventh and final trumpet. John writes: “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete” (Rev. 15:1).

Seven Last Plagues Heralded

Several introductory themes come before Revelation’s description of God’s final assault on Satan’s human forces. These are found in the 14th and 15th chapters. Here are some quick sketches of John’s visions recorded in these chapters:

- The 144,000 represent those who are obedient and faithful to God. They “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:1-5). This group is granted eternal life. They take part in Christ’s earthly rule.

- An angel has “the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come’” (Rev. 14:6-7). The angel announces that the system of evil, called “Babylon the great” is about to fall (verse 8).

- Another angel pronounces swift punishment on anyone who worships the beast and its image or has its mark. Those who continue to follow and trust the false system “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone [sulfur] in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev. 14:9-11).

- John then sees “One like the Son of Man” coming on a cloud (Rev. 14:14). This is an obvious reference to the returning Christ. He thrusts his sickle in the ground and begins to reap the harvest of the earth. This symbolizes his wrath and coming rule over the nations.

Chapter 14 briefly moves beyond the storm on earth. It *looks ahead* to the time when God’s servants—pictured by the 144,000 on Mount Zion with Christ—will inherit their eternal reward. But, then, the reader is brought back to the tumult and commotion on

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Seventh Trumpet Sounds

the earth. God has warned the world for the last time. Whoever has the mark of the beast—whoever is part of this world’s corrupt system—is about to suffer the final wrath of God. The seven last plagues are about to ravage planet earth.

The 15th chapter of Revelation is a prologue to the seven last plagues. John writes, “Out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues” (Rev. 15:6). One of the four living creatures gives them seven bowls. These contain the seven last plagues. A voice commands the angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth” (Rev. 16:1).

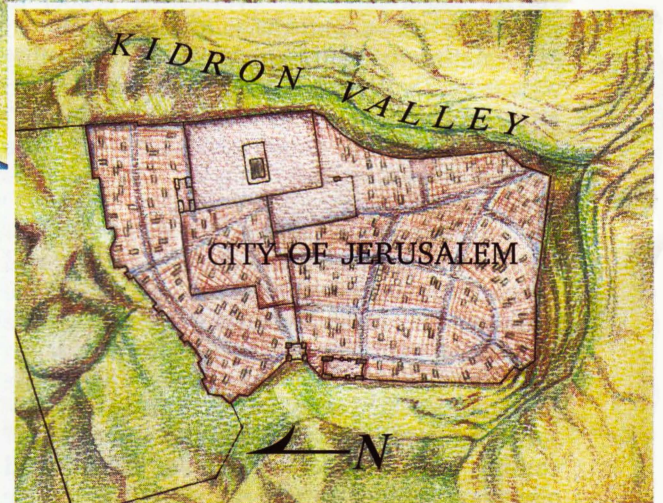
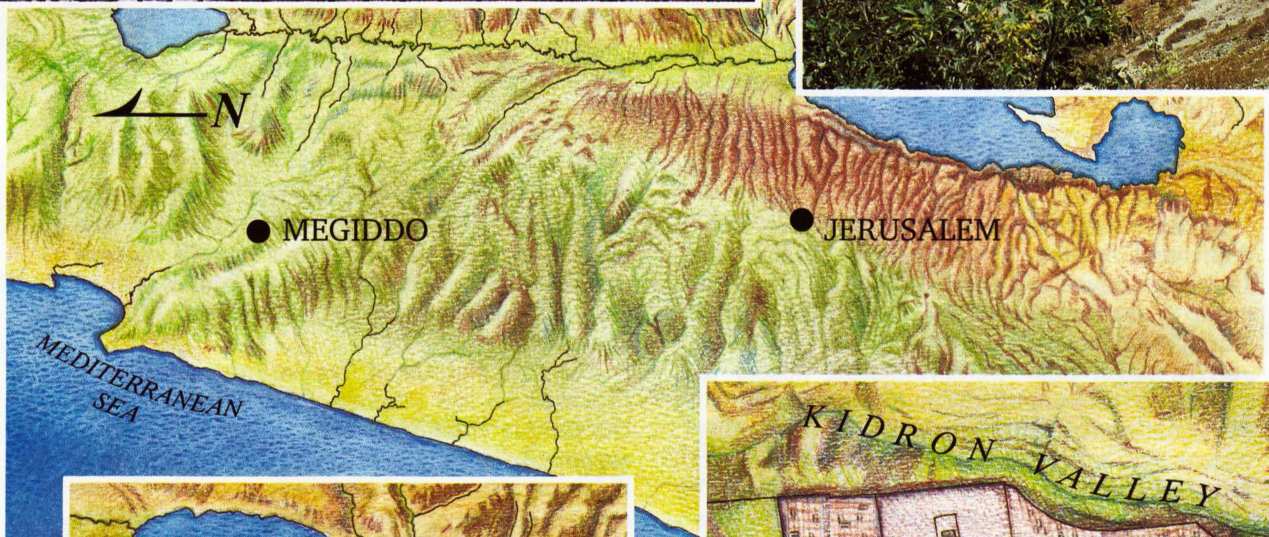
Plagues Poured Out

The entire 16th chapter describes a horrendous series of natural catastrophes from the hand of God. These seven last plagues comprise the seventh and last trumpet (Rev. 16:1-21). They recall the plagues which God poured out on Egypt, virtually destroying the nation (Exodus 10:7). The end time plagues or afflictions fall on those who refuse to acknowledge the government of God.

- **FIRST PLAGUE.** A deadly pestilence strikes those who have the beast’s mark (16:2).

- **SECOND PLAGUE.** The sea turns into blood and kills every living creature in it (16:3).

- **THIRD PLAGUE.** The rivers and springs of water become blood (16:4-7). God’s judgments, though fearsome, are said to be “true and righteous.”



THE VALLEY OF DECISION—In the “last days” vast armies will gather near Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley and move south to fight against the Messiah at Jerusalem. In the “valley of decision,” outside the Old City, these armies will be obliterated by the returning Christ.

- **FOURTH PLAGUE.** Increased solar radiation horribly scorches humans (16:8-9).
- **FIFTH PLAGUE.** Total darkness covers the headquarters of the world-ruling “beast power” (16:10-11).
- **SIXTH PLAGUE.** The waters of the Euphrates River dry up so “that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (16:12-16).
- **SEVENTH PLAGUE.** An immense earthquake shakes the planet. It is “such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth” (16:18—see also Isaiah 2:12-19; 13:6-13; 24:1-20 for further details about this series of planetary upheavals).

As the earth convulses, islands disappear beneath the sea. Mountains are leveled. A great hail shatters everything in its path. The cities of the nations are flattened into rubble (Rev. 16:19-21). The world’s political and economic system is in total ruin.

Trumpet and Seven Last Plagues Compared

The reader will notice some similarity between the seven last plagues of Revelation 16 and the first six trumpet plagues of Revelation eight and nine. Some assume that Revelation 16 is just a restatement of what happened earlier.

The parallels between this final series of judgments (the seven last plagues) and the trumpet plagues of chapters eight and nine are there, of course. In both series, the first four destructions are visited upon the earth, sea, inland waters and heavenly bodies respectively.

There are, however, distinct differences between the two series. For example in the trumpet plague series, only one third of the affected part is destroyed. No such qualifier is used for the seven last plagues. The destruction in the sea is complete, for example, as a result of the second plague (Rev. 16:3).

The fifth trumpet plague is the vision of the locust armies emerging from the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1-11). However, the fifth of the seven last plagues shows darkness and painful affliction enveloping the seat of the beast power (Rev. 16:10-11).

Apparently, the trumpet plagues of Revelation eight are meant as a *warning*. They are a sample of the destruction yet to fall on those who refuse to repent of their evil deeds. This final destruction is pictured by the seven last plagues of the 16th chapter.

Armies Gather to Fight the Messiah

Revelation now introduces the reader to “Armageddon.” The word *Armageddon* is found only once in the Bible, here in Revelation 16:16. “And they [the demons] gathered them [the kings and their armies] together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”

Armageddon refers to the “hill of Megiddo.” It lies in the modern state of Israel, about 55 miles (90 kilometers) north of Jerusalem, and about 15 miles (25 kilometers) inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Megiddo itself is a huge mound with a commanding view of the long and fertile valley of Jezreel.

Armageddon will merely be the staging area for these immense armies. The Bible does *not* say that a “battle” of Armageddon is to be fought. The actual war will be fought farther south, in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Today, it’s called the Kidron Valley. This valley borders Jerusalem on the east. (Read Joel 3:1-2, 9-14 and Zechariah 14:1-15 for details of this climactic battle.)

In the biblical account, evil spirits controlling “the beast” and “the false prophet” go out to deceive the nations (Rev. 16:13). They influence “the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (verse 14).

Contingents of armies from all nations will converge on Jerusalem to fight the returning Christ. Might they consider the Messiah and the resurrected saints to be invading aliens? Perhaps they will assume an army with staggering and yet unknown technologies of flight and military might is poised to strike.

The confrontation between these armies advancing on Jerusalem and the Messiah will result in “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). The result of the battle will be inevitable. The supernatural Christ will lead his army of resurrected saints to total victory (Zechariah 14:1-15).

These harrowing times occur during the “wrath of God” as the Messiah puts down all opposition to his rule. Christ must replace the world’s political, social, religious and economic systems so that he can begin all things new (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-5).

Standing in the way of these remarkable changes is “Babylon the great”—a symbol for all that is evil in the present world. The book of Revelation now takes up the story of how this Babylonish system is exterminated.

CHAPTER NINE

The Fall of Babylon the Great

In the 17th chapter of Revelation, John records his vision of another hideous and distorted creature. “I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (Rev. 17:3).

The woman has a name on her forehead: “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). She is pictured as being drunk with the blood of the saints. That is, she persecutes and martyrs the people of God.

Chapters 17 and 18 portray the judgment of God upon this great madam—the *mother* of harlots—and the “scarlet beast” she rides or controls. In Old Testament prophecy, the image of a harlot is commonly used as a metaphor for godless religious worship (Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16:15). Isaiah mocks Babylon by calling her “virgin daughter” (Isaiah 47:1).

The “Scarlet Beast”

What is this strange “scarlet beast” with seven heads and 10 horns, carrying the harlot woman?

This beast ridden by the woman exists through time right to the second coming of Christ. The 10 horns of the beast arise in the last days. They represent 10 rulers who receive political power at the very end of this world’s civilization and just before the Messiah’s intervention.

The Apocalypse tells us these horns fight the returning Christ. John writes: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings *with the beast*. . . . These will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them” (Rev. 17:12-14, italics added).

To what, then, do the “seven heads” refer (Rev. 17:3)? John tells us in verse nine: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” These heads correspond to seven successive kings, controlling powerful empires (verse 10). These, in turn, are “ridden” or manipulated by the “woman.” The final “head,” king or empire has not yet appeared. “When he comes, he must continue a short time” (verse 10).

The 10 horns or kings pool their power to form one empire under a super-dictator, the final or seventh head of “the beast.” They “have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (Rev. 17:12). That is, the seventh head is *also* called “the beast” just as the whole system is like a beast.

A Different Beast

We must be careful not to confuse the seven heads and 10 horns of the beast in Revelation 17 with another beast having the same number of heads and horns. It is described in Revelation 13.

The beast in Revelation 13 is depicted in the following terms: “[It] was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion” (Rev. 13:2). Notice the animals mentioned—a leopard, a bear and a lion.

Daniel, the seventh chapter, also describes this same beast. The prophet Daniel saw a vision of four beasts rising from the sea. “The first was like a lion . . . a second, like a bear.” Then, he said, “After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard. . . . The beast also had *four heads*.” Still later, Daniel said, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast. . . . It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns” (Daniel 7:4-7, italics added).

The reader should note that the four beasts in Daniel 7 had *seven heads* because the leopard alone had four heads. Daniel tells us these four successive powers would govern from his time down to the coming of the ruling Messiah

(Daniel 2:37-44). According to Daniel the fourth beast or kingdom would have 10 successive “horns,” “kings” or kingdoms.

Daniel wrote, “The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth. . . . The 10 horns are

other than the “woman” of Revelation 17. The returning Christ destroys this woman’s power along with that of the final “horn” or revival (Daniel 7:23, 26-27).

This “woman” is identified as “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18).

Revelation refers to her as a harlot who sits in control of “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Rev. 17:15). She has authority to coerce and compel.

“Babylon’s” Worldwide Influence

The harlot woman is the force *behind* the throne. The “beast,” of course, wields the real power. It represents the political-military presence. But the woman *rides the beast*. She directs its activities, molds and shapes its ruling philosophy and ideals. Thus, she stands for false religious ideology and philosophical dogma.

What John is depicting, then, is a powerful organization that promulgates and enforces certain religious, social and political laws. It is the moving spirit behind human society. But it is, as Revelation has shown us, a depraved system. For this reason, the Messiah comes to crush it.

John hears an angel shout: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a

habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit” (Rev. 18:2). The city called “Babylon” stands as the symbol for this anti-God system that has swayed and oppressed the human race.

To the citizens of the world, however, the system *does not appear* evil at all. On the contrary, it seems to offer mankind that which it has always sought. For example, it brings great economic prosperity to the nations of the world. Most of chapter 18 is taken up with this theme.

MATCHING UP THE ‘BEASTS’ OF PROPHECY				
HISTORICAL MEANING	FOUR BEASTS (DANIEL 7)		BEAST FROM THE SEA (REV. 13)	SCARLET BEAST (REV. 17)
BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (625-539 B.C.)	BEAST ONE (LION) (v. 4)	THE FOUR BEASTS HAVE SEVEN HEADS STANDING FOR FOUR WORLD RULING KINGDOMS (DANIEL 7:17, 22)	BEAST HAS SEVEN HEADS (LEOPARD BODY, BEAR FEET AND LION MOUTH) (v. 2)	SCARLET BEAST HAS 7 HEADS . . . (v. 3)
PERSIAN EMPIRE (558-330 B.C.)	BEAST TWO (BEAR) (v. 5)			
GREEK EMPIRE (DIVIDES INTO FOUR PARTS AFTER ALEXANDER’S DEATH)	BEAST THREE (LEOPARD WITH FOUR HEADS) (v. 6)			
ROMAN EMPIRE (31 B.C.-A.D. 476) AND ITS ‘HOLY’ REVIVALS THROUGH HISTORY UNTIL THE MESSIAH COMES	BEAST FOUR (IRON) HAS . . .			
	. . . TEN HORNS (v. 7)		THE BEAST’S 7TH HEAD HAS . . .	
	1st HORN	SUBDUED BY “LITTLE HORN” OF DANIEL 7:20, 24 OR SCARLET WOMAN OF REV. 17:9	1st HORN	
	2nd HORN		2nd HORN	
	3rd HORN		3rd HORN	
	4th HORN		4th HORN	1st HEAD
	5th HORN		5th HORN	2nd HEAD
	6th HORN		6th HORN	3rd HEAD
	7th HORN		7th HORN	4th HEAD
	8th HORN		8th HORN	5th HEAD
	9th HORN		9th HORN	6th HEAD
	10th HORN		10th HORN	7th HEAD
	FOURTH KINGDOM’S LAST HORN DESTROYED AT CHRIST’S RETURN (v. 24-27)		. . . AND TEN HORNS OR TEN KINGS WHO RECEIVE POWER WITH THE BEAST FOR A SHORT TIME, FIGHT WITH THE “LAMB” AND ARE DESTROYED AT CHRIST’S RETURN. (v. 12-14)	

10 kings who shall arise from this kingdom” (Daniel 7:23-24). These 10 horns of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 coincide with the 10 horns of the fourth beast in Revelation 13:1-10. Three of these are subdued by a “little horn” (Daniel 7:20-25). The remaining seven horns are pictured as the seven heads in Revelation 17, over which the woman sat.

By reading the verses in Daniel 7, it’s clear that the prophet is also talking about a religious authority who “shall persecute the saints of the Most High” (verse 25). This is none

"Babylon the great" is seen as an economic market of great breadth and power. That is the source of its wealth, a prerequisite for world domination. Political and military power, of course, is dependent on economic power. Without money, it's not possible to buy guns or wield influence.

An Economic Superpower

Revelation shows us that Babylon is fabulously wealthy. The list of imports and exports that this power controls is impressive (Rev. 18:11-15). The merchandise index here is similar to the one found in Ezekiel 27:12-24. There the Phoenician city of Tyre is the metaphor for a power that controls world trade.

Babylon makes businessmen rich and ushers in general prosperity. John writes: "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore" (Rev. 18:11). They cry, "Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing" (Rev. 18:16-17).

The traders throw dust on their heads, crying out, "Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth!" (Rev. 18:19).

That is one reason the nations will be tricked into fighting the returning Christ. They will have been deceived into thinking they had a good thing going. Babylon the great had brought international trade and prosperity, perhaps a false sense of peace. However, God judges the system and destroys it. "For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication" (Rev. 19:2).

After John sees Babylon destroyed in vision, he hears an angel announcing a royal victory celebration hosted by the Lamb. It solemnizes God's establishment of his universal reign on earth (Rev. 19:6). Revelation paints the festival as a great wedding party in which Christ (the Lamb) and his faithful followers (the Bride) consecrate their union (Rev. 19:7-9). The symbol—the bride of Christ—represents God's Church. The apostle Paul explained that in the spiritual realm the union between husband and wife illustrates the relationship of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:23-24, 31-32).

The angel calls the animal world and birds

of prey to a separate supper feast (Rev. 19:17). The beasts are to dine on the bodies of all those who opposed the returning Christ (Rev. 19:18). This feast stands in grim contrast to the joyous marriage banquet of the Lamb.

The Event of the Ages

The book of Revelation now describes one of the most important events of human history. It is the coming of the Messiah or Christ to reinstate God's government on this earth and to reward God's faithful people.

Revelation announced this singular event earlier: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

Once again, the second coming is proclaimed in a vision and recorded in Revelation 19. In this vision, John sees the returning Christ in sharp focus. He is symbolically riding on a white horse, and making war against Satan's political and religious system. John writes, "I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Rev. 19:19).

Christ destroys the armies and captures "the beast" and the false prophet alive. Both of them are thrown into a "lake of fire" and quickly burned up (Rev. 19:20). (See II Thesalonians 1:7-10 which shows Jesus as coming from heaven in flaming fire to obliterate the wicked.)

Satan Bound For 1,000 Years

One final act must be carried out before Christ officially becomes "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16) over the remaining inhabitants of the earth. In vision, John sees an angel having a key to the "bottomless pit." He is carrying a massive chain.

John writes, "He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit" so that Satan "should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:1-3).

At last, God has removed the destructive spirit of Satan from the affairs of man. The government of God—bringing peace, prosperity and spiritual health—comes to the human race. Now the wonderful world tomorrow can begin.

The 20th chapter of Revelation sketches a brief outline of God's plan for human beings. It briefly answers the question people have asked through the centuries, "What happens to the dead who lived and died through the millennia?"

"Righteous Dead" Reign With Christ

Revelation 20 portrays "the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus" (verse 4). This is symbolic of the "saints." These are the virtuous individuals willing to obey God at any cost. They often suffer extreme persecution and sometimes death for their beliefs. They comprise the Church or spiritual nation of God (I Peter 2:9).

Revelation 20:1-6 pictures the reward of the saints. They are seen ruling with the Messiah for 1,000 years or a millennium of time. John sees thrones for the saints "and judgment was committed to them" (Rev. 20:4). They are said to be "blessed and holy." The saints are now immortal—"over such the second death has no power." The Apocalypse tells us they will be "priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

To be a priest, one must be a priest to someone. To "reign" presupposes one must have subjects over which to rule or teach. To "have judgment" means these individuals must make decisions about situations that affect others. Where and over whom do the saints carry out these functions?

We have seen that Christ is coming to earth to govern the nations and kingdoms of the world (Zechariah 14:9). The saints made immortal will rule with him (Daniel 7:22, 27). The Hebrew prophets speak of this as the time when the Messiah rules the inhabitants of earth with justice, mercy and truth. (See Isaiah 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 35:1-10 for details.)

The conclusion is that the immortal saints will reign on earth for 1,000 years. They will govern and guide humans to whom salvation is universally made available.

A Satanic Interlude

God's government will rule this earth for 1,000 years. The sorrows of this world today will soon seem like a dead and distant past. Then God will allow Satan to be loosed. Once again, the devil will be permitted to delude humans into rejecting God.

The devil "will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog

CHAPTER TEN

The Millennium and Beyond

and Magog, to gather them together to battle whose number is as the sand of the sea" (Rev. 20:8). The expression, "four corners of the earth," points out the universal nature of this deception (Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 7:2; Rev. 7:1).

It would take a little time for Satan to do his evil work of persuasion. Revelation does not explain either how he accomplishes his nefarious task or the exact circumstances of this worldwide rebellion.

Revelation does tell us that Satan will collect a vast army called "Gog and Magog." They symbolize the population centers of the world that unite for an assault on God's government. They eventually sweep across the earth and surround "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev. 20:9). This would refer to Jerusalem and God's people living at peace in the Holy Land.

Satan fails again. His human soldiers who failed to grasp the meaning of salvation, are vaporized. The Apocalypse tells us, "Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them" (Rev. 20:9). The devil's gathering of "Gog and Magog" is an eerie replay—1,000 years later—of the final battles at Christ's return.

The original war during the Messiah's coming is described in Zechariah 14. Christ then exterminated the vast army besieging Jerusalem. Satan's human army is likewise destroyed at the end of the Millennium. Immediately after God annihilates this enormous

horde, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10). From this point on, Satan and his demons are forever isolated from God and the resurrected saints.

The Dead Come to Life

Satan’s last rebellion also sets the stage for one of the great dramatic events of the ages—“The Great White Throne Judgment.” God’s ultimate aim and design for the majority of the human race is about to be fulfilled.

John writes: “I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it. . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev. 20:11-12).

What could this strange vision mean?

John here sees a symbolic picture that tells us what happens to the billions who have died throughout the ages without having a knowledge of salvation.

These are individuals not counted among the righteous dead at the start of the Millennium. Revelation here introduces us to the rest of the dead who lived throughout human history—those who died without ever having been a part of God’s spiritual people.

John’s vision represents them as having been resurrected to *mortal* life. These individuals are to live again and be judged by their works. Things written in “the books” are the basis of judging the spiritual works of this great standing host. Their final judgment is based on the way of life revealed in “the books” of the Bible.

If these individuals must yet be judged, they cannot be immortal beings nor can they be “lost” spiritually. They must be those resurrected to *physical life* and living through a period or time of judgment or judging. That is, they now have—for the first time—the opportunity to demonstrate through another lifetime that they, indeed, will trust and follow their God.

They, too, can have their names written in that other book—the book of life. It is a register of all the names of the righteous (Rev. 3:5; Hebrews 12:23). Once all those who ever lived have had their opportunity for salvation, God’s present phase of his plan is over.

There will have been some individuals who

refused to obey God. The spirit of God had enlightened their minds but they sinned *willfully*, nonetheless (Hebrews 6:4-6). Their choice was to follow Satan’s way. They cannot be given life everlasting.

The last two verses of Revelation 20 summarize their fate. John sees in vision all the dead in the sea, in death and hades (the grave) coming forth to life. “And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev. 20:13). Their end is both sad and horrifying: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (verses 14-15).

Such antagonistic humans are burnt up and cease to exist (Malachi 4:3). Jesus said: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew

God’s people—his
faithful ser-
vants—made immortal,
will rule with Christ for
1,000 years on earth.

10:28). This “hell” is the fire of Revelation 20:15—the soul-destroying lake of fire.

God’s purpose with man is now complete. The lake of fire that destroys the unrepentant wicked sweeps around the earth. The apostle Peter wrote, “The heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:7).

Peter tells us that this fiery destruction will purge the earth of man’s works: “The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (verse 10).

But that isn’t the end of the story of Revelation. We must now consider something called the “new heavens and new earth.” That’s the subject of the next chapter.

Perhaps the most enigmatic parts of Revelation are the book's last two chapters. These describe "the new heavens and new earth," "the new Jerusalem" and "the tree of life." When do the "new heavens and new earth" appear? In Revelation, they appear in time order *after* the Millennium and Great White Throne Judgment described in Chapter 20.

The term "new heavens and new earth" is found, as we saw, in II Peter. Speaking of spirit-begotten Christians—those who will be part of the Bride of Christ—Peter says, "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (II Peter 3:13). The present earth and heavens are said to be "reserved for fire until the day of judgment" (verse 7).

In II Peter, the new heavens and earth appear after "the elements melt with fervent heat" (verse 10). It is a time after "both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (verse 10). This seems to refer to the lake of fire mentioned in Revelation 20:14-15. In time order, then, the "new heavens and the new earth" would appear after the 1,000-year-period and the final judgment.

The term "new heavens and new earth" is found in only two other places in the Bible, in Isaiah 65:17-18 and 66:22. In the 66th chapter, the term is used as an example of that which endures forever, without reference to time. "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I *will make* shall remain before Me," says the Lord, "So shall your descendants and your name remain" (Isaiah 66:22, italics added). If anything, this passage would indicate the new heavens and new earth come after the Millennium, the latter being then in progress as described in verses 12 through 24.

In Isaiah 65:17 we again read of this time. God is pictured as saying: "I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice *forever* in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (italics added). The new heavens and new earth are again used as a model of permanency.

The New Jerusalem

There is also the "new Jerusalem" to consider. Interpreters have held differing opinions as to what it is. Some say this new Jerusalem is a real city. Others claim it is only an allegory

CHAPTER ELEVEN

New Heavens and New Earth

of the perfected and eternal Church. The Bible, no doubt, contains elements of both.

For example, we read, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*" (Rev. 21:2, italics added). Similarly, John hears an angel speak of the new Jerusalem in these terms: "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9). The Bride of Christ can be the saints made perfect. It is so called in Revelation 19:7-9. Here the new Jerusalem does appear as a type of the perfected Church.

The Church is called the Jerusalem "above [that] is free" (Galatians 4:26). True Christians are told, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22). The "builder and maker" of this city is God (Hebrews 11:10).

The new Jerusalem as an analogy of the immortal saints would stand in stark contrast to that of the deceived people in today's system, Babylon the great. Babylon is the wicked harlot and the new Jerusalem is the holy city of God. Babylon is full of evil (Rev. 18:2); the new Jerusalem is pure (Rev. 21:27). Commentator G.R. Beasley-Murray has written that Revelation "may be characterized as *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the sub-title, *The Harlot and the Bride*."

As an allegory, the new Jerusalem is utopia personified. It represents God's kingdom and rule, one in which happiness and abundance

exist. During this era of perfection the pain of this present life is ended. Revelation tells us: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

It is a time and place in which God’s way is supreme. “There shall by no means enter it [the holy city] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” (Rev. 21:27). God’s laws permeate all creation. The new Jerusalem represents an ideal new world order under God’s direction.

A Literal City?

However, the Bible presents the vision of new Jerusalem as though it is a literal city. New Jerusalem as an actual city would be an incredible place, indeed. The measurement of the city, as given in the vision, would make new Jerusalem about 1,400 miles (2,100 kilometers) long in each direction (Rev. 21:16)! The exterior wall is 144 cubits or about 200 to 300 feet high (verse 17). It is a city, not a building, and its dimensions are *equal* or proportional.

Here are some of its characteristics, given in Revelation, chapter 21:

- The new Jerusalem comes to a new earth, for the old one has passed away (21:1-2).
- The city has a great and high wall with 12 gates. These contain the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (21:12).
- The city has 12 foundations with the names of the 12 apostles (21:14).
- Precious stones such as sapphires, topaz and emeralds adorn the city (21:18-20).
- Each city gate is formed from an incredibly huge pearl (21:21).
- The city streets are made of pure gold, giving them a transparent appearance (21:21).
- There is no temple in the city, because God and the Lamb are its temple (21:22).
- There is no night in the city. The city needs no sun or moon. God and the Lamb illuminate it (21:23, 25; see also 22:5).
- Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life can enter the city (21:27).

Some have wondered *when* the new Jerusalem itself appears on earth, especially if it is to be an actual city. The Apocalypse tells us it arrives after the first heaven and earth have passed away (Rev. 21:1-2).

Notice that God himself is present in this

city (Rev. 21:3). John hears God say, “I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). The new Jerusalem, therefore, represents God’s headquarters for a great work which he has for his resurrected saints, once his purpose with mankind is completed.

The River and Tree of Life

The first five verses of Revelation 22 emphasize a special part of the new Jerusalem. John is shown a “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

Along the river, John sees the “tree of life” whose leaves are “for the healing of the nations” (verse 2). In the final chapter, Jesus tells his servants, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the *right to the tree of life*, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14, italics added).

There are similarities between the healing water of life that John saw and the millennial vision the prophet Ezekiel experienced. Ezekiel wrote: “In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like *the structure of a city* . . .” (Ezekiel 40:2, italics added).

In his vision, Ezekiel saw water flowing from under the threshold of the temple. Along the river, which healed everything it touched, were many trees “of life”—similar to John’s vision (see Ezekiel 47:1-12).

The “tree of life” symbol is first introduced in the early chapters of Genesis. In chapter three, verse 24, mankind was barred from access to the tree of life—a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life. Adam had sinned, disobeyed his maker and had spiritually disqualified himself. Humans have continued to sin and remain barred from access to the “tree of life.”

In Revelation, we see salvation offered to all those willing to keep God’s commandments. The way to the “tree of life” is no longer blocked to the obedient. Repentant humans from all nations are able to enter into a relationship of love and obedience with God. That is the clear teaching of Revelation 22. Thus, Revelation comes full circle and heals the breach between man and God which started with Adam shortly after creation. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, reverses humanity’s walk toward death, begun in Genesis.

FROM THE 'LAST DAYS' UNTIL THE 'NEW EARTH'

Revelation is the only book of the Bible that summarizes important events of God's plan that have taken place on this earth for the last 2,000 years. It also outlines future aspects of God's purpose for the human race. Using the Apocalypse or book of Revelation as a skeletal outline, we can see how scriptures in other parts of the Bible fill in details concerning many of the events yet to take place. A few such scriptures are given for each event listed below.

EVENTS OF THE 'LAST DAYS' TO CHRIST'S RETURN

The Suffering of the 'Great Tribulation'

Revelation 6:9-11
Jeremiah 30:5-7
Ezekiel 5:1-17
Daniel 7:21; 12:1
Matthew 24:21-22

Heavenly Signs and Cosmic Disturbances

Revelation 6:12-17
Joel 2:30-31
Matthew 24:29-39

Seventh Trumpet and the Return of Christ

Revelation 11:15-17
Isaiah 27:13
Daniel 7:13-14
Zechariah 14:3-4
II Thessalonians 2:8

Seventh Trumpet and the Resurrection of the Saints

Revelation 11:18
Matthew 24:31
I Corinthians 15:50-51
I Thessalonians 4:15-17
Jude 14

The Messiah and Armies of the Nations Gather to Fight

Revelation 16:12-16
Psalm 2:1-6,9
Jeremiah 25:30-33
Zechariah 12:9; 14:1-3

Man's Civilization, 'Babylon the Great,' Destroyed

Revelation 16:17-21
Isaiah 13:17-21; 24:1-23;
28:16-22; 47:1-15
Jeremiah 51:1-58
Daniel 2:44

THE MILLENNIUM AND BEYOND

Messiah's 1,000 Year Reign, Satan Chained

Revelation 20:1-5
Psalms 93, 97, 98, 99
Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:6-9;
35:1-10
Micah 4:1-5

Saints of God Rule World with Christ

Revelation 20:6
Psalm 149:4-9
Daniel 7:22, 27
Matthew 19:28
Luke 19:12-19

Satan Incites Rebellion, Cast into Lake of Fire

Revelation 20:7-10
Jude 13
II Peter 2:4

The Judgment of the 'Great White Throne'

Revelation 20:11-13
Ezekiel 37:1-14; 16:2,
53-55
Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42
Luke 10:12-14

Unrepentant Dead Rise in Resurrection of Condemnation

Revelation 20:13-14
Daniel 12:2
Luke 16:23
John 5:29
II Peter 3:7-12

Glorious 'New Heavens and New Earth'

Revelation 21:1-5
Isaiah 65:17-18
II Peter 3:13

CHAPTER TWELVE

Conclusion to the Apocalypse

The conclusion or epilogue of Revelation begins in verse six of the last chapter. John writes, "Then he [the angel] said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 22:6).

John attests that he personally heard and saw all the things he wrote down in Revelation (verse 8). He stakes his authority as God's apostle on the truthfulness of what we read in the Apocalypse. The conclusion stresses two important themes.

First, the book is a genuine, legitimate and truthful account of what is to happen. It is not a humanly devised book. The rulers of the universe, God and Jesus Christ, have inspired its contents.

Second, the pivotal "end time" prophecies of Revelation are about to occur. They should be considered "imminent" or near by each reader in his or her lifetime. Why so?

By the time Revelation was written, Jesus had lived a perfect life and had paid for the sins of humanity with his death. He had been resurrected from the dead and had started his Church. The pivotal events of human history were accomplished facts. God's plan had, in a sense, turned toward home. The "time of the end" was—at least from God's vantage point—just around the corner for each passing generation awaiting the resurrection (II Peter 3:8).

Opening Up the Future

The nearness of the end time is underscored by this command to John: "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (Rev. 22:10). Daniel had been given the opposite instruction: "Shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4).

Daniel personally sought to understand what the prophecies given to him meant. He was told, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Daniel 12:9). That's because not even "the wise" would understand until the "time of the end" (verse 10). The Apocalypse is the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. It is meant to enlighten his servants—"the wise"—so they can know what is to occur shortly on this earth (Rev. 1:1).

The book of Revelation speaks about the actual "end time" when the plan and purpose of God begins its final stage. In principle, however, its message is for people living in all ages. That's because "the end" can come at any time to a person, wherever and whenever he or she might live.

The third of all the Europeans who died in the Black Death of 1348-50, found "the end" had come upon them. Many even put it in these terms. They felt everyone was going to eventually die of disease, and that the end of the world was around the corner. Surely, God's servants living in those years must have eagerly looked to the hope given them in Revelation.

Want to Know More?

The Worldwide Church of God publishes a number of other booklets on prophecy. They are all free of charge and may be obtained by writing to our office nearest you. Addresses are listed on the inside front cover.

Introduction to Prophecy. The prophecies of the Bible have confused and confounded readers through the centuries. Can they be understood? Do they have relevance today? This booklet will give you the foundation you need for an understanding of the Bible's prophecies.

In a sense, we all find ourselves victims of “the end” in our own lifetime. Every human being faces “the end” of his own life. To one and all, the end is rarely more than 70, 80 or 90 years away from the day of birth.

Jesus—the real author of the book of Revelation—told a story that illustrated this important point. It concerned a certain wealthy man who lacked nothing. He had just harvested a great agricultural yield. So large was his crop output, he didn’t know where to store all he had garnered.

Jesus repeated the rich man’s words: “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

But God saw the rich man’s death was imminent. He said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus concluded: “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21, New International Version).

Revelation and the Reader

This rich man had not lived through the *literal* fulfillment of the end time of which Revelation speaks. Its symbolic effect had occurred to him, however. He lived and died without being rich toward God.

That’s why Jesus tells his own people—yes, and all who will listen in each age of human

existence—to be on guard. He says: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. . . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matthew 24:42, 44).

Revelation is meant to wake up God’s people to the trials that have plagued man throughout history—persecution, war, famine, disease and death. Unless God protects his own people, they too will fall victims to the world’s woes. Revelation’s special emphasis is to alert God’s people to the enormity of the final holocaust—of what is yet ahead.

Revelation’s intended audience is God’s “Church” or congregation—his spiritual na-

The book of Revelation contains an urgent message of repentance for people living in all ages.

tion (I Peter 2:9-10). That’s to whom the book is addressed and for whom it is meant. In the epilogue Jesus says: “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. . . . Surely I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:16, 20).

John uses such code words as “he who has an ear, let him hear” (Rev. 2:7) and “here is wisdom” (Rev. 13:18). Daniel was told the “wise” would understand. The wise are the saints of God. They are his people in every age of human history. Are *you*, the reader, among the wise?

What characterizes these wise “saints” or holy ones belonging to God? The Apocalypse tells us, “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Revelation offers vital information about how we may be protected from the tribulation and wrath yet to come on this world. It speaks to all those who desire to change their lives and bring their thoughts and actions into harmony with the Creator God of this universe.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

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