

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION OUTLINE

ETERNAL HOPE -----	1:1-20
LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES-----	2:1 - 3:22
OH WORSHIP THE KING -----	4:1-11
THE LION AND THE LAMB -----	5:1-14
THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE -----	6:1-17
THE DRAMATIC PAUSE -----	7:1-17
THE WRATH OF GOD -----	8:1-13
THE MESSENGER, THE MESSAGE, AND A MEAL -----	10:1-11
TWO WITNESSES AND ONE LAST TRUMPET -----	11:1-19
THE SEVEN SIGNS -----	12:1-17
THE ANTICHRIST AND THE FALSE PROPHET -----	13:1-18
THE PROTECTION AND POWER OF GOD -----	14:1-20
INTRODUCTION TO DESTRUCTION -----	15:1-8
THE SEVEN BOWLS -----	16:1-21
THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON -----	17:1-18
THE FUNERAL OF HUMANITY -----	18:1-24
WORSHIP AND WRATH -----	19:1-21
THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISES OF GOD -----	20:1-15
ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL -----	21:1-27
EDEN RESTORED -----	22:1-21

## INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

The word revelation means “unveiling,” or “uncovering.” This is a book that reveals how the personal righteousness and judgment of Jesus are going to be revealed in all of the fullness and power of God.

Understanding a symbolic book like this requires putting together whole sections of the Bible. You cannot read only selected verses alone. The meaning of Revelation comes from unfolding the entire book chapter by chapter. The message is God’s sovereignty over all.

## **AUTHOR**

Through the centuries there has been discussion about who is the author of this letter. The same thing is true with most New Testament books. The writer identifies himself as John (1:1). Some people have wondered if this means the apostle John. Many of the arguments on this topic focus on how the language is different from the other New Testament books written by the apostle (the Gospel of John and 1 John). There has been no convincing evidence that the author is someone else. Most conservative scholars accept John's authorship.

## **PURPOSE**

The church in the first century was suffering. Many of the original apostles had been martyred for the faith, and John had been arrested and placed in exile on the island of Patmos. The Christian church was suffering from much persecution. The immediate future seemed to have even worse difficulty. The first-century Christians needed spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical strength to stand firm in their trials.

The overall purpose of this letter is to encourage those Christians. They needed to know that the kingdom of God would overcome the kingdoms of the world, and that all those who oppose God and oppress God's children would be brought to justice.

## **OCCASION**

Since so many of the images in Revelation are often interpreted in relation to governments and political leaders, discussions about when the book was written focus on which emperor was ruling at the time. Many people suggest that Nero must have been ruling. But most suggest that John wrote during the time of Emperor Domitian, which would have placed the writing of this vision letter around AD 90—95. One of the biggest supports for this date is the fact that emperor worship—which is repeatedly shown in John's visions—was a much greater problem during Domitian's rule than during Nero's.

## **THEMES**

First, John's book reveals important aspects of the character and future work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Also, the eternity and sovereignty of God is a major theme. The idea that God is outside of time and sovereign over human history is encouraging, because we can know that He is above the things in the earth that drive us down. God is holding all things together, and therefore, no matter how much it looks like evil is winning, that is not the reality.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE BIBLE**

Revelation is the only book of prophecy in the New Testament. And it is the only book that focuses so heavily on the end times. It offers us a symbolic and full vision of the end of the age that is mentioned in places in the other New Testament writings.

## ETERNAL HOPE 1:1—20

Greeting and Introduction 1:1—8

The Revelation of Power 1:9—20

The book of Revelation is a type of literature called “apocalyptic” (a Greek word meaning “revelation”). It is written in the form of a letter. It opens with a greeting typical for a New Testament Epistle.

**Revelation 1:1 This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show his servants what must soon happen. And Jesus sent his angel to show it to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who has told everything he has seen. It is the word of God; it is the message from Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads the words of God’s message, and blessed are the people who hear this message and do what is written in it. The time is near when all of this will happen.**

John opens his letter with the truth of God’s power and eternal nature. This would have been an encouragement to his readers who were facing increasing persecution for their faith. The first-century Christians needed spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical stability to stand firm in their trials. They would have been strengthened by the knowledge that God has a plan, and no matter how much it looks like evil is winning, that is not the reality.

### GREETING AND INTRODUCTION

The first two verses of Revelation tell us three things:

- 1) The book is a revelation of Jesus Christ and His sovereign control of the universe.
- 2) John is the one who received this revelation.
- 3) The letter is an eyewitness report.

**Verse 3** is beatitude (like the declarations of blessedness pronounced by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount). In it John claims this book is a prophecy to be heard and obeyed. The word *prophecy* here does not mean a prediction of the future, though much of Revelation has to do with future events. Instead, it is prophecy in the sense that it is God’s truth communicated to the people on earth.

**Revelation 1:4 From John. To the seven churches in Asia: Grace and peace to you from the One who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful witness, the first among those raised from the dead. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He is the One who loves us, who made us free from our sins with the blood of his death. <sup>6</sup> He made us to be a kingdom of priests who serve God his Father. To Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever! Amen. <sup>7</sup> Look, Jesus is coming with the clouds, and everyone will see him, even those who stabbed him. And all peoples of the earth will cry loudly because of him. Yes, this will happen! Amen.**

**Verse 4** begins a section of letters to seven churches in Asia. These seven churches are all located in the western part of what we know today as Turkey. They all faced difficult circumstances and

struggled with a variety of issues. Though these letters address the specific situations of each church, all together they offer a wealth of application for the church at large today.

Letters in the first century typically had a greeting that identified the sender and the addressees. The greeting in Revelation is what theologians call a Trinitarian greeting. It starts with a description of the Father, the supreme sovereign Lord of the entire world, past, present, and future (1:4). The seven Spirits before His throne represent the Holy Spirit (1:4). And at the first part of **verse 5**, we have a threefold description of Jesus:

- 1) *The faithful witness.* Jesus was faithful in the past to carry out God's plan of redemption, and He will be faithful in the future by bringing about the plan of God for the completion of the ages.
- 2) *The first among those raised from the dead.* Because Jesus was faithful to the plan of God, God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the ultimate in hope for the believer, because all those who place their faith in Jesus can be assured of rising from the dead as well.
- 3) *The ruler of the kings of the earth.* Even though John's readers were dealing with cruel rulers, and it would seem as if these rulers were in ultimate control, Jesus has supreme control and the earth is under His rule.

At the end of **verse 5** and the beginning of **verse 6**, John states two things about Jesus:

First, He loves us and releases us from our sins by His blood. Next, He allows each true believer to be a part of the kingdom of God, and thus to be a priest to God the Father. Because of Jesus, there is no longer need for any other human mediators to connect us to God. Therefore, all believers are the object of Jesus' love, released from sin, a part of the kingdom of God, and able to pursue God directly through Jesus Christ. That is why John offers praise in the form of a doxology (a kind of hymn, or words that give praise to God) at the end of **verse 6**.

As a conclusion to the work of Jesus, John finally states that this same Jesus who loves us, releases us, includes us in the kingdom, and makes us able to serve God will also come again (1:7). Notice that at the return of Jesus the people will mourn (a reference to Zechariah 12:10). They will be mourning the judgment that is coming as a result of their sin.

**Revelation 1:8 The Lord God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega. I am the One who is and was and is coming. I am the Almighty."**

There are several titles given to God in **verse 8**, and each conveys the depth and the strength of God:

- 1) *Alpha and Omega:* This statement refers to the eternal and unchanging nature of God. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and omega is the last. This means that God lives in an eternal state.
- 2) *Who is and was, and is coming:* God, although living outside of time, still dwells in time and therefore simultaneously interacts with those living in the present, those in the past, and those in the future.

- 3) *The Almighty*. This refers to the fact that God has His hand on everything and, therefore, is able to completely rule the world.

John's readers can take hope in these truths—God is the One who secures us in time and space because He is eternally secure in heaven.

## THE REVELATION OF POWER

**Revelation 1:9 I, John, am your brother. All of us share with Christ in suffering, in the kingdom, and in patience to continue. I was on the island of Patmos, because I had preached the word of God and the message about Jesus.**

In **verse 9**, John reveals that he is writing from the island of Patmos, a place to which criminals were deported. John's crime was proclaiming the Word of God. He writes that every believer partakes of the following:

- 1) *Suffering*—the trials that come when a person seeks to follow God.
- 2) *Kingdom*—the spiritual world that one experiences in part on earth and then experiences fully upon death.
- 3) *Patience to continue*—the ability to keep on going in the trials that come along with following Jesus.

**Revelation 1:10-11 On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. <sup>11</sup> The voice said, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."**

Some people say that the Lord's Day (1:10) is a figurative statement referring to the final judgment day. More likely it is simply referring to the day that belongs to the Lord – every day! So here, John is caught up in the spiritual world celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

It is important to interpret John's letter of Revelation as apocalyptic literature, a type of Jewish literature that often used symbolic images to describe spiritual as well as historical realities. This vision of John is not necessarily meant to be a literal description of people and events (the Antichrist, for example, will not literally look like a "beast"), but instead it is meant to be a figurative description that shows the character of Jesus and the nature of the salvation He is providing. This metaphorical language happens in other passages of scripture as well, such as when Jesus calls Himself bread or a gate (see John 6:35; 10:7). We are not supposed to think that Jesus actually looked like a piece of bread, but are instead supposed to understand aspects of His character and mission from the illustration. That's how it is with Revelation.

In **verse 10**, John says he was "in the Spirit." This may mean a kind of trance, but it certainly describes a state of mind in which John was open to the Spirit's leading through visions. In this open and spiritual state of mind, John hears a voice that sounds like a trumpet. This voice tells him to write down his vision and send it to the seven churches listed in **verse 11**.

**Revelation 1:12-13 I turned to see who was talking to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands <sup>13</sup> and someone among the lampstands who was "like a Son of**

**Man.” He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest. <sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace, and his voice was like the noise of flooding water. <sup>16</sup> He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth. He looked like the sun shining at its brightest time.**

**Verses 12—13** introduce a new image—seven golden lampstands, or candlesticks, which represent the churches John will address. And in the midst of those lampstands is the Son of Man.

In John’s vision, Jesus’ description and even position are significant. The fact that He was standing among the churches signifies that the churches belong to Him (1:13). The term Son of Man (Daniel 7:13—14; Revelation 1:13), when used about the Messiah, refers to the fact that Jesus not only had a divine nature but a physical body as well. John is saying that he saw a man, but not just any man—He is a God-man. Jesus’ full-length robe with a golden sash was the apparel of a priest. His white hair signifies both age and wisdom. In fact, it is the same type of description used of the Ancient of Days, a reference to God Himself in Daniel 7:9. This paints the picture of someone who has the wisdom of the world because He has existed forever (Revelation 1:14).

The fire images introduced in **verse 14** and continuing into **verse 15** are pictures of judgment. In this vision, Jesus is looking at the world with the eyes of judgment. The feet of Christ represent the reality that Jesus can judge the earth and will execute that judgment personally. His feet are glowing with the power of justice and righteousness.

The fact that His voice sounded like flooding waters implies that Jesus spoke with authority and power (1:15; see Ezekiel 43:2). The seven stars in Jesus’ hand refer to the Spirit of God at work in each of the churches, and the sword from His mouth is a symbol of God’s Word with the continuing suggestion of judgment (Revelation 1:16). Jesus’ shining face implies His glory (1:16).

**Revelation 1:17-20 When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead. <sup>19</sup> So write the things you see, what is now and what will happen later. <sup>20</sup> Here is the secret of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.**

John’s response to this vision is not simply a reverent bow, but rather a complete collapse caused by the overwhelming glory he has experienced. Jesus tells him not to be afraid but to remember that He is eternal (“First and Last,” mirroring verse 8), resurrected, and in control (1:17—18). These are three key truths that John can cling to so that he does not need to fear for his life in the presence of Jesus.

The use of Hades (the place of the dead) here refers to the realm of death, which Jesus triumphs over. This is a different meaning than hell, the place of punishment.

John’s role, as described in **verse 19**, is to describe this vision, reveal the state of the churches, and communicate the later description of the future to come.

The angels (1:20) of the churches may simply refer to the spirits of those churches as opposed to an actual type of guardian angel. It is important to note that the churches are described as lampstands—not the light itself, but that which reveals the light.

While Revelation is apocalyptic in nature, it is important to remember that, like any New Testament book, it serves to reveal Jesus to us. We make the most of studying this book when we stop trying to figure out the “when” of Jesus’ return (which we have already been told is impossible; see Mark 13:32-36) and instead focus on who Jesus is and who we are to be in light of that revelation.

## REVELATION 2:1-3:22 LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

Ephesus—Passion for Christ 2:1—7  
Smyrna—Dependence upon Christ 2:8—11  
Pergamum—Determination in the Truth 2:12—17  
Thyatira—Purity of Leadership 2:18—29  
Sardis—Faith That Leads to Life 3:1—6  
Philadelphia—Deliverance through Trials 3:7—13  
Laodicea—Dangers of a Lukewarm Faith 3:14—22

While some see these churches as only symbolic, it is more likely these were messages to specific congregations. What we do know about the cities addressed here matches with the specific messages John writes. The situations of these churches vary, and thus John addresses many issues that churches face today.

These letters do not represent a collection of letters that were once circulated separately but were from the beginning part of the book of Revelation. The whole book was meant to circulate among the seven churches.

### EPHESUS—PASSION FOR CHRIST

**Revelation 2:1-7** “Write this to the angel of the church in Ephesus: “The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands says this: <sup>2</sup> I know what you do, how you work hard and never give up. I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people. You have tested those who say they are apostles but really are not, and you found they are liars. <sup>3</sup> You have patience and have suffered troubles for my name and have not given up. <sup>4</sup> “But I have this against you: You have left the love you had in the beginning. <sup>5</sup> So remember where you were before you fell. Change your hearts and do what you did at first. If you do not change, I will come to you and will take away your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But there is something you do that is right: You hate what the Nicolaitans do, as much as I. <sup>7</sup> “Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden of God.

The church at Ephesus is committed to doctrinal purity; the believers have continued as disciples of Jesus (2:1—3). Yet their love for doctrine and truth is stronger than their passion for the person of Jesus (2:4). The concept of not staying true to their first love may include not only their love for Jesus, but also their love for each other, which is to mirror their love for Jesus.

The Ephesus of John’s day was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia, located in what is today western Turkey. It was home to 250,000-500,000 people. Because it stood at the crossroad of many trade routes, it was a diverse city with many religions present.

The apostle Paul spent more than two years in Ephesus establishing this church. The New Testament book of Ephesians is his letter to the congregation. According to tradition, Ephesus is where John spent his later years.

The Ephesian church receives two commands (2:5):

- 1) They must consider how far they have fallen.

2) They must repent.

If they don't obey, Jesus will pronounce judgment, and their success as a church of God will be lost (2:5).

The Ephesian church is credited for standing against the Nicolaitans. All that is known of this group is found here. While it is clear from this passage that the Nicolaitans represent a heresy, we have only guesswork as to the origin and specifics. Some have argued that this was a heresy produced from Nicolas, one of the seven servants chosen to serve the widows in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6), who later fell into heresy and used his position to lead many astray. Others think that this group is not associated with Nicolas and just used his name to gain authority.

This letter to Ephesus ends with "Every person who has ears (Revelation 2:7), a statement used throughout these letters to the churches. It means that if anyone understands the real meaning of what he or she hears, then he or she must respond.

While the close of verse 7 refers back to the tree of life from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24), the garden of God refers to the future when God restores heaven and earth after the fall of humanity.

### **SMYRNA—DEPENDENCE UPON CHRIST**

**Revelation 2:8-11 "Write this to the angel of the church in Smyrna: "The One who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again, says this: <sup>9</sup> I know your troubles and that you are poor, but really you are rich! I know the bad things some people say about you. They say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews. They are a synagogue that belongs to Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer for ten days. But be faithful, even if you have to die, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> "Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Those who win the victory will not be hurt by the second death.**

Jesus addresses this church from His role as the resurrected One. He identifies them by the troubles they have experienced—suffering, poverty, and insults. Christianity was outlawed at the time John was writing and was mostly held in disapproval in a place known for its loyalty and worship of the emperor.

Smyrna was a beautiful city with much trade based on a well-protected harbor. It had been destroyed before 200 BC. After that, it was rebuilt according to a plan, much as a planned community today. Most likely, the church in Smyrna was a product of Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10) and was founded by the apostle himself or one of his converts. At the end of the first century, life was difficult and dangerous for Christians in Smyrna. As a loyal Roman supporter, the city was a key center for emperor worship, so any other religious loyalties could easily be perceived as political threats.

In Revelation 2:9, John makes reference to those who call themselves Jews but are not. What he means is that, in light of the revelation of Jesus, being a Jew has more to do with how a person lives than with his heritage or bloodline. This is key to one's interpretation of John's writing in Revelation. One who understands John's use of the Jewish nation to mean the new nation of faith—the church—will interpret passages relating to the Jews as symbolically to be about the church as a whole. How one chooses to interpret this affects many portions of this book.

In light of the persecution of the day, the reference to prison in verse 10 may suggest more than simple containment. It may be a reference to a type of holding cell where a detainee awaits execution (2:10). The mention of ten days would have been understood by John's original readers as an reference to Daniel's request to be tested for ten days in order to see that God's commands regarding food would make him and his partners stronger than the rest of the men taken to Babylon (Daniel 1 :1 2—1 5). This was a test that proved God faithful, as would the test of the Smyrnaeans.

Jesus wants this congregation to be faithful until death so that they may receive the crown of life. The word translated *crown* here is not a king's crown, but the winning wreath given to the winner of a game. In the case of the Smyrnaeans, if they endure in the midst of their difficulties, they will not be hurt by the second death—in other words, they will be the ultimate victors over hell (the second death [Revelation 2:10—11]).

## **PERGAMUM—DETERMINATION IN THE TRUTH**

**Revelation 2:12-17** “Write this to the angel of the church in Pergamum: “The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says this: <sup>13</sup> I know where you live. It is where Satan has his throne. But you are true to me. You did not refuse to tell about your faith in me even during the time of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed in your city, where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup> “But I have a few things against you: You have some there who follow the teaching of Balaam. He taught Balak how to cause the people of Israel to sin by eating food offered to idols and by taking part in sexual sins. <sup>15</sup> You also have some who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> So change your hearts and lives. If you do not, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword that comes out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> “Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. “I will give some of the hidden manna to everyone who wins the victory. I will also give to each one who wins the victory a white stone with a new name written on it. No one knows this new name except the one who receives it.

In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Jesus is described as the One with a sword in His mouth, an image that symbolizes the Word of God. This symbol may have had multiple meanings to John's original readers in that the sword also served as a symbol of Rome. In light of that fact, this image could serve as a reminder that Jesus' authority exceeds any earthly power (2:12).

Pergamum was about a hundred miles north of Ephesus, with Smyrna located about halfway in between. As Asia's ancient capital, it was considered Asia's greatest city, not because of its position on trade routes but because of its governmental standing. It was a city with many pagan practices, renowned for its altar to the god Zeus as well as multiple temples to the emperor.

The people in this church remained true to Christ in the face of great temptation. The believers did not give in to the emperor worship that was rampant, but instead they remained true even in the face of martyrdom. No additional information is given about Antipas's identity, but it's obvious from verse 13 that he was faithful even in death.

The reference to Satan is a reminder that their persecution is a product of spiritual warfare rather than simple governmental persecution (2:13).

The accusation against this church is that they allowed false teachers to exist in their presence (2:14). The references to Balaam and Balak are from an Old Testament account in which a king named Balak tried to hire a prophet named Balaam to curse the Israelites. When Balaam's attempt failed (Numbers 22—24), he instructed Balak to tempt the Israelites to forsake their religious commitments

so the resulting consequences would have the same effect as a curse (Numbers 31:15-16). Both behaviors listed here in Revelation 2:14—food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality—were related to idol worship.

The reference to the Nicolaitans offers no more explanatory information than in the previous letter to the church at Ephesus (2:6). In this case, though, there seems to be a possible connection to the idol worship mentioned in connection with Balaam (2:14-15).

Jesus calls the church to repent, at the risk of war if they don't, thus the fitting vision with the sword—an image of God's Word, but also a military weapon (2:16). On the other hand, if this church wins the victory against their sin, they will have hidden manna (2:17). This refers to the manna that was hidden in the ark of the covenant by Moses, one of the most precious relics of the ancient Jews.

The white stone in verse 17 may refer to an invitation. In the Roman culture, a white stone was given to the winner of a competition. The stone had the winner's name inscribed on it, and it was used to get the winner into the awards banquet. The party that these believers are going to will be "by invitation only," and they will receive this stone as the invitation. On it will be a new name that no one knows.

In the Greek culture there was a thought that the gods all had secret names in which their powers were kept. Jesus may be using that imagery to illustrate that they will have a name that has power to it, and this name is hidden from the world. It is a name that has to be revealed. This name is given to the people as their new name because they are given a new life in Jesus Christ.

## **THYATIRA—PURITY OF LEADERSHIP**

**Revelation 2:18-28** "Write this to the angel of the church in Thyatira: "The Son of God, who has eyes that blaze like fire and feet like shining bronze, says this: <sup>19</sup> I know what you do. I know about your love, your faith, your service, and your patience. I know that you are doing more now than you did at first. <sup>20</sup> "But I have this against you: You let that woman Jezebel spread false teachings. She says she is a prophetess, but by her teaching she leads my people to take part in sexual sins and to eat food that is offered to idols. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to change her heart and turn away from her sin, but she does not want to change. <sup>22</sup> So I will throw her on a bed of suffering. And all those who take part in adultery with her will suffer greatly if they do not turn away from the wrongs she does. <sup>23</sup> I will also kill her followers. Then all the churches will know I am the One who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you for what you have done. <sup>24</sup> "But others of you in Thyatira have not followed her teaching and have not learned what some call Satan's deep secrets. I say to you that I will not put any other load on you. <sup>25</sup> Only continue in your loyalty until I come. <sup>26</sup> "I will give power over the nations to everyone who wins the victory and continues to be obedient to me until the end. <sup>27</sup> 'You will rule over them with an iron rod, as when pottery is broken into pieces.' <sup>28</sup> This is the same power I received from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Opening the letter to the church at Thyatira is a vision of Jesus similar to the description given in chapter 1 of Revelation. This vision of Jesus' eyes and feet highlights His all-knowing nature and His commitment to hunt down and conquer evil (1:14-15; 2:18). While this church's good works are acknowledged, the church is also accused of tolerating Jezebel (2:19-20). This is probably an alias John uses for this troublesome woman, relating her to the wicked queen of the Old Testament by the same name (1 Kings 16:30-31). This woman's teaching pulls people away from the Word of God to

immorality and idolatry. On one hand, this church has people who are serving God in a strong fashion. On the other hand, they have allowed a false teacher in their midst to lead them astray (2:20).

Many suppose that the church at Thyatira was founded somehow through Paul's ministry in Ephesus. At the time of the writing of Revelation, the city of Thyatira was entering its greatest season of prosperity. As a Roman outpost city, it served the purpose of protecting the Roman Empire from invading forces from the north. The various businesses were divided into guilds that all had their own gods. In order to do business in the city, a person had to go through a guild. Thus before business was conducted, one would have to perform the worship customs of the god of the guild.

Verses 21-23 reveal how God deals with evil. Those who follow this woman will join her in illness and suffering as an added prompt toward their repentance.

There are those in Thyatira who have not surrendered to Jezebel's false teaching, and they are praised (2:24-25). The additional burden that will not be added to them probably refers to anything further than the service they have already been called to as disciples of Jesus (2:24). The reward for their perseverance, though, will be authority in Jesus' name (2:26).

The iron rod probably refers to a shepherd's implement with a metal tip (2:27). While a shepherd is a gentle leader, he maintains ultimate control over his flock. This image coupled with the image of the clay jars broken to pieces implies judgment. This may mean that the authority given to the faithful will be participation in Jesus' final judgment

The morning star, also a reward given to the faithful by Jesus, refers to the power of a new life, the resurrected life that Christ had shown when He rose from the dead (2:28).

## **SARDIS—FAITH THAT LEADS TO LIFE**

**Revelation 3:1-6** "Write this to the angel of the church in Sardis: "The One who has the seven spirits and the seven stars says this: I know what you do. People say that you are alive, but really you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up! Strengthen what you have left before it dies completely. I have found that what you are doing is less than what my God wants. <sup>3</sup>So do not forget what you have received and heard. Obey it, and change your hearts and lives. So you must wake up, or I will come like a thief, and you will not know when I will come to you. <sup>4</sup>But you have a few there in Sardis who have kept their clothes unstained, so they will walk with me and will wear white clothes, because they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>Those who win the victory will be dressed in white clothes like them. And I will not erase their names from the book of life, but I will say they belong to me before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup>Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Unlike the preceding churches, the judgment against the church at Sardis appears in the first verse of the address. It is a church that thinks it is alive, but in all reality, it is dead (3:1). Sardis, the city, had twice been overtaken by enemies because of its failure to remain on watch. So it seems fitting that the command offered to the Christian church in that city is to wake up (3:2).

The church of Sardis has a noticeable difference from the other churches addressed so far. All of the other churches have some corrupt people but others who are faithful. In this case, the faithful are in the minority (3:3-5).

Sardis was a wealthy city full of gold taken from the nearby Pactolus River. The city was located on a high hill at the intersection of five roads. Like the other cities addressed in Revelation 2-3, the church of Sardis was probably founded through Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

Through the years there have been a variety of meanings suggested for the white clothing mentioned in verse 4. Most likely, the white clothes represent justification through faith in Jesus. These few faithful individuals mentioned here have done nothing to surrender that justification, so they have kept their clothes unstained (3:4). Also, they will be confessed before the Father, which means they will be acknowledged as belonging to Jesus and thus allowed to enter into heaven (3:5).

Finally, they will not have their name erased. Some people think that this is a reference to them not losing their salvation, but that is not the case. In some ancient cities, everyone had their name in a book, and when they died their name was crossed out or erased from the book. Jesus is saying that those who overcome will not have their names erased, because they will never die. Eternal life is their destiny.

### **PHILADELPHIA—DELIVERANCE THROUGH TRIALS**

**Revelation 3:7-13** “Write this to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: “This is what the One who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, says. When he opens a door, no one can close it. And when he closes it, no one can open it. <sup>8</sup>I know what you do. I have put an open door before you, which no one can close. I know you have little strength, but you have obeyed my teaching and were not afraid to speak my name. <sup>9</sup>Those in the synagogue that belongs to Satan say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews; they are liars. I will make them come before you and bow at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>You have obeyed my teaching about not giving up your faith. So I will keep you from the time of trouble that will come to the whole world to test those who live on earth. <sup>11</sup>“I am coming soon. Continue strong in your faith so no one will take away your crown. <sup>12</sup>I will make those who win the victory pillars in the temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, that comes down out of heaven from my God. I will also write on them my new name. <sup>13</sup>Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

The descriptions in verse 7 apply to Jesus. He is described as the One who has the key of David, meaning He has all authority. Though Jesus' reference to an open door can be interpreted in a variety of ways, the fact that no one can shut the door is an obvious reference to the fact that no one can undo what He declares (3:7-8).

The Jews will bow before the believers in this city as a testimony to the reality that Jesus is the Messiah (3:9). The implication is that with the life and death of Jesus, the definition of God's chosen people has changed. No longer is it simply a matter of family heritage, but of faith in Jesus.

Little is known about the church of Philadelphia apart from this passage. Like most of the other churches it was probably founded through Paul's ministry to Ephesus. One interesting note is that this church lasted for centuries. The people stood firm in the face of major persecution.

The church in Philadelphia will be protected from the testing that will come. This may mean they will escape trials, but it can also mean that Jesus will see them through the trials they face. They will have protection from all of the evil that will come to the earth (3:10).

The crown mentioned in verse 11 is not a crown of royalty, but a crown of victory, much like the garlands or wreaths worn by the winners of an Olympic competition.

The comparison of one who conquers to a pillar in verse 12 is a reference to strength. Earthquakes were common in this region. Typically, the pillar of a building was all that remained after a quake. Because of this, a pillar is an excellent image for something that will remain secure no matter what happens around it.

### **Critical Observation**

While later in Revelation John writes that there will be no temple in heaven, in verse 12 he refers to the temple. This is a reminder that John is recording a series of symbolic visions. Each image stands alone, supporting a specific point of truth. To find apparent inconsistencies between those visions is only to recognize that they, indeed, are separate.

The believers described in Philadelphia, those who will be kept through testing, will have three names written on them: the name of God, New Jerusalem, and Jesus. This means they will be claimed by these three things. In their earthly lives they may have been insignificant, but in heaven they will be members of the New Jerusalem.

### **LAODICEA—DANGERS OF A LUKEWARM FAITH**

**Revelation 3:14-22** “Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea: “The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of all God has made, says this: <sup>15</sup> I know what you do, that you are not hot or cold. I wish that you were hot or cold! <sup>16</sup> But because you are lukewarm—neither hot, nor cold—I am ready to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, ‘I am rich, and I have become wealthy and do not need anything.’ But you do not know that you are really miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from me gold made pure in fire so you can be truly rich. Buy from me white clothes so you can be clothed and so you can cover your shameful nakedness. Buy from me medicine to put on your eyes so you can truly see. <sup>19</sup> “I correct and punish those whom I love. So be eager to do right, and change your hearts and lives. <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you will eat with me. <sup>21</sup> “Those who win the victory will sit with me on my throne in the same way that I won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In the opening of the letter to the church in Laodicea, several names are used for Jesus that have not been used yet in Revelation. All three stress His authority.

The judgment against this church is that they are lukewarm (3:15). The water supply to Laodicea came from a hot spring, so the water in the city was indeed lukewarm. In this case, of course, it is the spiritual condition of the church that is being described. Rather than denying Christ, they made an empty profession. According to verse 16, this makes God sick to His stomach.

Laodicea was an economic banking center for Asia. Due to its location, it became a major financial site for the Roman Empire. The city was famous for the soft black wool it produced. Laodicea was also known as an important center of ancient medicine. The nearby temple of the Phrygian god Men Karou had an important medical school associated with it. That school was most famous for developing an eye salve, which was exported all over the Greco-Roman world. All three of these industries (clothing, banking, and eye medicine) are used in Jesus’ condemnation.

Verse 17 further carries the charge against this church, declaring that these people claimed to need nothing, yet they were poor, blind, and naked. These three claims were direct hits at the industry of the Laodiceans: banking, medicine, and clothing. Banks cannot remove the bankruptcy of the soul. Wool cannot cover the nakedness of sin. Eye salve cannot remove the blindness toward the gospel. Thus, to trust in the things of the world is foolish. According to verse 18, only Christ can actually take care of spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness.

Verse 19 echoes a truth found elsewhere in the New Testament—God disciplines those He loves. The repentance referred to here is not an ongoing daily repentance, but a once-for-all, turning-from-your-old-ways kind of change.

Verse 20 is a well-known verse, including a word picture of Jesus asking to be let in. The words translated “eat with you” do not refer to a meal shared with a stranger, but with a meal shared among friends who know each other well.

The reward offered in verse 21 is unlike the wreaths or crowns already mentioned that are given to winners of a competition. Instead, this is the offer to rule with Jesus.

## REVELATION 4:1-11

### OH WORSHIP THE KING

The Door of Revelation	4:1
The God of Revelation	4:2-3
The Revelation of Worship	4:4-11

#### Setting Up the Section

From this point on, John's writing changes from the letters to the church to the vision of heaven. He begins with a vision of God Himself.

### THE DOOR OF REVELATION (4:1)

**Revelation 4:1** After the vision of these things I looked, and there before me was an open door in heaven. And the same voice that spoke to me before, that sounded like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this."

Verse 1 opens with an introductory phrase that John often uses in Revelation to begin a new vision—After the vision of these things, I looked. . .

The door of verse 1 is the third door mentioned in Revelation. The first is the door of opportunity in Philadelphia. The second is the door of fellowship in Laodicea. This door is one of revelation. John is going to pass through a door that will allow him to see the God of the universe and all of the glory that controls the world.

The voice that sounded like a trumpet is the voice of Jesus calling John into the vision. Notice that the revelation Jesus is about to reveal is of things that *must* happen. They are certain.

### THE GOD OF REVELATION (4:2-3)

**Revelation 4:2-3** Immediately I was in the Spirit, and before me was a throne in heaven, and someone was sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> The One who sat on the throne looked like precious stones, like jasper and carnelian. All around the throne was a rainbow the color of an emerald.

John saw the throne of the Almighty (4:2). His description of the throne is not meant to be literal. The images are used to describe the meaning of the throne. This symbolic language describes the universe from a heavenly point of view.

John describes God by using the names of jewels. Different versions of the Bible translate these names differently (jasper, carnelian, diamonds, rubies, etc.). Also, we can't be sure if the ancients used the same names for precious and semi-precious stones that we use today. Nevertheless, the importance of John's description is in the images of beauty and value that are attributed to God. John gives no literal, physical description of God, because God cannot be described. Instead, the character and nature of God are described, because that is what anyone could ever see of God (4:3).

There was a rainbow, or a halo, around the throne. This reminds us of the rainbow that signified the eternal covenant that God made with Noah (Genesis 9:12-13; Revelation 4:3).

## **THE REVELATION OF WORSHIP (4:4-11)**

**Revelation 4:4-11** Around the throne there were twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders sitting on them. They were dressed in white and had golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Lightning flashes and noises and thunder came from the throne. Before the throne seven lamps were burning, which are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Also before the throne there was something that looked like a sea of glass, clear like crystal. In the center and around the throne were four living creatures with eyes all over them, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion. The second was like a calf. The third had a face like a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of these four living creatures had six wings and was covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He was, he is, and he is coming.” <sup>9</sup> These living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever. <sup>10</sup> Then the twenty-four elders bow down before the One who sits on the throne, and they worship him who lives forever and ever. They put their crowns down before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, because you made all things. Everything existed and was made, because you wanted it.”

In verses 4 and 5, John paints a picture of worship. The first picture is twenty-four elders sitting on thrones around God. There are many interpretations of this picture, ranging from the elders as a special class of angels to the elders as the church before God.

For those who make a case that these elders represent the church, John’s description, then, is of the redeemed—they have white robes (19:8), they are wearing crowns (James 1:12), and they reign with God (2 Timothy 2:12). Why are there twenty-four? Some say there were twenty-four priests that represented the entire nation of Israel. And some have said that the elders represent the twelve tribes plus the twelve apostles. Each interpretation includes its own difficulties. However the specifics are interpreted, this vision reveals the majesty of worship.

### **Critical Observation**

The key to understanding the picture painted of the throne of God in Revelation 4:5 is the account of the Jews at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. When God came down upon the mountain, it shook with thunder and lightning. All of this was a picture of the holiness of God. John is telling us in this passage that God is holy and His holiness reigns in heaven.

John also sees seven lamps of fire. These lampstands are different from the lampstands mentioned in Revelation 1:12-13. These lampstands are outdoor torches. John identifies these torches as the seven Spirits of God, a phrase that denotes the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:1-10).

Since there is no sea in heaven (Revelation 21:1), the body of water mentioned in verse 6 is not a literal sea. Instead, it is a descriptive term showcasing the brilliance of heaven. Today a clear glass or a large mirror is easy to get. In John’s day, though, a large glass as clear as crystal was an extravagance beyond imagination. This points to the immense glory and power of the One who sits on the throne.

There are also living creatures centered around the throne (4:6). Their positions suggest both their closeness to God and the fact that they serve Him. One general description that covers all of the creatures is that they are full of eyes both front and behind. Eyes are used for seeing, and thus these angels are aware of what is all around them. Some have suggested that the creatures are cherubim, but this is not known for certain.

According to verse 7, each of these creatures has a different face: lion, calf, man, and eagle. Each symbol shows that all of creation is represented before the throne, and thus all of creation is worshiping God. Creation's purpose is to bring glory to God.

These creatures, representative of the creation of God, call out God's holiness. They repeat the word holy three times, emphasizing that God is holy. They also acknowledge that God is almighty and eternal; He began all things, and He will bring all things to a conclusion.

Verses 9-11 offer a picture of worship. The angels give glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne. To give someone glory is to put that person on display. To honor is to praise someone for what he or she has done. To give thanks is more than simply recognizing an attribute of someone, but to go one step further and be grateful for who that person is or what he or she has done. The heart of the worship is centered on displaying God, acknowledging His attributes, and thanking Him for what He has done.

In addition to the angels, the elders also worship. They fall before God in reverence and lay their crowns before Him. All of their actions—throwing themselves down, offering crowns—communicate God's greatness. They are placing themselves below Him. This indicates that they do not look at God as an equal; instead, they see themselves as His servants. When they fall before God, they offer up words of praise.

**Take It Home**

The elders' song of worship gives words to their actions and acknowledges God as the source of all creation. There is no way to understand the judgment of God without understanding that God is the center of the universe. Everything bows to Him, putting Him in the position of granting His approval to all He has created. Giving that approval or not is the act of judgment.

## REVELATION 5:1-14

### THE LION AND THE LAMB

The Scroll and the Lion	5:1-5
The Lamb and the Salvation	5:6-7
The Worship and the Praise	5:8-14

#### Setting Up the Section

In chapter 5, John's visions change from God the Creator to Jesus the Redeemer. Here the nature of Jesus will come into view when we see the final judgment of the world taking place. Jesus will be the Judge; thus, He is called the Lion. Yet Jesus is also the Savior of the world; thus, He is called the Lamb. As the Lamb, He took the sin of humanity so that they might stand redeemed before God.

### THE SCROLL AND THE LION (5:1-5)

**Revelation 5:1-5** Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. The scroll had writing on both sides and was kept closed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a powerful angel calling in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" <sup>3</sup> But there was no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth who could open the scroll or look inside it. <sup>4</sup> I cried bitterly because there was no one who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. <sup>5</sup> But one of the elders said to me, "Do not cry! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, David's descendant, has won the victory so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

The scroll John describes has seven seals. Sealing a scroll was not an unusual practice. Some scrolls may have had seven seals on the outside that had to be broken in order to unroll the parchment. In this case, though, it seems the seals open each section of the scroll. The angel is looking for someone worthy to open the scroll, read it, and carry out the plan of God (5:1-2).

When no one could be found to break the seals, John weeps (5:4). The kind of weeping described here is a loud, wailing grief.

While John reveals in verse 1 that the scroll is in the hand of the person sitting on the throne, it seems that he doesn't fully see that person until verse 6. John has seen a vision of Jesus but not the revelation of Jesus that the elder is referring to. This elder begins to explain to John that Jesus is the One who is worthy to open the scroll.

The phrase "Lion from the tribe of Judah" is found only here in the Bible. In Genesis 49:9, Jacob speaks a prophecy over each of his sons. When he speaks of Judah, he refers to him as a lion cub. Jesus, of course, finds His ancestry in the tribe of Judah.

The "David's descendant" means that Jesus was born into the family line of David. Both Matthew and Luke give genealogies of Jesus, tracing Him through David's bloodline (Matthew 1; Luke 3).

### THE LAMB AND THE SALVATION (5:6-7)

**Revelation 5:6-7** Then I saw a Lamb standing in the center of the throne and in the middle of the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb looked as if he had been

**killed. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that were sent into all the world. <sup>7</sup> The Lamb came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne.**

The lamb that appears to have been killed symbolizes Jesus' crucifixion (5:6). The fact that the lamb has seven horns and eyes suggests completeness. The number seven often carries that meaning in the Bible.

Horns are often a symbol of power; most powerful animals have horns. In this image, then, Jesus is represented as the One who possesses complete power.

In the same way, the seven eyes represent complete vision. According to the text here, these eyes are the seven Spirits of God. While this may be a reference to the Holy Spirit, it is more likely this all-seeing attribute is credited to Jesus.

#### **Critical Observation**

The lamb is the meekest of animals, the least fierce, and evokes the least amount of fear. Yet it was through becoming a Lamb that Jesus conquered. Jesus proved His strength by being meek. The triumph of God does not come through power but rather through love and meekness.

The end of verse 7 is the high point of John's vision—the Son of God takes the scroll from the hand of God. This means that the plan of God is ready to be carried out, and the person of Jesus Christ is the One who will implement the plan.

#### **THE WORSHIP AND THE PRAISE (5:8-14)**

**Revelation 5:8-14** When he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed down before the Lamb. Each one of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's holy people. <sup>9</sup> And they all sang a new song to the Lamb: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were killed, and with the blood of your death you bought people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation. <sup>10</sup> You made them to be a kingdom of priests for our God, and they will rule on the earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne, and the four living creatures, and the elders. There were thousands and thousands of angels, <sup>12</sup> saying in a loud voice: "The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength, honor, glory, and praise!" <sup>13</sup> Then I heard all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea saying: "To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever." <sup>14</sup> The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders bowed down and worshiped.

The elders and the creatures fall down in worship of Jesus. The only appropriate response to this moment is praise. In this case, the instruments and implements they use are harps and bowls of incense (5:8).

Harps, possibly small lyres, are often associated with worship in Revelation. The bowls with incense symbolize the prayers of the saints who have been under the persecution of evil in the world and have been killed as a result of the persecution (6:10).



As with so many new things in Revelation, the elders and creatures are singing a new song (5:9). In this case, new is not a chronological designation but more so the quality of the song. This song is meant for this particular situation, not simply reused from another. The song celebrates the fact that Jesus is worthy to take the scroll. He is the One to accomplish the plan of God—dying for people from every nation in the world. Not only did Jesus die to bring humanity to God, but He also enabled believers to stand before God holy and just.

In both verses 9 and 10, the song acknowledges that the redeemed belong to God. In verse 10, they are appointed as a kingdom and as priests. This is similar to John's greeting in Revelation 1:6.

In verse 11, John's vision widens so that he sees and hears countless voices as one voice singing. His numbers are not meant to be equations of a specific number but are instead a description of the vastness of those in the vision. The song itself claims Jesus' worthiness, as does the song in verses 9-10. The first four descriptive words are qualities of Jesus: power, wealth, wisdom, and strength. The last three describe the response to Jesus: honor, glory, and praise (5:12).

Then, added to the countless number of worshipers, every creature joins in the singing (5:13). The final "Amen" is added by the elders who began the song in verse 9. There is no distinction drawn in their worship between the One sitting on the throne (God) and the Lamb (Jesus). They worship them as one.

## REVELATION 6

### THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The White Horse	6:1-2
The Red Horse	6:3-4
The Black Horse	6:5-6
The Pale Horse	6:7-8
Prayer in Persecution	6:9-11
The Cosmic Disturbance	6:12-17

#### Setting Up the Section

Beginning in chapter 6, and continuing into chapters 7 and 8, the scroll is unrolled and its seals are broken. Rather than reading the scroll, John experiences it in visions.

The unrolling of the scroll marks the judgment of God upon the earth—justice brought to the world. The first four seals on the scroll reveal the sin of humanity unleashed on the earth.

### THE WHITE HORSE (6:1-2)

**Revelation 6:1-2** Then I watched while the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” <sup>2</sup> I looked, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out, determined to win the victory.

Jesus, the Lamb, breaks the first seal on the scroll, at which point one of the four creatures shouts an invitation to come (6:1). This invitation is not directed to John, but to the white horse and the first horseman. This horseman holds a bow and is given a crown. As in Revelation 2:10, this is a crown of victory rather than royalty. The implication, of course, is that this horseman will find victory in his efforts.

This horse and rider serve the purpose of conquering. The idea here is simple: The first judgment that must come to humanity before the final completion of the ages is that of military conquering. There are three popular views as to who will conquer or be conquered:

- 1) This horse represents Christ and the gospel in the world.
- 2) This horse represents the Antichrist.
- 3) This horse represents the spirit of conquest, or military figures.

We cannot know for certain, but we can note that the bow seems a significant part of the vision, and that a bow is not a typical Roman weapon. So this vision has implications beyond a political statement regarding the Roman Empire. This is a vision of a conqueror and destruction.

#### Critical Observation

Some associate this first vision with one group of warriors in John’s day who were known for using bows—the Parthians. They were a feared group of warriors who tormented much of the East and Middle East for hundreds of years. The Parthians were noted for two things: their horsemanship and their skilled archery. They would ride into a city, shoot their arrows with deadly accuracy, and then

ride out so fast they could not be killed. They rode white horses that they trained to jump and maneuver in incredible ways.

While John's vision is probably not intended to be this specific (one army or one country), the Parthians may have been the closest comparable image for John's original readers.

### **THE RED HORSE (6:3-4)**

**Revelation 6:3-4** When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" <sup>4</sup> Then another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given power to take away peace from the earth and to make people kill each other, and he was given a big sword.

As with the first seal, the Lamb opens the second seal, and the second creature offers the same invitation to the next horseman to come (6:3).

The power to remove the peace that is on the earth is granted to this horseman on a red horse. Since God is sovereign over all things, it is He who grants the permission. The imagery here is not that this horseman does the butchering, but that he removes peace, and without that peace, humans butcher one another. The great sword is the image of the machines of war being unleashed on the earth, acted out by people left to their own devices without any divine intervention.

### **THE BLACK HORSE (6:5-6)**

**Revelation 6:5-6** When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse, and its rider held a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> Then I heard something that sounded like a voice coming from the middle of the four living creatures. The voice said, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, and do not damage the olive oil and wine!"

With the next seal broken by the Lamb and the next invitation from the third creature, a horseman rides in on a black horse with a scale in his hand. Since verse 6 reveals the ridiculously high prices of wheat and barley, this horseman symbolizes famine. The scale is for measuring out food.

The announcement in verse 6 is not attributed to any one of the four creatures. In fact, the announcement itself is only said to have been like a voice from among the creatures.

A quart of wheat was what one person needed in a day. According to the prices called out in verse 6, a person would work all day to simply get the grain that he or she needed. If there was one income for a family, the problem was obvious. In addition, barley was used by the poor to mix with their wheat to make it go further. According to the information given in verse 6, the market prices were well beyond what anyone could afford.

The oil and the wine were protected. These are basic ingredients for cooking and for purification. We see that they have been left out of the judgment, but no reason is offered for this. Because the olive trees and grape vines are still producing, this famine will affect the poor, but some will survive.

### **THE PALE HORSE (6:7-8)**

**Revelation 6:7-8** When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" <sup>8</sup> I looked, and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider

**was named death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill people by war, by starvation, by disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.**

The fourth horse and rider, also summoned by the Lamb breaking the seal and the voice of a creature, is described as pale, or ashen. This signifies a pale green color, the color of a dead body.

This horseman is not holding a weapon of any kind, but his name is Death, and he is followed by Hades, the place of departed spirits. As with the third horseman, permission is given for the destruction to take place involving 25 percent of the earth. This destruction will come by a variety of means.

## **PRAYER IN PERSECUTION (6:9-11)**

**Revelation 6:9-11 When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the word of God and to the message they had received. <sup>10</sup> These souls shouted in a loud voice, “Holy and true Lord, how long until you judge the people of the earth and punish them for killing us?” <sup>11</sup> Then each one of them was given a white robe and was told to wait a short time longer. There were still some of their fellow servants and brothers and sisters in the service of Christ who must be killed as they were. They had to wait until all of this was finished.**

The next seal marks a change. The first four reflect the coming of a particular kind of destruction. The fifth involves the prayers of a particular group of people—the persecuted (6:9).

The first evidence of the difference between this seal and the four preceding is that no one summoned the vision. In the first four seals, one of the living creatures called “Come,” and the horsemen came. For the fifth seal, John simply notices the souls who have been violently killed for their faith.

These souls are under an altar—they are already dead. They have been persecuted to death. John gives two reasons why these souls have been killed: (1) because of the Word of God and (2) because of the testimony they had been given by Jesus.

The Word of God refers to the message of the scriptures (6:9). The central message is the saving work of Jesus Christ. The testimony that these souls maintained refers to the active and verbal faith that they lived out in the world. These people were distinctively Christian, and they were killed because of it. The lives of these people became offerings of worship; thus, they are under the altar.

While their persecution is a reality, the focus is on their prayers for justice (6:10). Sin is widespread, and many people are being killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. Those who have been killed want justice. In light of the teachings throughout the scriptures about vengeance and its place in God’s hands (not humanity’s), it would be a mistake to understand the prayers of these souls as merely a cry for revenge. It is, rather, a cry for God to rule. This is a prayer that longs to see the power in the hands of the One who rightfully controls the universe. The souls even address God as true, a term often used for the master of slaves. They recognize His power and authority.

The answer to their prayers comes in two parts. The first part is in God rewarding them for their sacrifices. Their reward is rest. Once dead they are allowed to enjoy the peace of heaven. The other part of their reward includes a long white robe, which probably represents victory as it does in the vision of the white horse of the first seal (6:1-2).

They are told to wait until “all of this was finished” – all of the martyrs had died. This does not imply that God has a certain quota of martyrs that have to die before He will enact His justice, but it does reveal the reality that more people will be sacrificing their lives for Him (6:11).

## **THE CELESTIAL DISTURBANCE (6:12-17)**

**Revelation 6:12-17** Then I watched while the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became black like rough black cloth, and the whole moon became red like blood. <sup>13</sup> And the stars in the sky fell to the earth like figs falling from a fig tree when the wind blows. <sup>14</sup> The sky disappeared as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the rich people, the powerful people, the slaves, and the free people hid themselves in caves and in the rocks on the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us. Hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> The great day for their anger has come, and who can stand against it?”

There are two parts to the disturbance of the sixth seal: first, the celestial light show and, second, the response of the people.

The reason the sun and moon are both a part of this vision is that God is going to move at the same time all over the world; in some places it will be night and in other places it will be day. Notice the sun will be black as rough black cloth (sackcloth). This is a reference to the black sackcloth worn by mourners. The garments were made out of the hair of black goats, so they were naturally very dark. If the sun ever became that dark, there would be no light. Without light, the entire world will be disoriented.

### **Critical Observation**

Keep in mind that John’s visions are not the first his readers have heard of the apocalypse. Jesus Himself spoke of terrible events at the end of the world (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 12). The Old Testament prophets offered their own apocalyptic visions as well (Joel 2:11, 31; Zephaniah 1:14, 18; 2:2). It is quite likely that John’s readers made a connection between his visions recorded here and the teachings of Jesus and the prophets. Rather than new and disturbing images, John is likely describing a confirmation of God’s sovereignty from the ancient days to the ultimate future.

If the sun goes away, the natural fallout will be that the light given from the moon will also cease to exist, since it merely reflects the sun’s light. John records that the moon looks like blood (6:12). The idea is that there is a covering of the moon to such a degree that it will give no light. Instead, there will be darkness, and the moon will look as if it has been covered in blood. Remember that blood is maroon in color when in large quantities, so this describes a darkening of the moon more than a reddening of it.

The two images of sackcloth and blood are meant to suggest the destruction that is coming. Blood symbolizes death, and sackcloth represents the mourning that comes along with it.

There are two ways in which the word stars can be translated in verse 13. It could mean the actual stars in the sky falling, but it more likely refers to meteors falling from the sky to the earth. While some have interpreted the result of the falling stars as a violent effect, like an earthquake, the illustration John actually gives is of ripe figs that easily fall when the wind shakes their limbs.

Verse 14 paints the picture of the sky opening up so that the atmosphere, the blue canopy that is over the earth, will split open and form a hole. Then verse 15 indicates that these events will affect everyone on earth and cause widespread panic. Verse 16 reveals the hopelessness of the situation. It is clear that no person has control of his or her own fate. Each is at the mercy of the powerful sovereignty of heaven and earth (6:17).

## REVELATION 7

### THE DRAMATIC PAUSE

The Angels and Servants  
The Believers Are Rescued

7:1-8  
7:9-17

#### Setting Up the Section

Chapter 7 describes a pause between the sixth and seventh seal. This pause sets up the events just prior to the wrath of God being poured out on the earth. It is a moment God stops the clock to provide divine protection.

### THE ANGELS AND SERVANTS (7:1-8)

**Revelation 7:1-8** After the vision of these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. The angels were holding the four winds of the earth to keep them from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. <sup>2</sup> Then I saw another angel coming up from the east who had the seal of the living God. And he called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom God had given power to harm the earth and the sea. <sup>3</sup> He said to them, “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we mark with a sign the foreheads of the people who serve our God.” <sup>4</sup> Then I heard how many people were marked with the sign. There were one hundred forty-four thousand from every tribe of the people of Israel. <sup>5</sup> From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were marked with the sign, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, <sup>6</sup> from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, <sup>7</sup> from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, <sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, and from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were marked with the sign.

John describes four angels holding back the wind (7:1). The fact that they are standing at the four corners of the earth implies that they cover the whole earth.

To this point, John has not described any winds that need to be held back, so these angels may be holding back all that was released in the first four seals. At the least, they are stopping the natural order of the world. The sun is not shining, the stars are not shining, meteors are falling to the earth, and now the wind has stopped blowing.

In verse 2, another angel comes up and carries the seal of God’s ownership. This angel instructs the four angels holding the wind to hold back their damage until the servants (slaves) of God are identified by a seal on their foreheads (7:3). This seal will mark them so that they will not be hurt during the judgment of God.

#### Critical Observation

According to Revelation 14:1-5, the servants marked with a seal are those who have kept themselves pure, followed the Lamb, been purchased by God, and been offered as first fruits.

Many interpreters of Revelation hold that the 144,000 people represent Israel. Keep in mind, though, that John is sending this letter to dispersed Christians, not all of whom are Jewish. Also, keep in mind that John has made statements elsewhere that can be interpreted to mean that God’s chosen people

are no longer determined by heritage or ancestry, but by faith (2:9; 3:9). In light of this, others interpret this 144,000 as the faithful of the Christian church.

Verses 5-8 provide a list of the tribes of Israel. These lists are based on the sons of Jacob (whose name was later changed to Israel). While the tribes are usually listed in order of the age of the sons, in this case Judah is listed first, though Judah was not the oldest son. This is significant in that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. This may have been intentional on John's part, though it is difficult to find an intentional meaning in the order of the rest of the list.

A tribe is missing from this list—Dan. Some say this is because of the idolatry engaged in by that tribe.

### **THE BELIEVERS ARE RESCUED (7:9-17)**

**Revelation 7:9-17** After the vision of these things I looked, and there was a great number of people, so many that no one could count them. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language of the earth. They were all standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They were shouting in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." <sup>11</sup> All the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. They all bowed down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever. Amen!" <sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders asked me, "Who are these people dressed in white robes? Where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> I answered, "You know, sir." And the elder said to me, "These are the people who have come out of the great distress. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Because of this, they are before the throne of God. They worship him day and night in his temple. And the One who sits on the throne will be present with them. <sup>16</sup> Those people will never be hungry again, and they will never be thirsty again. The sun will not hurt them, and no heat will burn them, <sup>17</sup> because the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of water that give life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

What follows is John's vision of an amazing and diverse crowd in the stillness of heaven. Many think this refers to the Rapture, when God removes His church from the world. Others believe it refers to those who have been killed during the unleashing of evil. Regardless, these are people who have come from the world and are now rescued from their misery and are in the presence of the Lord (7:9).

These people are worshiping the Lamb. Their long white robes are more similar to glorious celebration than everyday clothing. The palm branches they wave are typical symbols of triumph (7:9). They are worshiping the Lord because of the salvation He has given (7:10). All the angels worship as well, proclaiming their own doxology to God (7:11-12).

In verses 13-14, an elder both asks and answers the question of the identity of this throng in white robes. His answer includes the now familiar phrase "great distress," (the great tribulation). This could mean simply the ongoing tribulation that these people have faced on earth, as opposed to the specific period now referred to as "the Tribulation." Undoubtedly these are the redeemed, because their robes have been washed clean in Jesus' blood.

The elder's description continues in verses 15-17 with the fate that awaits these worshipers. They will be provided for, and even shepherded, by the Lamb. Similar to Psalm 23, Jesus will provide for them, and the sorrows and difficulties of this life will be left behind.

**Take It Home**

We can be encouraged by this vision in two ways. It signifies the following:

- 1) Believers will not face the wrath of God.
- 2) Enduring trials for our faith here in this life will not be forgotten in eternity.

For John's original readers facing persecution, this would have been a precious thought. For contemporary readers, it offers an eternal perspective in the midst of the suffering we face.

## REVELATION 8:1-13

### THE WRATH OF GOD

Preparation for Justice  
The First Four Trumpets

8:1-5  
8:6-13

#### Setting Up the Section

What we have here is the beginning of the anger of God. The judgment of Jesus is going to be carried out. This is the great moment of justice that suffering believers have been praying for.

**Revelation 8:1-5** When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God and to whom were given seven trumpets. <sup>3</sup> Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden pan for incense. He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all God's holy people. The angel put this offering on the golden altar before the throne. <sup>4</sup> The smoke from the incense went up from the angel's hand to God with the prayers of God's people. <sup>5</sup> Then the angel filled the incense pan with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were flashes of lightning, thunder and loud noises, and an earthquake.

#### PREPARATION FOR JUSTICE

In John's vision, God is about to deal with the sin that is in the world. At the opening of the seventh seal, the response is silence (8:1). And a new vision begins.

The seven angels in verse 2 are specific angels. They are those who stand before God. And in this case, they are the ones with the responsibility of carrying out justice on the earth. The trumpets symbolize the instruments of that judgment (8:2).

#### Critical Observation

The difference between the seventh seal and the former seals is who is implementing the punishment. During chapters 6 and 7, humankind and nature are having their way. During this vision of the trumpets, it is the angels who have been given the role of executing the judgment of God on earth.

Verse 3 is a dramatic image of the prayers of the saints ascending into heaven. In 5:8 the incense embodies the prayers of the saints, but that is not the case here in chapter 8. In chapter 5, prayers for justice are given to God from the martyred saints. The idea here is that all the prayers for justice are given to God so that God can answer them all. He is going to begin the process of revenge for the persecution of the church.

In verse 4, the prayers ascend from the angel's hand. Heaven and earth are united in this request. And in verse 5, fire from the altar is added and the prayers are empowered. This can be seen as a picture of the power of God added to the prayers.

**Revelation 8:6-13** Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. <sup>7</sup> The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were poured down on the earth. And a third of the earth, and all the green grass, and a third of the

trees were burned up. <sup>8</sup> Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something that looked like a big mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. And a third of the sea became blood, <sup>9</sup> a third of the living things in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. <sup>10</sup> Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a large star, burning like a torch, fell from the sky. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is Wormwood. And a third of all the water became bitter, and many people died from drinking the water that was bitter. <sup>12</sup> Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck. So a third of them became dark, and a third of the day was without light, and also the night. <sup>13</sup> While I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying high in the air cry out in a loud voice, “Trouble! Trouble! Trouble for those who live on the earth because of the remaining sounds of the trumpets that the other three angels are about to blow!”

## THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

As with the seals, the first four trumpets are distinguished from the last three. In this case, the first four are concerned with natural events and the last three with people. The trumpets are distinguished from the seals in that the trumpets are God’s intervention rather than the world’s actions upon itself. These trumpets do not describe the final judgment. In each case, only part of the world is affected. To John’s original readers, though, they are reminders that God will indeed deal with sin.

- **THE FIRST TRUMPET (8:6-7):** The angels prepare to blow the trumpets, but only the first trumpet is sounded, followed by hail and fire mixed with blood. One-third of the earth is burned. In this case, *one-third* may not mean an exact amount, but instead may be a way of saying that a portion of the earth was affected, but not the majority.

### Critical Observation

Each of John’s visions stands somewhat on its own. An example is the first trumpet (8:7), in which one-third of the grass and trees are destroyed, Then in the account of the fifth trumpet, God commands that the grass not be destroyed (9:4). Revelation is best understood when it is read as a series of apocalyptic visions each standing on its own. While similar elements may appear in the visions, they are not meant to be treated as scientific facts that should be paralleled and measured. This is a vision, much like a dream—truth told in images for a first century audience. These visions communicate over and over, in a variety of ways, that God will deal with sin in the end.

- **The Second Trumpet (8:8-9):** At the blowing of the second trumpet, something like a mountain of fire is thrown into the sea. We are not told exactly who did the throwing. This time a third of the sea becomes blood and a third of the creatures and ships are destroyed. This event is more than just pollution of the water, since ships are destroyed and sea life dies.
- **The Third Trumpet (8:10-11):** At the blowing of the third trumpet, a star falls from the sky and lands on a third of the rivers and springs, making a third of the water poisonous. The plant with the same name as the star, *Wormwood*, is a bitter plant often used as a metaphor for something bitter to the taste, though it is not usually considered a poison.
- **The Fourth Trumpet (8:12):** The fourth angel’s trumpet sound struck a third of the sun, moon, and stars. This affects the structure of the universe. Everything from the remaining plant life and even the tides in the oceans would be changed. Certainly, as described, the natural amount of daylight would be altered.

Thus far, the attacks have dealt with only the earth and have only indirectly affected human population. With each phenomenon, God is removing hiding places and protection in nature.

After the first four trumpets and judgments, a flying eagle proclaims three troubles, perhaps in light of the three trumpets yet to blow (8:13). This is a curse and a proclamation of things to come. The appearance of the eagle (which may mean one of several kinds of birds of prey, as the term was used in the first century) provides an interlude in the trumpets.

## REVELATION 9

### THE DAY OF THE LORD

More Trumpets and the First Trouble	9:1-11
The Last Trumpet and the Second Trouble	9:12-21

#### Setting Up the Section

Just as the last three seals pertain to things of heaven rather than earth, the last three trumpets deal with the realm of the supernatural—in this case, though, it's the demonic rather than angelic realm.

**Revelation 9:1-11** Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fall from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the deep hole that leads to the bottomless pit. <sup>2</sup> Then it opened up the hole that leads to the bottomless pit, and smoke came up from the hole like smoke from a big furnace. Then the sun and sky became dark because of the smoke from the hole. <sup>3</sup> Then locusts came down to the earth out of the smoke, and they were given the power to sting like scorpions. <sup>4</sup> They were told not to harm the grass on the earth or any plant or tree. They could harm only the people who did not have the sign of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> These locusts were not given the power to kill anyone, but to cause pain to the people for five months. And the pain they felt was like the pain a scorpion gives when it stings someone. <sup>6</sup> During those days people will look for a way to die, but they will not find it. They will want to die, but death will run away from them. <sup>7</sup> The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore what looked like crowns of gold, and their faces looked like human faces. <sup>8</sup> Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. <sup>9</sup> Their chests looked like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the noise of many horses and chariots hurrying into battle. <sup>10</sup> The locusts had tails with stingers like scorpions, and in their tails was their power to hurt people for five months. <sup>11</sup> The locusts had a king who was the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in the Hebrew language is Abaddon and in the Greek language is Apollyon.

#### MORE TRUMPETS AND THE FIRST TROUBLE

**The Fifth Trumpet and the First Trouble (9:1):** It was common for people or angels to be referred to as stars in Jewish imagery (Isaiah 14:12). Therefore, John is likely using a common image for his day of an angel of some kind. The angel descends to the earth and receives a key to the opening of the bottomless pit, which evidently has a narrow opening that then widens beyond the entrance (9:2).

#### Demystifying Revelation

The bottomless pit, or abyss, is a place that is referenced nine times in the scriptures, seven of which are in the book of Revelation. The pit seems to be a place where God holds all of those who have died without faith. The glories of heaven are not fully open, and neither are the tortures of hell. The abyss is a place where people exist until the final judgment.

The smoke from the bottomless pit is enough to block out the remaining light of the sun (8:12; 9:2). In addition, locusts poured from it. The locusts here represent the judgment of God just as they did in

the plagues in Egypt and in the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:25). In this case, though, the locusts are prohibited from plant life, which is their typical food source. These locusts were given power, presumably by God, to sting like scorpions. They could go after, but not kill, people without God's seal (9:5). The effects would be torturous to the point that those affected would wish to die.

The five-month period of torment may correspond to the typical life span of the locust, or it may simply be a way to communicate that the torment would last a few months. This is the way the number five is used elsewhere in scripture (Acts 20:6; 24:1; Revelation 9:5).

Verses 7-11 describe the locusts. The description combines human and animal features and reveals the locusts to be more like demons than insects. The importance of the comparison to horses is not that the demons looked like horses, but that they were prepared for battle like horses. This is to say that they were determined to accomplish the task.

In the same way, John's mention of crowns is not to say that the beings wear crowns, but that they resemble something wearing crowns. The crowns here may symbolize the authority to act and to get things done. The teeth like lion's teeth reveal more about the fierceness of the creatures than their physical description. And the breastplates reveal how well-protected the beings are. The loud noise made by their wings reveals their great number (9:7-9).

### Critical Observation

Verse 11 is a difficult verse to understand because it is the only reference to this king—called the angel of the bottomless pit. This is either referring to the fact that there is one who will control these creatures and they will be carrying out a mission on earth, or it is a cultural issue emerging that is contemporary to John's day.

At the time John was writing this letter, the emperor of Rome liked to think of himself as a reincarnated form of the god Apollo. Interestingly, Apollo was known as the god over the locusts. The locusts in this verse are from the underworld, and thus they are the power of evil being used by God, a message that would be relevant to John's readers. Both names listed in verse 11, *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, can be translated as "destruction."

## THE LAST TRUMPET AND THE SECOND TROUBLE

**Revelation 9:12-21** The first trouble is past; there are still two other troubles that will come. <sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns on the golden altar that is before God. <sup>14</sup> The voice said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Free the four angels who are tied at the great river Euphrates." <sup>15</sup> And they let loose the four angels who had been kept ready for this hour and day and month and year so they could kill a third of all people on the earth. <sup>16</sup> I heard how many troops on horses were in their army—two hundred million. <sup>17</sup> The horses and their riders I saw in the vision looked like this: They had breastplates that were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow like sulfur. The heads of the horses looked like heads of lions, with fire, smoke, and sulfur coming out of their mouths. <sup>18</sup> A third of all the people on earth were killed by these three terrible disasters coming out of the horses' mouths: the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur. <sup>19</sup> The horses' power was in their mouths and in their tails; their tails were like snakes with heads, and with them they hurt people. <sup>20</sup> The other people who were not killed by these terrible disasters still did not change their hearts and turn away from what they had made with their own hands. They did not stop worshiping demons and

**idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—things that cannot see or hear or walk. <sup>21</sup> These people did not change their hearts and turn away from murder or evil magic, from their sexual sins or stealing.**

Since the appearance of the eagle announcing the three troubles in 8:13, the trumpets have been identified as troubles (9:12). What is identified as the second trouble here is also the sixth trumpet.

The voice that follows the sixth trumpet comes from the horns on the golden altar before God (9:13). This is probably the same altar mentioned in 8:3, the place where the prayers of the saints have registered with God.

The four angels who are bound at the Euphrates River are the angels that God has set aside to pour out His wrath on the earth. They have not been able to perform their designed purpose until this moment in time (9:14-15).

### **Demystifying Revelation**

The river Euphrates was the easternmost border of the Roman Empire. The army that occupied this part of the empire was the Parthian army, which was ready to attack at any moment. This army was feared by the people, and this description would have suggested fear in the minds of John's readers.

These angels are going to release an army on the earth to destroy a third of the population—millions of people.

When John claims there are two hundred million soldiers on horseback, this is probably an actual number (9:16). John is not estimating—he had been told the number.

John describes his vision in verses 17-19. It is not certain whether he is describing three different colors of breastplates or breastplates that are each three colors. However, the description of the horses—heads like lions, tails like snakes—expresses the ferocity and danger of this army. These are warriors bent on total destruction.

According to verses 18-19, it seems the riders do not play any active part in the destruction of the people; it is the horses who breathe the fire, smoke, and sulfur on the people. Fire, smoke, and sulfur represent three different, yet destructive, plagues.

Verse 20 transitions from the plight of the cavalry to a description of those who survived the plagues. Notice that John's description of the idols underscores the terrible reality that even in light of the destruction around them at the hand of God, these people failed to repent. His list of their sins in verse 21 doesn't seem to be in a specific order, and they don't connect with another specific list in the scriptures—murders, magic, sexual sins, and stealing.

## REVELATION 10

### THE MESSENGER, THE MESSAGE, AND A MEAL

The Messenger	10:1-3
The Message	10:4-7
The Meal	10:8-11

#### Setting Up the Section

Just as there was a pause between the sixth and the seventh seal, there is now a pause between the sixth and seventh trumpet. This pause is composed of two main sections: First an angel and a little book, then two witnesses come to declare the glory and wrath of God.

The section provides a specific warning. God has judged people in general. Now He will judge the leaders of the world system that sets its agenda against God.

#### THE MESSENGER

**Revelation 10:1-3 Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven dressed in a cloud with a rainbow over his head. His face was like the sun, and his legs were like pillars of fire. <sup>2</sup> The angel was holding a small scroll open in his hand. He put his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. <sup>3</sup> Then he shouted loudly like the roaring of a lion. And when he shouted, the voices of seven thunders spoke.**

Verse 1 describes an angel coming down from heaven (10:1). Clouds, like those he is dressed or wrapped in, sometimes symbolize those coming back to earth from heaven to carry out a task for God.

The rainbow appearing above his head signifies that he is going to bring judgment and salvation. In the Old Testament, the rainbow is a sign that God would never again flood the earth (Genesis 9:12-16). Yet this sign is meant to remind people of how God saved and judged people at the same moment.

The face of this angel is like the sun, which means that he is a source of power, and his legs are like pillars of fire, which means he has the power of judgment within him.

The angel holds a small scroll (10:2). This scroll is open, which means that what is on the scroll is about to be read and executed. The fact that the angel places one foot on the sea and the other foot on the land shows that he has authority over the entire earth. What he is about to announce is meant for everyone in the world.

The imagery of thunder speaking is also used in Psalm 29:3 to describe the voice of God. Many believe that the thunder in this passage is the Lord speaking, and He repeats Himself seven times, though that information is not given definitively in verse 3.

## THE MESSAGE

**Revelation 10:4-7** When the seven thunders spoke, I started to write. But I heard a voice from heaven say, “Keep hidden what the seven thunders said, and do not write them down.” <sup>5</sup> Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven, <sup>6</sup> and he made a promise by the power of the One who lives forever and ever. He is the One who made the skies and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it. The angel promised, “There will be no more waiting! <sup>7</sup> In the days when the seventh angel is ready to blow his trumpet, God’s secret will be finished. This secret is the Good News God told to his servants, the prophets.”

John understood the words spoken by the seven sounds of thunder and intended to write them down, but he is instructed not to do so (10:4).

### Take It Home

One of the gifts of this passage is the realization that God has not given us all the information. There is always the temptation to take the information in Revelation and decide how God will act and when certain events will occur. But we are not given all that knowledge or understanding. God keeps mysteries for Himself and He will reveal them in His own time.

The angel in verse 5 is identified as the same angel as in verse 2, who has authority over the land and the sea. He swears an oath by raising his right hand, a gesture common in both ancient and contemporary days. His oath is that when the seventh trumpet is blown—when all is done that needs to be done—there will be no delay before the fulfillment of the mystery of God (10:6).

The seventh trumpet mentioned in verse 7 is not actually blown until 11:15. What begins here is not a description of the chronological events in between the sixth and seventh trumpets, but is instead more like parenthetical information. John is not in control of his vision. Instead, he writes it down as he experiences it.

The “God’s secret” (10:7) is usually understood to refer to the gospel message, though it could have an even broader meaning than that. The prophets referenced here are not necessarily confined to the Old Testament prophets, but to those who have spoken God’s truth, including the gospel message.

### Critical Observation

While John eating the scroll is an unusual request by contemporary standards, it is not without precedent in the scriptures. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet himself is asked to eat a scroll (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). The idea is that eating the scroll is devouring the truth, or taking the words to heart.

## THE MEAL

**Revelation 10:8-11** Then I heard the same voice from heaven again, saying to me: “Go and take the open scroll that is in the hand of the angel that is standing on the sea and on the land.” <sup>9</sup> So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. And he said to me, “Take the scroll and eat it. It will be sour in your stomach, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” <sup>10</sup> So I took the small scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. In my mouth it tasted sweet as honey, but after I ate it, it was sour in my

**stomach. <sup>11</sup> Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.”**

When John is instructed to eat the scroll (10:9), he does as he is asked, and it changes him. The scroll tastes sweet but is bitter in his stomach. This is a fitting image of God’s commandments in the lives of His children. The picture here is that the commands of God are always good, and they are always something that the child of God can rejoice in. But at the same time, these words are powerful, and they will be difficult to wrestle with because they tell of the wrath of God. This is the twofold nature of God’s words.

This is the first time in these visions that John is a participant in the experience in heaven rather than simply an observer. As a participant, John has the opportunity to experience fully how God is going to work on and in this earth. Verse 11 explains why John has been asked to participate—he is to prophesy.

Also, up until this point, the judgment of God has not been directed toward anyone in particular, just humanity in general. Now God is using John to announce that specific judgments are on their way. The Word of God is to be in John’s heart so that he can carry out the job God has called him to do.

## REVELATION 11

### TWO WITNESSES AND ONE LAST TRUMPET

The Measuring	11:1-2
The Messengers	11:3-14
The Seventh Trumpet	11:15-19

#### Setting Up the Section

In this chapter we will see a measuring of the temple and two witnesses emerging to give testimony. As with much of Revelation, these events can be interpreted either literally or symbolically. If taken symbolically, many interpret the measuring of the temple to reflect a description of the emerging Christian church based on the familiar temple of Jerusalem. Similarly, a symbolic interpretation often sees the two witnesses as a reflection of the martyrs of the church who give testimony with their lives, rather than two specific men. Whichever interpretive path, this section continues the theme of God's judgment as He begins to hold the world outside of the church accountable.

#### THE MEASURING

**Revelation 11:1-2 I was given a measuring stick like a rod, and I was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the people worshiping there. <sup>2</sup> But do not measure the yard outside the temple. Leave it alone, because it has been given to those who are not God’s people. And they will trample on the holy city for forty-two months.**

In the first century, as often today, a building was measured any time it was sold. It was a means of guaranteeing a fair exchange. In this vision, John is given some type of measuring stick and is asked to measure the temple as a sign that God will take the temple back (11:1). If this were a literal temple, it would most likely refer to the temple at Jerusalem. It can also be interpreted as a reference to the church, God's redeemed, but the language is written in terms of the temple.

John is instructed not to measure the yard outside the temple (the court of the Gentiles) (11:2). This refers to the outer area of the Jewish temple, a courtyard in which non-Jews were allowed. If John's image is meant as a picture of the church, then it may be that he is speaking of Christians to be the chosen nation. There would still be an outer court for those outside of the faith, which in this case would include all nonbelievers.

Regardless of the literal or symbolic interpretation, John outlines a forty- two-month period of time (three and one-half years) in which those outside of the Christian faith would trample God's city. A connection can be drawn to other scriptures in which a time period of forty-two months is outlined (Daniel 7:25, “time, times and a half a time” equals a year, two years, and one-half a year). This time frame comes into play in several places in Revelation as well. For John's readers, a time frame in itself is significant. It speaks to the fact that their suffering will not go on indefinitely. There will be an end to the persecution of God's people.

## THE MESSENGERS

**Revelation 11:3-14** And I will give power to my two witnesses to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, and they will be dressed in rough cloth to show their sadness.”<sup>4</sup> These two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.<sup>5</sup> And if anyone tries to hurt them, fire comes from their mouths and kills their enemies. And if anyone tries to hurt them in whatever way, in that same way that person will die.<sup>6</sup> These witnesses have the power to stop the sky from raining during the time they are prophesying. And they have power to make the waters become blood, and they have power to send every kind of trouble to the earth as many times as they want.<sup>7</sup> When the two witnesses have finished telling their message, the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit will fight a war against them. He will defeat them and kill them.<sup>8</sup> The bodies of the two witnesses will lie in the street of the great city where the Lord was killed. This city is named Sodom and Egypt, which has a spiritual meaning.<sup>9</sup> Those from every race of people, tribe, language, and nation will look at the bodies of the two witnesses for three and one-half days, and they will refuse to bury them.<sup>10</sup> People who live on the earth will rejoice and be happy because these two are dead. They will send each other gifts, because these two prophets brought much suffering to those who live on the earth.<sup>11</sup> But after three and one-half days, God put the breath of life into the two prophets again. They stood on their feet, and everyone who saw them became very afraid.<sup>12</sup> Then the two prophets heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Come up here!” And they went up into heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched.<sup>13</sup> In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city was destroyed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and those who did not die were very afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.<sup>14</sup> The second trouble is finished. Pay attention: The third trouble is coming soon.

While the identities are not revealed, God will send two witnesses in the midst of the persecution. In verse 3, the time period is defined in terms of days but is the same amount of time as the forty-two months mentioned in verse 2.

The attitude of the witnesses is reflected in the clothes that they will wear—sackcloth, the clothes of mourning. This symbolizes the sorrow and grief that are about to come to the earth.

Some believe the witnesses are simply symbols that represent believers. Others believe that these two are Moses and Elijah. Still others think the witnesses are apostles, martyrs, or other prophets. The significance of the number of witnesses may relate to the Old Testament command that two witnesses must confirm a story in order for it to be considered reliable. The fact that there are two witnesses here reflects the fact that whoever these witnesses are, their testimony is enough to prove God’s truth reliable.

Verse 4 offers a description taken from Zechariah 4:3, 11-14. While there is only one lampstand in the Zechariah passage and two in John’s description, the point remains that the lampstands are connected directly to olive trees. This means there will be an endless supply of oil and the lamps will never burn out. This could mean that the two witnesses bear testimony to an endless supply of life. While their identity is not known, it is evident they are special people who have been prophesied in the Old Testament as the ones to bring life to a dead Israel.

Because it is God’s will that these men preach the Word of God, they will have the ability to protect themselves from any attack (11:5-6). They can prevent rain and perform miracles, if necessary, like

turning water to blood and causing plagues. These references bring to mind Moses and Elijah who exhibited these types of miracles (Exodus 7:19-20; 1 Kings 17:1).

For the two witnesses, this ability to protect themselves is temporary. When their job is done, they are killed by what is referred to as “the beast” from the bottomless pit (11:7-8). The beast is a figure that is frequently seen in the last half of Revelation. It is empowered by Satan and filled with evil.

For those who interpret Revelation in a more literal sense, the killing of the prophets will happen in Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified. Jerusalem is also referred to as Sodom and Egypt, one a city famous for immorality and the other a country known for holding God’s people in bondage. So those who interpret Revelation figuratively see this city as representative of the world’s cities in general.

The fact that the corpses lay for three and a half days without being buried is an act of shame and triumph by those who were glad of their deaths (11:9). Due to the customs of the day, John’s original readers would have felt the pain of this disgrace of no proper burial.

The general population rejoices that these two witnesses are dead (11:10). Because of the message they had and the power that was at their disposal, the forty-two months that they were on the earth were horrible for the unrepentant. Therefore, to those unrepentant, their deaths are almost like a holiday—people exchange gifts and celebrate. But this only happens for three and a half days.

Then the witnesses come back to life. First, God breathes life into them; then He calls them to heaven (11:11-12). All those watching are overcome by fear. In a sense, this is a review of the gospel—new life and the conquering of death. While we can’t be sure if everyone in the crowd watching hears God call out, or if just the two witnesses hear His voice, it is obvious to everyone that those who were dead have found new life.

Verses 13-14 draw this trouble to an end. Those who had celebrated the death of the two witnesses have now experienced an earthquake that collapses part of the city and kills seven thousand. The unrepentant now honor God’s power and authority. The third trouble associated with the seventh and final trumpet is on the way.

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

**Revelation 11:15-19** Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: “The power to rule the world now belongs to our Lord and his Christ, and he will rule forever and ever.” <sup>16</sup> Then the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, bowed down on their faces and worshiped God. <sup>17</sup> They said: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have used your great power and have begun to rule! <sup>18</sup> The people of the world were angry, but your anger has come. The time has come to judge the dead, and to reward your servants the prophets and your holy people, all who respect you, great and small. The time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth!” <sup>19</sup> Then God’s temple in heaven was opened. The Ark that holds the agreement God gave to his people could be seen in his temple. Then there were flashes of lightning, noises, thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

The seventh trumpet is not just one short event; it actually involves the rest of the judgment of God and then the final end of the age with the new heaven and the new earth. It also serves as a prompt for the next series of visions recorded by John.

The seventh angel blows the seventh trumpet, and instead of immediate destruction, there is loud praise from voices in heaven (11:15). The reference to loud voices implies a group, but we are not told the specific identity of the group. Perhaps it is everyone who is in heaven. The focus of this praise is this: The kingdom of this world has become Jesus' kingdom.

The twenty-four elders, not mentioned since the last of the seals (7:11), worship God and give thanks because:

- 1) He has begun to reign on earth.
- 2) His anger has punished the rebellious nations. All of the kings that try to rule the world challenge God, and therefore God defends His honor by judging the nations.
- 3) He has judged the living and the dead. God gives each person the reward he or she deserves (11:17-18).

The people in heaven are seeing God bring about the final day of judgment. For this they worship the Lord.

Verse 19 contains meaningful Old Testament Jewish imagery. The temple of heaven opens up and the ark of the covenant appears. In the Old Testament, the ark was the symbol of God's presence and God's covenant with humankind. In the Old Testament tabernacle, and in the temple of that day, the ark resided in the innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, sealed off from everyone except the high priest. Here God is allowing people into the real Holy of Holies and is, in essence, saying that His covenant is complete.

The thunder, lightning, and hail are reminders of the power of God that was present the first time He revealed His covenant with the children of Israel, unveiling the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20).

### **Take It Home**

When the trumpet blows, the people praise God because they know that He is now bringing all things to their appointed end and the kingdom of heaven to its appointed beginning. This is great news and worth praising God over. At this point there is a shift in John's visions from heaven to the kingdom of the earth and the fate of Satan.

For John's original readers, the idea of God establishing a place where He alone rules and justice is complete is a reason to hope. It is the same for contemporary culture. Amid the imagery and symbolism of Revelation is the message that God is moving toward a specific end and that His children are cared for within that plan, even though temporary suffering is a reality.

## REVELATION 12

### THE SEVEN SIGNS

The Woman and the Dragon	12:1-6
A Battle with the Enemy	12:7-17

#### Setting Up the Section

Chapter 12 begins a series of seven visions that will continue into chapter 14. These visions do not have a repeating symbol, like the seven seals or seven trumpets. But they are similar in that they flesh out the conflict between God and His church and the forces of evil that would seek to destroy both.

### THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

**Revelation 12:1-6** And then a great wonder appeared in heaven: A woman was clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars was on her head. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and cried out with pain, because she was about to give birth. <sup>3</sup> Then another wonder appeared in heaven: There was a giant red dragon with seven heads and seven crowns on each head. He also had ten horns. <sup>4</sup> His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and threw them down to the earth. He stood in front of the woman who was ready to give birth so he could eat her baby as soon as it was born. <sup>5</sup> Then the woman gave birth to a son who will rule all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was taken up to God and to his throne. <sup>6</sup> The woman ran away into the desert to a place God prepared for her where she would be taken care of for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

In the first of the seven signs, a woman is described as a picture of Israel (12:1-2). She has been called by God and is clothed with the sun, which means she is reflecting the power of God. The moon is under her feet, which indicates that she is the nation God has marked as special, and she has twelve crowns that correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. She is pregnant with a man child, which is the picture of the Messiah. Her labor pains represent the struggles that were a part of the life of Israel.

#### Demystifying Revelation

For John there is always a connection between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. In his theology, the church has become God's chosen nation. Here in chapter 12, the image of the woman represents Israel, but later in Revelation a woman will represent the church. Understanding John's visions requires that his readers stay sensitive to the fact that images can sometimes maintain their meanings between visions, but at other times the same image can carry a different message.

The next sign John sees is that of a dragon, not an uncommon concept in ancient literature (12:3). This dragon is red, the symbol of blood. This fits the image of Satan—he is a murderer. He seeks to kill and devour.

The dragon has seven heads. Seven is a number that symbolizes perfection or completion. This many heads may imply that the evil one is all over the world. In other words, his evil is everywhere. On each head are seven crowns. These crowns are not merely the wreaths worn by the victor of a

contest; they are the crowns of royalty and symbolize the dragon's ability to rule. Whatever authority the dragon has, though, is limited and assigned by God. God has allowed it.

In addition to the seven heads, there are also ten horns, which in the most basic sense imply great strength. Some interpreters understand the ten horns to represent the ten nations that will rule under the Antichrist during the final days. Others believe the ten horns represent the leaders or rulers that have been a tool of Satan to attempt to oppose the Messiah.

The dragon's tail sweeps away one-third of the stars (12:4). Some see this as a reference to Satan taking one-third of the angels with him when he fell from heaven. Others simply think it represents a show of power by the dragon. He has only one goal in mind in this particular vision, and that is to destroy the child, an image of the Messiah.

In verse 5, the Messiah arrives on the earth in order to rule with an iron rod. This is not a picture of an oppressive rule as much as it is a firm hand in the power of a king. The child is immediately caught up into heaven, or He ascends into heaven. This ascension means that the Son is waiting for the day when He will rule.

### **Critical Observation**

Some question the fact that John's vision includes this obvious reference to Jesus' birth, cutting directly to the ascension without any reference to His ministry or death and resurrection. But there is no explanation given here. It is important to remember, though, that the purpose of this section is to give hope to the church by highlighting God's power over Satan rather than to give a review of Jesus' life.

In verse 6, the 1,260 days, or three and one half years, show up again (11:1-3). In this case, the woman, a picture of Israel, hides for three and a half years. She hides in a place that has been prepared by God in order for her to be cared for. Satan has power, but he cannot oppose the plan of God.

### **Take It Home**

What do we see in this text? We see that God is finally going to bring an end to the delegated and defeated power of Satan on this earth

What do we learn from this? We learn that Satan has some limited power and we must be careful dealing with him. Also we see that his goal is to attack Jesus but he cannot win, because God still has control over him

## **A BATTLE WITH THE ENEMY**

**Revelation 12:7-17** Then there was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But the dragon was not strong enough, and he and his angels lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The giant dragon was thrown down out of heaven. (He is that old snake called the devil or Satan, who tricks the whole world.) The dragon with his angels was thrown down to the earth. <sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: "The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have now come. The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accused them day and night before our God, has been thrown

down. <sup>11</sup> And our brothers and sisters defeated him by the blood of the Lamb's death and by the message they preached. They did not love their lives so much that they were afraid of death. <sup>12</sup> So rejoice, you heavens and all who live there! But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you! He is filled with anger, because he knows he does not have much time." <sup>13</sup> When the dragon saw he had been thrown down to the earth, he hunted for the woman who had given birth to the son. <sup>14</sup> But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. There she would be taken care of for three and one-half years, away from the snake. <sup>15</sup> Then the snake poured water out of its mouth like a river toward the woman so the flood would carry her away. <sup>16</sup> But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon was very angry at the woman, and he went off to make war against all her other children—those who obey God's commands and who have the message Jesus taught.

Verses 7-8 describe the battle between Satan, the dragon, and Michael. Michael is the angel who was given to Israel to protect her as a nation and as a people (Daniel 12:1). Thus, this battle can be understood as a direct attack by Satan on Israel.

Both Michael's and the dragon's armies are referred to as angels, a name that simply means "messenger" (12:7).

The reality is that Satan is not strong enough to overtake Michael. The original readers of this letter would find great hope in this description. Without this kind of encouragement, their suffering could push them into thinking that Satan was finally going to do away with not only Israel, but all of the people of God.

According to verse 9, at the end of the war Satan is thrown out along with all of his army. The idea here is that God stops Satan from ever attacking again. In verse 9, John uses several of Satan's designated names:

- *Snake*—the first term used to describe Satan (Genesis 3:1)
- Satan—accuser, adversary (Job 1:6)
- *Devil*—deceiver, slanderer (Matthew 4:1)

After this final expulsion from heaven, there is an announcement: Salvation—the power and the kingdom of God, as well as the authority of Jesus Christ—has come. Satan is finally prevented from ever entering heaven for the purpose of interrupting the plan of God. This final expulsion provides a great outburst of praise in heaven (12:10-12).

Notice that this announcement is spoken in first person plural—the accuser of *our* brothers and sisters. It is probably proclaimed by a group of angels, but any of the heavenly members in the vision could be the source.

According to verse 11, the people's power to overcome Satan is found in three things:

- 1) *The blood of Jesus*. It was the death of Jesus that took the power of death away from all those who place their faith in Jesus alone.

- 2) *The word of their testimony.* The people continued to proclaim Jesus no matter the consequences. The proclamation of the gospel is the power that will see Satan defeated.
- 3) *Not loving this life over the next* Satan uses death as a means to intimidate people into denying Jesus. Nevertheless, the saints who deal with the complete onslaught of Satan realize that their only hope is to proclaim Christ, no matter the cost.

Verse 12 contains an announcement of trouble to the people of earth, warning them that Satan is now truly a being with nothing to lose. He knows his final defeat is simply a matter of time (12:12). The heavens are rejoicing because Satan is cast out forever, and the believers know how to handle him. The rest of the world, however, will have to endure his anger for a short while. This will be a bad time on earth. But these days will not go unpunished.

As the vision continues in verse 13, when Satan realizes that he can't reach the child, he goes after the woman. In other words, Satan sets out to persecute Israel. He surely knows that he will not defeat her, but he can inflict pain and suffering.

In verse 14 God provides divine protection for Israel. The protection is found in the symbolic picture of an eagle. The eagle has large wings and is strong enough to carry the people of God. This image is reminiscent of Exodus 19:4, a description of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

So not all of Israel is destroyed. Some are protected for the three and one-half years ("time, times and half a time"). This would be the second part of the three and a half years when Satan is allowed to unleash his fury.

At the end of verse 14, Satan is referred to as the snake rather than the dragon. He has been referred to as the snake in verse 9, so there is little doubt that the snake and the dragon are one and the same.

Two more attempts are made by Satan, the dragon. First, he spits floodwaters to sweep the woman away from her wilderness safe house, but the earth swallows the floodwaters (12:15-16). Then, when he is unable to attack, he goes after her children. In other words, he turns on the church (12:17).

## REVELATION 13

### THE ANTICHRIST AND THE FALSE PROPHET

The Beast's Ancestry, Authority, and Adoration	13:1-4
The Beast's Arrogance	13:5-6
The Beast's Activities and Admirers	13:7-10
The False Prophet's Presence and Purpose	13:11-14
The False Prophet's Plan	13:15-18

#### Setting Up the Section

At this point in Revelation, we have seen the judgment of God on the earth in a general sense. This judgment has been carried out toward the earth and the people of the earth.

In chapter 10, God begins to deal directly with Satan and all those who have intentionally and directly supported his efforts to oppose Jesus. This final judgment on Satan is the reason worship breaks out at the end of chapter 11.

Chapter 12 describes the troubles of Israel (the woman), Jesus (the child of the woman), Satan (the dragon), and the church (the other children of the woman). Satan, as revealed in this chapter, has one goal—to destroy the Messiah. Because he cannot destroy the Messiah, he seeks to do away with Israel. Because he cannot do away with Israel, he goes after the church.

In chapter 13, the story line continues with a final move of Satan in trying to oppose the Messiah through a false messiah—otherwise referred to by the contemporary church as the Antichrist (Chapter 14 will show that this attempt will not be successful.) Also in chapter 13, we will see the description of the man whom the Antichrist will possess, referred to as the false prophet.

### THE BEAST'S ANCESTRY, AUTHORITY, AND ADORATION

**Revelation 13:1-4** Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, and there was a crown on each horn. A name against God was written on each head. <sup>2</sup> This beast looked like a leopard, with feet like a bear's feet and a mouth like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave the beast all of his power and his throne and great authority. <sup>3</sup> One of the heads of the beast looked as if it had been killed by a wound, but this death wound was healed. Then the whole world was amazed and followed the beast. <sup>4</sup> People worshiped the dragon because he had given his power to the beast. And they also worshiped the beast, asking, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?"

It is already established that the dragon is Satan, and he has in mind to do away with the Messiah. If he can't accomplish that, then he will do away with Israel and the church. The way in which Satan will try to do away with all three of these is found here in Revelation 13.

At the end of chapter 12, Satan is standing on the sand of the seashore. This represents Satan standing at the edge of the bottomless pit.

Basically, he is summoning the beast, the one who has been called the Antichrist. This is the offense that will cause Satan, and all who directly follow him, to be judged in a direct and painful way by God. The offense of Satan is that he offers a false messiah to the world in order to deceive and destroy.

The beast is described in verse 1 as having ten horns and seven heads (as does Satan, the dragon, in 12:3), with crowns on its horns. Typically, the horns on an animal represent the strength of that animal to attack and defend. There are also ruling crowns, but they are on the horns of the beast rather than the heads. Some believe each of these crowns represents nations or kingdoms that will make up his ruling empire.

On each of the beast's multiple heads is written a blasphemous name (a name against God). This may mean seven different names or the same name on each head. This beast is a climax of all that is evil in this world.

In verse 2, we find a description of the power and authority that is given to the beast. He is described in terms of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. Each of these animals was used by governments to describe their power. The leopard describes swiftness in battle, the bear is the strength and stability that comes with enough power, and the lion describes the fighting power of a nation.

While the beast is described as having seven heads, he has only one mouth ("like a lion's,"). This is a reminder that John is describing a vision. His interest is not in making all the visual pieces fit, but rather in describing them and allowing them to flesh out the truth. Some interpret the beast in John's writing to represent the Roman leadership in the first century. They would see the multiple heads as the Roman emperors, citing the myth that Nero was too evil to die and would therefore be resurrected. They connect this myth with the wounded head described in verse 3.

This beast will have a consuming power that could be used to overrun the world—and all the power is given to him by Satan. The territory Satan has been allowed (the earth) will be given to the beast so he will be able to rule the entire world without much restraint. The wickedness that is on the earth will rule all at once.

The man the beast represents—often referred to as the Antichrist—will have absolute authority over the entire world. It is delegated authority in the sense that God could stop it at any point, but nevertheless, it is a moment in time when evil will rule. God is centralizing all of the wickedness into one place to deal with it completely.

According to verse 3, one of the beast's heads has been fatally wounded, then healed, or brought back to life. This adds to his popularity. He is seen as supernatural, and this causes people to be deceived into following him. In the remainder of John's description of the beast, this head that has been restored becomes his calling card.

The people will begin to ascribe to him and to Satan the worship due to God. This is the ultimate in blasphemy. The question, "Who is like the beast?" may be a satiric reference to Psalm 35:10, "Lord, who is like you?", highlighting this blasphemous worship.

## **THE BEAST'S ARROGANCE**

**Revelation 13:5-6 The beast was allowed to say proud words and words against God, and it was allowed to use its power for forty-two months. <sup>6</sup> It used its mouth to speak**

**against God, against God's name, against the place where God lives, and against all those who live in heaven.**

The beast has been given everything he has. In other words, he is still bound to the ultimate sovereign control of God. There is nothing in this man that God has not allowed and that God cannot take away.

He is allowed to rule for forty-two months, the now familiar amount of time for several significant events in Revelation—three and one-half years (11:2; 13:5).

The pride of this man goes beyond the pride that most powerful leaders struggle with from time to time. This man considers himself to be God (13:5). He believes he possesses all the authority of God, and he acts on that belief by blaspheming God and all who dwell in heaven with Him (13:6).

### **Critical Observation**

Keep in mind that one of the struggles for John's readers in their political climate was the pressure to worship the emperor as a god. This emperor worship was seen as blasphemy. This passage would likely have touched on that hot-button issue in their minds.

## **THE BEAST'S ACTIVITIES AND ADMIRERS**

**Revelation 13:7-10 It was given power to make war against God's holy people and to defeat them. It was given power over every tribe, people, language, and nation. <sup>8</sup> And all who live on earth will worship the beast—all the people since the beginning of the world whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb is the One who was killed. <sup>9</sup> Anyone who has ears should listen: <sup>10</sup> If you are to be a prisoner, then you will be a prisoner. If you are to be killed with the sword, then you will be killed with the sword. This means that God's holy people must have patience and faith.**

This man, described by the image of the beast, is more than talk; he also acts in a deadly and powerful manner. The focus of his attack are believers in the one true God. All of the saints present on earth will be in his radar, and if he finds them, he will kill them. The situation John describes in verse 7 is such that, if it continues, there will be no believers left on the earth.

According to verse 8, this beast rules the world. The beast is the fulfillment of evil, the ultimate fulfillment of every evil power that has existed. The focus in verse 8 is that those who are not believers will worship the beast. Those who are true believers will not, for they will see that he is not the Messiah. The beast is the ultimate moment of separation; he will be the dividing rod of humanity. The true believers will not submit, and the world will.

Verse 9 contains a common New Testament warning: "Anyone who has ears should listen." It is used fifteen times in the New Testament. It means that if anyone understands the real meaning, he or she must respond. Some will read this and not get the message. Others will understand the message, and it will change them.

Verse 10 contains instructions. Basically, if you are marked out to be arrested, then go. Do not resist. If you are to be killed, do not fight back. Submit to what happens. There is a day of reckoning coming, and you are to wait for that day. The idea is to leave the fighting to God. By trusting in the faithfulness of God to bring about retribution, you will persevere.

## THE FALSE PROPHET'S PRESENCE AND PURPOSE

**Revelation 13:11-14** Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. <sup>12</sup> This beast stands before the first beast and uses the same power the first beast has. By this power it makes everyone living on earth worship the first beast, who had the death wound that was healed. <sup>13</sup> And the second beast does great miracles so that it even makes fire come down from heaven to earth while people are watching. <sup>14</sup> It fools those who live on earth by the miracles it has been given the power to do. It does these miracles to serve the first beast. The second beast orders people to make an idol to honor the first beast, the one that was wounded by the deadly sword but sprang to life again.

At the time the beast comes to power, another beast will rise to power with him. He will be called his prophet. This prophet's purpose is to make sure that everyone worships the beast and to ensure that all humans are sealed with the mark of the beast. This prophet is a critical part of the attack of Satan.

Some believe that this second beast will be a nation or a government. But that theory is difficult to accept because the Greek says *another* beast (13:11). The way it is constructed represents another of the same kind. Therefore, the most natural way to read this is that another man is on the scene performing critical works.

The first beast came out of the sea, which indicates the bottomless pit or the mysterious place of Satan. This second beast comes out of the earth, which indicates he is satanic in his power (13:11). To the first-century readers, the earth was a little less fearful than the sea. It was a picture of an evil place but not the place of hell. This would suggest that this will be an evil man but not as evil as the first.

The second beast has two horns (13:11). Horns symbolize power and sometimes nations. Interpreted as nations, this man will have the authority of two nations under him. It also may simply parallel the two witnesses who were killed and then resurrected (chapter 11). The horns on this man are the horns of a lamb, which may be a parallel of Jesus, the Lamb. This suggests that he appears gentle and meek, but that appearance is deceptive. The reason for the disguise is that his role is to get people to worship the beast, and he therefore has to be a salesman. He must make all the evil of the beast look good to humanity. Even though he will have two horns like a lamb, he will speak like a dragon—he will speak the words of Satan. He will appear harmless, but in reality, his words will be deadly.

This second beast exercises the delegated authority of the first (13:12). In application, the second beast is indwelt with the same evil power as the first, and therefore he will be given some of the responsibilities to carry out the first beast's will on the earth. All of this power is centered on one goal—to get every living being to worship the Antichrist rather than Jesus Christ.

Verse 13 offers their strategy for accomplishing this. The second beast, the false prophet, will perform miracles. These miracles will draw attention to the first beast, and particularly to the fact that the beast was wounded yet survived. In this way, the healing of the one damaged head becomes a point of tribute and worship. The main tactic is this:

The prophet gets everyone's attention with his own powers, and when he has their attention, he speaks as front man. The spin of his message? The fact that the first beast was restored to life shows his ultimate power in the world, and therefore everyone should worship him. Note that both verse 12 and verse 14 identify the first beast as having a fatal wound that was healed.

The second beast, the false prophet, will also be able to copy the prophets of the past by calling down fire from heaven (13:13). Because of these powers, he will be able to convince people that he preaches the truth, and everyone who is not a true believer will be fooled (11:14). He will encourage people to make an image of the beast so that all can worship him in their homes. In this way, he will have the entire world consumed with the first beast, the one with the restored head, the Antichrist. He will be a household word, even a way of life.

## THE FALSE PROPHET'S PLAN

**Revelation 13:15-18** The second beast was given power to give life to the idol of the first one so that the idol could speak. And the second beast was given power to command all who will not worship the image of the beast to be killed. <sup>16</sup>The second beast also forced all people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to have a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. <sup>17</sup>No one could buy or sell without this mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. <sup>18</sup>This takes wisdom. Let the one who has understanding find the meaning of the number, which is the number of a person. Its number is 666.

The prophet's plan for carrying out these tasks has two parts. The first part is supernatural, and the second part is economic.

According to verse 14, the prophet instructs people to make an image of the first beast and to put it in their homes. Then, according to verse 15, the prophet gives the image, or idol, the power to speak. The word speak is often translated "spirit." This seems to mean that not only can the image speak, but it has a spirit within it that will be watching everyone in his or her home. If anyone strays from total allegiance, that person will somehow be killed, apparently by the idol itself.

The second part of the plan—the economic part—is found in verses 16-17. The prophet will control access to the food supply of the world so that all people, no matter who they are, will look to him to gain access to food. The way to participate in the global economy will be through taking his mark. This mark is a mimic of the mark given to protect the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1. This mark will be placed on the right hand or forehead and will allow people to participate in the global economy. Without it there can be no participation, and people will starve to death.

The mark is either a name or a number. Verse 18, which reveals the number 666, opens with a call for wisdom. Wisdom is the application of the knowledge of God into real life. If Christians are wise, they are living for God and should be discerning as to who the beast really is. They must not be fooled into thinking that this is Christ reigning or that it is the advent of the kingdom of God. Instead, they must see that all of this is merely the power of a person. That is why the mark given to the people does not reflect the glory of God but instead the glory of humanity.

For centuries, people have searched for the meaning behind the numbers 666. Since numerical values were often applied to letters in the ancient world, many have looked for a name that, when converted to numbers, would equal 666. No solutions to that equation have been widely accepted. And in truth, this number may represent some symbolism that has thus far not been taken into account.

## REVELATION 14

### THE PROTECTION AND POWER OF GOD

The Protection 14:1—5

The Proclamations 14:6—13

The Harvest 14:14—20

#### Setting Up the Section

In chapter 14, we see God's response to the attack of the two beasts described in chapter 13. The beast's goal has been to stop the Messiah, destroy the Jews, and persecute the church. Here God claims His own and begins the final harvest.

#### THE PROTECTION

**Revelation 14:1-5** Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. With him were one hundred forty-four thousand people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup> And I heard a sound from heaven like the noise of flooding water and like the sound of loud thunder. The sound I heard was like people playing harps. <sup>3</sup> And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the new song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who had been bought from the earth. <sup>4</sup> These are the ones who did not do sinful things with women, because they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb every place he goes. These one hundred forty-four thousand were bought from among the people of the earth as people to be offered to God and the Lamb. <sup>5</sup> They were not guilty of telling lies; they are without fault.

God prevents the plan of the beast from coming to completion by sealing 144,000 people to keep them from being killed by the beast. He will seal them with a sign on their foreheads (14:1).

#### Demystifying Revelation

The idea around the sign on the forehead is that God is marking these individuals as being His and His alone. The marking of the forehead is an Eastern practice, both in the first century and today. A person places the mark of the god he or she serves on his or her forehead. When God marks His name on these people, He is declaring them His exclusive property.

In verses 2-3, John hears the singing of a song that sounds like rushing waters, thunder, and harps. The song is powerful and beautiful. It is sung before the throne of God, and the only people able to sing it are the 144,000 whom God purchased from the earth (7:4-8).

There are two notable things in this passage. The first is that this song is exclusive to this group of people. The second is that these people have been purchased from the earth—God has redeemed them.

### Critical Observation

Many believe the 144,000 represent a remnant of Jews brought to faith to represent the restoration of Israel. Others see this number as a symbol of completion. They see the 144,000 as a representation of all the redeemed who are now the spiritual children of Abraham—in other words, the church.

Verses 4 and 5 offer five characteristics of these worshipers:

- **Sexually Pure.** The first description is that these individuals are not married and have not allowed themselves to indulge in immoral relationships.

### Critical Observation

The New Testament does not represent sex within marriage as anything sinful, though certain vows included abstaining from sex. This description of sexual purity raises some questions about how to interpret John's comments. For those who interpret this passage symbolically, this description simply implies that this group has been spiritually faithful to God—spiritual virgins. For those who interpret it as a literal group of 144,000 Jews, this description implies that the group is all male and that they have never married.

- **Devoted to Jesus.** These individuals not only believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they are also completely devoted to obeying Him and doing His will.
- **Purchased as Firstfruits.** Firstfruits were the first of the harvest offered to God as an act of worship. Offering the firstfruits indicates that the worshiper understands that all things belong first to God. Here, these people were the firstfruits offered to God and to the Lamb, Jesus.
- **Righteous.** When the text states that no lie is found in their mouths (14:5), it means that because their hearts are righteous, their words and actions are righteous as well. To say a person speaks no lie is to say that his or her heart is governed by truth.
- **Blameless.** The final characteristic is that these Jews are blameless. This means that people live lives that are beyond reproach. To be righteous is to have a heart that is pure before God, and to be blameless means that your life is pure before the world.

## THE PROCLAMATIONS

**Revelation 14:6-13** Then I saw another angel flying high in the air. He had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. <sup>7</sup> He preached in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him praise, because the time has come for God to judge all people. So worship God who made the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the springs of water.” <sup>8</sup> Then the second angel followed the first angel and said, “Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon! She made all the nations drink the wine of the anger of her adultery.” <sup>9</sup> Then a third angel followed the first two angels, saying in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his idol and gets the beast's mark on the forehead or on the hand, <sup>10</sup> that one also will drink the wine of God's anger, which is prepared with all its strength in the cup of his anger. And that person will be put in pain with burning sulfur before the holy angels and the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke from their burning pain will rise forever and ever. There will be no rest, day or night, for those who worship the beast and his idol or who get the mark of his

name.”<sup>12</sup> This means God’s holy people must be patient. They must obey God’s commands and keep their faith in Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die from now on in the Lord.” The Spirit says, “Yes, they will rest from their hard work, and the reward of all they have done stays with them.”

In verses 6-12, John witnesses three angels each making an announcement.

**First announcement: The Gospel (14:6-7).** John sees an angel that appears in midair, or midheaven. This is the place in the sky where the sun is at high noon, the highest point in the sky. The image is that this angel will be in the center point of the sky preaching the gospel to the whole world. There are three parts to the angel’s message:

- 1) Fear God. The fear of the Lord means to treat the Lord with awe and reverence. The call is to acknowledge God’s control and power over the earth. At this time, the beast is ruling and the world is giving its respect and reverence to him. Yet the angel has stated that fear must be given to God and not to the beast.
- 2) Give God praise. To give praise to God is to announce the marvelous wonders that He has done. The glory of God is the manifestation of His attributes. To give God praise is to announce His attributes to the world.
- 3) Worship God. The beast may be manipulating the earth, but God is the *maker* of the earth. To worship God is to acknowledge who He is. In this case, He is to be acknowledged as the maker of the universe.

At this point there is another announcement; this one about the destruction that is to come.

**Second Announcement: The Destruction (14:8).** This announcement states that Babylon has been ruined. The angel is letting everyone know that God is going to do away with the beast’s empire. It will fall. Notice the terminology: This nation makes people drink the wine of the anger of her adultery. Every thought and every desire of this nation is so wicked and evil that its heart is bent on destroying God.

### Demystifying Revelation

This is the first of several times in Revelation that Babylon is mentioned (16:19; 17:5; 18:1-24). The actual city of Babylon began after the flood with the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 10:10; 11:9). Throughout the history of the Bible, Babylon represented pride, power, and wickedness. Some say that John was using Babylon here to represent Rome. Certainly, his original readers would have seen Rome as the oppressive power they were experiencing. But there is a much broader interpretation as well. Babylon can represent the pride and wickedness of humanity that opposes God.

**Third Announcement: The Punishment (14:9-12).** Punishment is awaiting those who take the mark of the beast and worship him. Keep in mind that the mark of the beast represents humanity. It is not just a number—it is a religion and a life philosophy. Those who receive the mark of the beast will experience the following punishments:

- 1) Drink of the wine of God’s anger. This refers to both His power to punish and the totality of all of His anger.

2) Be eternally tormented with fire and burning sulfur. This refers to the burning of hell. This hell is a place the angels and Jesus will be able to view.

3. Be tortured continually. Their lives will be tormented, both day and night, without rest.

The ones who keep their eyes on the way of God and the work of Jesus will avoid this torture. Those who want to stay true to the Lord during this time risk almost certain death, and for that reason John is told that those who die for the Lord are blessed.

### Take It Home

Verse 13 serves as a reminder (and encouragement) to John's readers that while they may face trials even to the point of death, what they have done with their lives will continue beyond the grave. This theme is woven throughout Revelation and serves to remind all readers of this letter that God's economy exists outside of this life. That which we do for Him is not destroyed or discredited even if it is rejected by the surrounding culture.

## THE HARVEST

**Revelation 14:14-20** Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and sitting on the white cloud was One who looked like a Son of Man. He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. <sup>15</sup> Then another angel came out of the temple and called out in a loud voice to the One who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and harvest from the earth, because the time to harvest has come, and the fruit of the earth is ripe." <sup>16</sup> So the One who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. <sup>17</sup> Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. <sup>18</sup> And then another angel, who has power over the fire, came from the altar. This angel called to the angel with the sharp sickle, saying, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the bunches of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." <sup>19</sup> Then the angel swung his sickle over the earth. He gathered the earth's grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's anger. <sup>20</sup> They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the winepress as high as horses' bridles for a distance of about one hundred eighty miles.

Some interpret John's vision in verse 14 to be a picture of Jesus bringing judgment to the earth. Others view it as an angel using his sickle to obey God's request by bringing in a harvest.

The first interpretation is based on the use of the name *Son of Man*, which often describes Jesus in the Gospels. The second interpretation focuses on the fact that this being is described as *like* a son of man (meaning like a human being), which is more similar to the description of an angel. Then verse 15 begins by referring to another angel, as if an angel had just been mentioned.

In the vision, someone like a son of man sits on a white cloud (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 14:14). He is wearing a crown and holding a sickle. Another angel then appears to announce that it is the right time for the harvest. For John's original readers, this idea of it being the right time would have been meaningful. Since they are facing persecution, they would surely be eager to know when God is going to get involved on their behalf.

In verse 16, the one who is sitting on a cloud swings his sickle over the earth and reaps a harvest in one swing. Because there is no mention of anger, those who interpret the person on the cloud as

Jesus hold that this reaping is the time when the followers of God are being brought to heaven. For those who hold that the one doing the reaping is an angel, this harvest is undefined.

Verses 17-20 describe a grape harvest. Another angel appears with a sickle, this one coming out of the temple. Then another angel, this one from the altar, joins him and offers the instructions to gather the grapes because they are ripe. When the angel gathers the grapes, he tosses them into God's winepress. This is most likely a picture of judgment, since it is a winepress of anger. We aren't told who presses the grapes, but the huge amount of blood that pours from the winepress reveals a devastating judgment.

John describes the amount of blood as deep enough to reach the height of horses' bridles stretching for nearly two hundred miles. The Greek reads 1,600 *stadia*. A stade was about 607 feet, so the distance was about 180 miles. The greatest concern here is not the exact distance; it is the immeasurable extent of God's judgment falling on those who refuse to believe.

## REVELATION 15

### PRELUDE TO DESTRUCTION

The Agents of Anger	15:1-4
The Attire of Anger	15:5-6
The Attitude of Anger	15:7-8

#### Setting Up the Section

Chapters 15-16 include another seven-fold image. In this instance, the image is of seven angels pouring out the contents of bowls. The contents contain God's anger— His final judgment.

### THE AGENTS OF ANGER

**Revelation 15:1-4** Then I saw another wonder in heaven that was great and amazing. There were seven angels bringing seven disasters. These are the last disasters, because after them, God's anger is finished. <sup>2</sup> I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. All of those who had won the victory over the beast and his idol and over the number of his name were standing by the sea of glass. They had harps that God had given them. <sup>3</sup> They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: "You do great and wonderful things, Lord God Almighty. Everything the Lord does is right and true, King of the nations. <sup>4</sup> Everyone will respect you, Lord, and will honor you. Only you are holy. All the nations will come and worship you, because the right things you have done are now made known."

This is the third time in Revelation that John introduces a sign. The first was the image of a woman that represented Israel (12:1). The second immediately followed: Satan in the form of a red dragon (12:3). This third sign is the angels of destruction with seven final plagues (disasters) (15:1). These angels hold the anger of God, which will be used to destroy Satan—it will settle the issue of sin once and for all. After this, the judgment of God will be complete.

An area that resembles a sea of glass appears in Revelation 4:6 and now here in 15:2. This time, though, it is mixed with fire. Some have speculated that this "sea" represents the evil in the world, with those who have overcome that evil standing beside it. Others have supposed that this "sea" is the same one mentioned in Revelation 4:6—a glasslike platform that surrounds the throne of God offering an image of His purity—with the added feature here of God's anger (fire).

The victorious ones described in verse 2 had endured three things:

- 1) The beast—the evil of the man himself
- 2) The beast's idol—the power of the image that would draw attention to the beast
- 3) The number of his name—the identification with his teaching and worldview

In John's vision, these conquerors are standing before the throne of God holding harps. They are prepared to worship God. The song that they sing is referred to as the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (15:3-4). While the words to this song are not the same as the song attributed to Moses in Exodus 15, it is a similar theme—deliverance and justice. Through their song, those who have avoided the anger of God are worshiping Him because He will make Himself known in the world. The next section in this prelude to final destruction is the description of the angels who will do the destroying.

## THE ATTIRE OF ANGER

**Revelation 15:5-6** After this I saw that the temple (the Tent of the Agreement) in heaven was opened. <sup>6</sup> And the seven angels bringing the seven disasters came out of the temple. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden bands tied around their chests.

In verse 5, John includes what is actually an Old Testament reference to the presence of God. The tabernacle (Tent of the Agreement) was the portable temple the Israelites used for their worship as they were traveling. The innermost part of the tabernacle, a shrine to the one true God, was the place where His Spirit resided. This innermost chamber was called the Holy of Holies, and it was a room off-limits to everyone but the high priest, and he could enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Understanding this reveals the significance of the fact that this room was now opened.

### Critical Observation

In Exodus 38:21, this inner room is referred to as the tabernacle (tent) of the Testimony because it held within it the ark of the covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. When this room is opened, as described here, it not only reveals God's presence but also His moral code. It is out of this moral code that people will be judged—it won't be an irrational or emotional moment, but a moment based on basic moral standards.

The seven angels with the seven disasters enter the main stage (15:6). Everything about the description of this scene implies that these angels and these disasters are authorized by God Himself. The angels are dressed in clean linen clothes that reflect purity. (The cleanliness of linen often refers to the holiness of the person.) The golden bands around their chests refer to the sashes worn either by priests or warriors. Both would have meaning within this context of exercising God's judgment.

## THE ATTITUDE OF ANGER

**Revelation 15:7-8** Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the anger of God, who lives forever and ever. <sup>8</sup> The temple was filled with smoke from the glory and the power of God, and no one could enter the temple until the seven disasters of the seven angels were finished.

In verse 7, the four living creatures that exist close to the throne of God give the seven angels bowls filled with judgment. The word translated *bowls* is the same word used for the bowl that contained the prayers of the saints in Revelation 5:8.

### Demystifying Revelation

Understanding the temple is a key to understanding many of the terms John uses to describe his visions in Revelation. For instance, there were bowls in the temple that served a significant role in worship. In the sin offering (Leviticus 4), blood was put in a bowl and then sprinkled and poured out during the ceremony. The bowls are used similarly here in the vision of the seven angels with seven disasters. In this case, the angels do not receive bowls with blood; instead, they receive bowls with anger and judgment. The eternal God who cannot be in the presence of sin will fill these bowls with His wrath, and they will be poured out on the earth.

Verse 8 describes the temple as filled with smoke. In the scriptures, smoke has often accompanied majesty and power. It was one of the signs of the presence of God (Exodus 40:34-35) and one of the signs of the awesome anger of God. In this closing verse of chapter 15, God's glory, all the attributes of His character and His power fill the temple, and there is no room for anything else until the disasters are poured out by the angels. All must stop and watch the mighty power of God on display.

## REVELATION 16

### THE SIX BOWLS

The First Six Bowls 16:1-12

Preparations for War 16:13-16

The Seventh Bowl 16:17-21

#### Setting Up the Section

In the judgments up to this point, there has been partial destruction. A portion of the stars, a portion of the earth, or a portion of the sea was destroyed, but not the whole of anything. In this case, total destruction will begin. All the people who worship the beast are affected, all of nature is affected, and the end is destruction.

Seven bowls of judgment are described in the upcoming chapters, and they symbolize the final events of God's punishment of those who reject Him.

### THE FIRST SIX BOWLS

**Revelation 16:1-12** Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's anger on the earth." <sup>2</sup> The first angel left and poured out his bowl on the land. Then ugly and painful sores came upon all those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his idol. <sup>3</sup> The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. <sup>4</sup> The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. <sup>5</sup> Then I heard the angel of the waters saying: "Holy One, you are the One who is and who was. You are right to decide to punish these evil people. <sup>6</sup> They have poured out the blood of your holy people and your prophets. So now you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice coming from the altar saying: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, the way you punish evil people is right and fair." <sup>8</sup> The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and he was given power to burn the people with fire. <sup>9</sup> They were burned by the great heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these disasters. But the people refused to change their hearts and lives and give glory to God. <sup>10</sup> The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and darkness covered its kingdom. People gnawed their tongues because of the pain. <sup>11</sup> They also cursed the God of heaven because of their pain and the sores they had, but they refused to change their hearts and turn away from the evil things they did. <sup>12</sup> The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates so that the water in the river was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east to come.

In verse 1, John describes a loud voice from the temple. This means that the actions that are about to take place are being driven and controlled by God directly. In the same way, the judgments that are about to fall are falling upon those who have directly scorned God. For these people, following the beast is a conscious attack against God.

#### Critical Observation

Isaiah 66:1-6 has a warning for Israel. The warning is to any of the Jews who refuse to accept the message of the Lord and instead serve the sin of the world. That message is simply that the Lord will

call out from heaven and kill the rebels. Isaiah 66:6 describes the sound of the Lord destroying people.

This points out that God the Father is the One who will avenge His honor and name. Thus, in the following verses in Revelation, we see Him shouting from heaven about the coming anger. God made a promise that He would destroy the dragon/serpent and its power over the earth in Genesis 3:14-15. At the cross, the power of sin had been broken in the lives of those who call out to God by faith. But still, God plans on removing the power of evil from the earth altogether.

**The First Bowl** (16:2): The first bowl is a physical attack against all the people who worship the beast. This anger is not just anger; it is actual punishment in the form of pain—ugly and painful sores. This attack will leave those who worship the beast useless. Then, once those who are opposed to God are out of commission and the beast is unable to help them, they are available to watch the judgment of God fall upon the earth.

**The Second Bowl** (16:3). Not only do the people get sores, but the water is turned to blood, much as it had been in the famous plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7:17-21). Earlier in Revelation, during the second trumpet (8:8-9) the water was turned to blood, but this is a little different. In this case, *all* the water of the world is turned to blood, which means that life can no longer be sustained. Also, this is the blood of a dead man, meaning the blood has already coagulated. It is thick and stale and useless. As a result, all the creatures of the sea die. Not only has the water supply ended, but also a major source of food.

God has made the people useless and in agonizing pain. Now the water supply is corrupted and so, too, all the life that depended upon it. Any hope of survival is shrinking.

**The Third Bowl** (16:4-7). When the third bowl is poured out by the angel, the rest of the water supply is affected—the rivers and the streams. There is nothing to drink. When this happens, an angel offers up a word of praise, but it is praise for the justice. As this angel expresses it, God’s punishment has been justly poured out on those who shed the blood of God’s followers and even opposed God Himself.

The “angel of the waters” mentioned in verse 5, the one who spoke the praise, is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. We can’t know details of his identity other than this designation.

Notice in verse 7 that it is the altar that speaks. Earlier in Revelation, a voice came from the horns of the altar (9:13), but in this case, it’s the actual altar offering praise.

### **Critical Observation**

The third trumpet also dealt with the water supply (8:10-11) but in that case, only a part of the water became toxic. In this case, all the waters were ruined.

**The Fourth Bowl** (16:8-9). In some of the past judgments described in Revelation, the sun has been weakened (6:12; 8:12; 9:2). But in this judgment, the intensity of the sun increases so much that it is scorching people.

Unfortunately, rather than crying out to God, the hearts of the people are unchangeable. They blaspheme the name of God. This means they lower His character and call Him evil.

While the first four troubles poured out by angels affected the natural world, the next trouble is more political in nature.

**The Fifth Bowl** (16:10-11). The fifth angel turns his attention upon the beast. In fact, he pours his bowl on the beast's throne and darkness takes control. John doesn't give a specific explanation for what caused the people's pain. Their sores are still present according to verse 11. Also, there could be many who were burned from the scorching sun but were not killed by it. While all the details are not known, it is obvious that people are miserable, in pain. Yet they curse God rather than acknowledge Him as the One who could ease their suffering and the One who has the power to control the plagues.

**The Sixth Bowl** (16:12). The sixth trouble removes the water from the Euphrates. This might not seem like such a bad thing given the fact that the river is filled with blood. But it is important because the next judgment is the great war of Armageddon that will destroy the armies of the beast once and for all. Drying up the riverbed removes an important obstacle for attacking armies.

John mentions that the kings from the East are the threat that will come across the dry riverbed left behind in the path of the Euphrates, but this is the only time these kings are mentioned. The Euphrates River did serve as the boundary of the Roman Empire, so in the minds of John's readers, assaulting enemies could easily lay beyond the river. And without the river to block them, the empire was much more open to attack. Still, as for these kings from the East, no more explanation is given than is mentioned in verse 12.

## PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

**Revelation 16:13-16** Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. <sup>14</sup> These evil spirits are the spirits of demons, which have power to do miracles. They go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. <sup>15</sup> "Listen! I will come as a thief comes! Blessed are those who stay awake and keep their clothes on so that they will not walk around naked and have people see their shame." <sup>16</sup> Then the evil spirits gathered the kings together to the place that is called Armageddon in the Hebrew language.

As with the previous sets of seven events in Revelation, there is a pause between the sixth bowl and the seventh bowl. (There is a pause between the sixth and seventh seals and the sixth and seventh trumpets as well.) In this case, the pause allows the armies of the world to gather in one place.

Out of the mouths of the dragon, beast, and the false prophet, come demons that go to all of the kings of the world (16:13-14). These demons are spirits that perform remarkable miracles to entice the enemies of God to gather. Why would these armies need to be enticed to wage war against God? Because they are infested with sores, their water supply has dried up, and the sun is scorching people to death. The only way these people are going to move is by some form of deception. The deception is that the beast is stronger than the One doing this to them, and if they unite, they will be victorious.

### Critical Observation

The fact that the three demons are compared to frogs (16:13) is an interesting element in Revelation. Some have supposed that this is actually a form of mockery aimed toward Satan and his armies.

Before the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet an announcement is made. The series of bowl visions contain the same kind of element. In the case of the seals and trumpets, an announcement of salvation was made to the world. In this case, an announcement is made that the coming of the Day of the Lord is like a thief in the night (16:15). The reality is that no one will know the day when the fury will strike. Therefore, those who are ready and know that this day will come are the ones who walk through life prepared. Those who do not account for this day are the ones who walk around the world vulnerable and naked—which means that at the very least they will be ashamed when they are caught unprepared. This announcement is the final act of judgment upon these people.

The froglike spirits are successful according to verse 16, and the armies of the beast gather in one place—Armageddon. The name probably stands for Har Mageddon, which means “the mountain of Megiddo.” There is no known mountain with this name, so some have considered it to be merely an element of John’s vision—a symbol of God’s judgment. Others, however, identify it as the plain that lies beside the ancient city of Megiddo.

### **Demystifying Revelation**

Megiddo was a much-desired spot because it was a junction for roads running north and south as well as east and west. With control of these trade routes the location was an advantage to merchants of all kinds. Because it was such an advantageous location, many battles were fought in the vicinity.

## **THE SEVENTH BOWL**

**Revelation 16:17-21** The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. Then a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is finished!”<sup>18</sup> Then there were flashes of lightning, noises, thunder, and a big earthquake—the worst earthquake that has ever happened since people have been on earth.<sup>19</sup> The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations were destroyed. And God remembered the sins of Babylon the Great, so he gave that city the cup filled with the wine of his terrible anger.<sup>20</sup> Then every island ran away, and mountains disappeared.<sup>21</sup> Giant hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell from the sky upon people. People cursed God for the disaster of the hail, because this disaster was so terrible.

When the seventh angel pours his bowl of anger upon the earth, a loud voice comes from the throne in the temple shouting, “It is finished” (16:17). While the speaker is not identified, it is likely that it is God, even if simply based on the fact that the voice came from the throne. This is similar to the announcement of Jesus at His death—“It is finished” (John 19:30). When Jesus uttered those words, He was saying the payment for sin was paid in full. When God expresses these words, He is saying there will be no more judgment—the serpent and all evil are being punished on the earth.

God uses two things to destroy the earth. The first is a severe earthquake (16:18). Notice the precision with which John describes just how severe this earthquake is. There has never been an earthquake like it. The earthquake does several things: It kills people and rearranges the landscape of the earth, islands disappear, and mountains fall into the opening where the ground split into three parts (6:19-20).

The great city that the earthquake destroys may refer to humanity in general. The fact that it breaks in three parts (as opposed to simply dividing into two parts) implies complete destruction. The whole picture here, including the second reference John makes to Babylon (which serves as an excellent

picture of human arrogance, (see Genesis 10:10; 11:9), builds a picture of more than specific cities, but of the destruction of the part of civilization that demands to remain godless (16:19).

Next come hailstones that weigh up to one hundred pounds according to some translations. They fall from the sky, crushing the people beneath. And while these people are receiving their judgment, they are cursing God (16:21).

### **Take It Home**

Two things about this passage are important to understand. First is the destruction of sin. Sin is rebellion that disconnects us from our Creator.

The second is how quickly and simply God can destroy those who follow after sin. He requires no nuclear holocaust, no human-made weapons, The Creator of the universe can use His creation to destroy those who have rejected Him. He has the power to rearrange the earth, which reveals His true sovereignty.

We fear or worry about many things in life—things that can't hurt us. When we truly acknowledge God's power, it should give us pause. We should respect the power that could crush us yet offers us the opportunity over and over again to change our ways and be treated as beloved children.

## REVELATION 17

### THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

The Vision of the Prostitute	17:1-6
The Angel's Explanation	17:7-14
The Relationship between the Beast and the Prostitute	17:15-18

#### Setting Up the Section

Thus far in Revelation, John's message has carried the theme of God's sovereignty. No matter what powers *seem* to exist, God is the One with the ultimate power and with the choice to decide when to display that power.

With chapter 17, the theme of the remainder of the book becomes the final judgment of God. He has chosen to display His power against evil, and the final battle is in sight.

Chapter 17 is built upon the vision of a woman, a prostitute, who seems to symbolize the same thing that Babylon symbolizes in 16:19—civilization convinced it doesn't need God.

### THE VISION OF THE PROSTITUTE

**Revelation 17:1-7** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke to me. He said, "Come, and I will show you the punishment that will be given to the great prostitute, the one sitting over many waters. <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth sinned sexually with her, and the people of the earth became drunk from the wine of her sexual sin." <sup>3</sup> Then the angel carried me away by the Spirit to the desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a red beast. It was covered with names against God written on it, and it had seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup> The woman was dressed in purple and red and was shining with the gold, precious jewels, and pearls she was wearing. She had a golden cup in her hand; a cup filled with evil things and the uncleanness of her sexual sin. <sup>5</sup> On her forehead a title was written that was secret. This is what was written: the great Babylon mother of prostitutes and of the evil things of the earth <sup>6</sup> Then I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people and with the blood of those who were killed because of their faith in Jesus. When I saw the woman, I was very amazed. <sup>7</sup> Then the angel said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will tell you the secret of this woman and the beast she rides—the one with seven heads and ten horns.

This prostitute, revealed to John in verses 1-2, is the leader of the immorality of the world. She leads the kings to commit acts of immorality and causes the people of the world to be led astray. The description "sitting over many waters" is the same used by the prophet Jeremiah for the Old Testament city of Babylon (Jeremiah 51:13). As Revelation 17 and 18 play out, the image of this woman is identified with Babylon in many ways.

#### Critical Observation

The fact that the woman in Revelation 17 is referred to as a prostitute rather than an adulteress is telling. Throughout the Old Testament when the nation of God strays into sin it is often described as an adulteress. This, of course, is because these people were considered God's bride.

But here the people who are living outside of God's law are simply referred to as a prostitute. They were never in a relationship with God, so they were not forsaking that relationship.

In verse 3, after having the prostitute described to him, John sees her for himself. After being carried away, he sees the woman on a red beast. This is presumably the same beast described in 13:1, with seven heads, ten horns, and labeled with blasphemous names (names against God).

The woman is dressed in purple and red the colors of royalty (17:4). She is glittering with her accessories of gold, pearls, and precious jewels. Many interpret this description, particularly the royal colors, to mean that the prostitute symbolizes a kingdom. She holds a golden cup, but inside the cup are immoral, disgusting things.

There is a title written on her forehead (17:5). This is one of several times in Revelation that people are identified by their mark, or seal, on their foreheads (7:3; 9:4; 14:1). Rather than understanding her name as being *Secret*, her name was a secret. More explanation is given later in this chapter, when an angel explains some of the symbolism to John (17:15-18).

The next thing written on her forehead is *Babylon*, a city that has already been mentioned several times in Revelation. In this case, the name Babylon is not used to identify a place but more to identify a godless culture.

It is clear, though, that not only is this woman (or whom she represents) evil herself, but she births evil. Identified as the mother of prostitutes, she represents the source of all of the immorality in the world. In addition, she is the source of all the evil that seeks to defile God. And as verse 6 states, she clearly opposes the children of God as well.

Verse 6 draws an even more vivid description. The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints, which implies she is responsible for their deaths. The language here is not that of something done long ago, but rather something that is still continuing. She enjoys the destruction of that which she has participated in. And John is amazed at what he sees.

## THE ANGEL'S EXPLANATION

**Revelation 17:7-14** Then the angel said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will tell you the secret of this woman and the beast she rides—the one with seven heads and ten horns. <sup>8</sup> The beast you saw was once alive but is not alive now. But soon it will come up out of the bottomless pit and go away to be destroyed. There are people who live on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life since the beginning of the world. They will be amazed when they see the beast, because he was once alive, is not alive now, but will come again. <sup>9</sup> "You need a wise mind to understand this. The seven heads on the beast are seven mountains where the woman sits. <sup>10</sup> And they are seven kings. Five of the kings have already been destroyed, one of the kings lives now, and another has not yet come. When he comes, he must stay a short time. <sup>11</sup> The beast that was once alive, but is not alive now, is also an eighth king. He belongs to the first seven kings, and he will go away to be destroyed. <sup>12</sup> "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet begun to rule, but they will receive power to rule with the beast for one hour. <sup>13</sup> All ten of these kings have the same purpose, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. <sup>14</sup> They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. He will defeat them with his called, chosen, and faithful followers."

The angel offers some explanation of the scene that has amazed John (17:7). While John has described the woman prominently in the vision, the angel reveals that it is the beast—identified by his heads and horns—that seems more prominent.

Several times in the angel's explanation, the beast is described, with some variations, as the one who "was once alive but is not alive now. But soon it will come up" (17:8). This is a way of saying that he has been resurrected, but it is a false resurrection. It is probably meant to stand in contrast to the description of Jesus in Revelation 1:4, "Grace and peace to you from the One who is and was and is coming". This beast lived, died, and is going to come back to life—a sign of false divinity. But in the end, this coming back serves the purpose of his final destruction.

### **Demystifying Revelation**

Much of John's visions in Revelation would have had political implications in the ears of his original readers. There was a myth that the evil Nero would be resurrected. Many saw this resurrection coming true in the cruel rein of Emperor Domitian. It was probably during this reign that John was writing.

Just as in 13:18, when the number for the beast is cited, the angel states that the mind that grasps the explanation of this vision requires wisdom (13:18; 17:9). Lest we think these should be simple concepts, they are not. They are truths that require a lot of understanding.

According to the angel, the seven heads on the beast are seven mountains on which the woman sits—as well as seven kings (17:9-10). For some contemporary interpreters, this means that the heads on the beast represent seven nations or emperors that this woman controls. To others, this is an obvious reference to Rome, which was often described as a city of seven hills. Certainly, in the days of John, Rome would have fit much of the description of Babylon given in this book.

Verse 10 mentions the seven kings, five of which have already been destroyed. Those who see the heads of the beast as nations interpret this verse as a reference to five kingdoms who have stood against Israel but are no longer in control. For those who see the heads of the beast as rulers, this verse references emperors or perhaps empires. Others offer the option that the number 7 may, as it has before, represent completion. Rather than a specific nation, ruler, or kingdom, it could denote all that has stood against God.

In verse 11, we read that there will actually be one more to rule. Whether interpreted as a ruler, a nation, or a symbol of evil, this eighth king refers to the beast himself. Somehow, he belongs to the seven yet rules again. The angel's interest in this explanation, though, doesn't seem to be identifying the beast in a definite way or explaining the symbolism without question. The focus seems to be that this beast is on his way to destruction at the hand of God.

Next, the angel begins to explain the horns (17:12-14). The ten horns represent ten kingdoms as a confederacy that will rule with the beast for a definite time—a quite short period of time. They will be completely united with the beast in opposition to the Lamb, but they will be defeated.

Jesus is described as Lord of lords and King of kings, a name similar to that which describes God in Deuteronomy 10:17. He will be accompanied by His chosen and faithful followers. This is not to be understood as His army; the Lamb needs no army to defeat evil. Rather, it is the family of those He has redeemed.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BEAST AND THE PROSTITUTE

**Revelation 17:15-18** Then the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, races, nations, and languages. <sup>16</sup> The ten horns and the beast you saw will hate the prostitute. They will take everything she has and leave her naked. They will eat her body and burn her with fire. <sup>17</sup> God made the ten horns want to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until what God has said comes about. <sup>18</sup> The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

In the explanation, the angel reveals that the waters on which the prostitute sits represent the influence she has over the entire world. Many believe this is a description of a world religion. For the first time, the entire world will share a common belief system. Others see it as a description of an immeasurably large empire (17:15).

In either interpretation, the main players turn on each other. The beast, with his army, first shames the prostitute, then destroys her (17:16). This is a picture of the nature of evil and of the sovereignty of God. Evil's nature is to turn even on its own. God's sovereignty is such that His will is done even by those who defy Him. God uses the hatred of the beast to do away with the spirit of evil that rules the world.

In verse 18 the angel who is making this explanation offers John some clues to the identity of the prostitute. The angel says that she is a great city who rules over the kings on the earth. In John's culture, this certainly would have been taken as a reference to Rome. In regard to the end times, it can be seen as an organized, but false, world religion or simply as a reference to organized humanity yet outside of the law of God.

## REVELATION 18

### THE FUNERAL OF HUMANITY

The Warning	18:1-8
The Weeping	18:9-19
The Wrath	18:20-24

#### Setting Up the Section

Chapter 18 records the destruction of Babylon. There are similarities here with the Old Testament accounts of the destruction of Tyre (Ezekiel 26-28) and with the destruction of the actual city of Babylon (Jeremiah 50-51).

When Babylon is destroyed, the entire infrastructure of humanity will be destroyed. This will create an undoing of the world that will leave humans hopeless. For John's original readers, this prophecy would have held some significance regarding the Roman Empire, but it is also the picture of all human civilizations that focus on earthly accomplishments rather than the power of the Creator.

#### THE WARNING

**Revelation 18:1-8** After the vision of these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven. This angel had great power, and his glory made the earth bright. <sup>2</sup> He shouted in a powerful voice: "Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon! She has become a home for demons and a prison for every evil spirit, and a prison for every unclean bird and unclean beast. <sup>3</sup> She has been ruined, because all the peoples of the earth have drunk the wine of the desire of her sexual sin. She has been ruined also because the kings of the earth have sinned sexually with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the great wealth of her luxury." <sup>4</sup> Then I heard another voice from heaven saying: "Come out of that city, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive the disasters that will come to her. <sup>5</sup> Her sins have piled up as high as the sky, and God has not forgotten the wrongs she has done. <sup>6</sup> Give that city the same as she gave to others. Pay her back twice as much as she did. Prepare wine for her that is twice as strong as the wine she prepared for others. <sup>7</sup> She gave herself much glory and rich living. Give her that much suffering and sadness. She says to herself, 'I am a queen sitting on my throne. I am not a widow; I will never be sad.' <sup>8</sup> So these disasters will come to her in one day: death, and crying, and great hunger, and she will be destroyed by fire, because the Lord God who judges her is powerful."

Chapter 18 opens with an angel coming from heaven with authority, splendor, and an announcement that Babylon has been destroyed (18:1-2). This opening part of the announcement is in the past tense, as if the event is completed. The angel describes Babylon four ways:

1. It is the home for demons and unclean birds. The unclean birds were probably scavenger birds, like buzzards, that preyed on dead things. This was despicable to the Jews. It was also an apt image of a deserted place (18:2).
2. It is a source for all the evil in the world. This is pictured by the nations drinking the wine of Babylon's immorality (18:3).
3. It is a source for all the wicked leadership in the world, thus the image of the kings committing adultery with her (18:3).
4. It is a source for all the ill-gotten gain in the world. This can be seen by the mention of the merchants making their profits from Babylon's excessive wickedness (18:3).

At verse 4, there is a shift in the tense of the passage. Chapter 18 opens with the proclamation of Babylon's destruction as a completed event. With verse 4, the voice from heaven sends out an address while Babylon is still in the process of being destroyed. The warning is to stay away from the city because it is already condemned.

While verses 4-5 are addressed to the people of God, verses 6-8 seem to be addressing those who can impose justice. They are a request for punishment not simply according to the amount that Babylon has inflicted pain, but double that. In fact, the punishment this voice is calling for is not according to Babylon's cruelties, but according to her demand for luxury. As extravagantly as she has lived, so let her punishment be (18:7).

### **Critical Observation**

Babylon's claim not to be a widow and not to have to mourn may reflect the nation's arrogance and demand for profitable times. She seems to believe that no power can take away the extravagance with which she lives. Babylon is a diva of a nation looking down on all others.

According to verse 8, her due punishment will come all at one time through four troubles: death, crying, great hunger, and fire.

## **THE WEeping**

**Revelation 18:9-19** The kings of the earth who sinned sexually with her and shared her wealth will see the smoke from her burning. Then they will cry and be sad because of her death. <sup>10</sup> They will be afraid of her suffering and stand far away and say: "Terrible! How terrible for you, great city, powerful city of Babylon, because your punishment has come in one hour!" <sup>11</sup> And the merchants of the earth will cry and be sad about her, because now there is no one to buy their cargoes— <sup>12</sup> cargoes of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, red cloth; all kinds of citron wood and all kinds of things made from ivory, expensive wood, bronze, iron, and marble; <sup>13</sup> cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, carriages, slaves, and human lives. <sup>14</sup> The merchants will say, "Babylon, the good things you wanted are gone from you. All your rich and fancy things have disappeared. You will never have them again." <sup>15</sup> The merchants who became rich from selling to her will be afraid of her suffering and will stand far away. They will cry and be sad <sup>16</sup> and say: "Terrible! How terrible for the great city! She was dressed in fine linen, purple and red cloth, and she was shining with gold, precious jewels, and pearls! <sup>17</sup> All these riches have been destroyed in one hour!" Every sea captain, every passenger, the sailors, and all those who earn their living from the sea stood far away from Babylon. <sup>18</sup> As they saw the smoke from her burning, they cried out loudly, "There was never a city like this great city!" <sup>19</sup> And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and being sad. They said: "Terrible! How terrible for the great city! All the people who had ships on the sea became rich because of her wealth! But she has been destroyed in one hour!"

While no one runs to Babylon's rescue, according to verses 9-11, there are some who mourn her passing—those who profited from her trade. The kings who traded with her stand at a distance and verbalize their lament over her quick (one hour) death (18:10).

In verse 11, the merchants join the lamentation for the simple reason that Babylon is not there to buy their cargoes any longer. Verses 12-13 list the kinds of merchandise that made up that cargo. Most

are easily recognizable still today. The precious jewels could refer to stones such as granite, as well as what we consider precious stones today. The colors of the cloth—red and purple—are both colors the scriptures associate with splendor, even royalty, and also with sin. Citron wood is a hardwood well-known for its deep grain. The mention of bodies denotes slaves and what we would refer to today as human trafficking.

Verse 14 caps off this list of cargo with a parenthetical announcement addressing the destroyed city directly and adding a general description of the splendor lost.

The section closes with more mourning of the merchants but includes more specifically the sea merchants who lost their overseas business (18:15-19). Their lament echoes the previous laments in the description of the city as lavish and in their sorrow for the loss of profits. The economic foundation of their existence has been destroyed.

## THE WRATH

**Revelation 18:20-24 Be happy because of this, heaven! Be happy, God's holy people and apostles and prophets! God has punished her because of what she did to you."**  
**<sup>21</sup> Then a powerful angel picked up a large stone, like one used for grinding grain, and threw it into the sea. He said: "In the same way, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, and it will never be found again. <sup>22</sup> The music of people playing harps and other instruments, flutes, and trumpets, will never be heard in you again. No workman doing any job will ever be found in you again. The sound of grinding grain will never be heard in you again. <sup>23</sup> The light of a lamp will never shine in you again, and the voices of a bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great people, and all the nations were tricked by your magic. <sup>24</sup> You are guilty of the death of the prophets and God's holy people and all who have been killed on earth."**

Verse 20 is another parenthetical address, in this case perhaps by John himself (see also verse 14). This statement addresses the saints, apostles, and prophets attributing this great act of judgment to God. It is a call to rejoice.

John's vision in verse 21 involves an angel who picks up a stone used for grinding grain (a millstone) and throws it into the sea. This image is reminiscent of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah's actions in Jeremiah 51:63, which are also a picture of the destruction of Babylon.

### Demystifying Revelation

The typical millstone in that day was four to five feet in diameter and a couple of feet in thickness. It would have been quite heavy and would have sunk instantly when thrown into the water. In other words, it would seem to disappear. That is an apt description of the sudden destruction of Babylon. The entire system of the world will be done away with in an instant.

When the millstone is thrown down, it is done with violence. The judgment comes in an intense and destructive moment that changes the foundation of life forever (18:21). Verses 22-23 list the things that will never happen again because of Babylon's destruction: Musicians won't play, craftsmen won't practice, and everyday life—like grinding grain into flour, marrying, and even lamps lighting homes—will cease.

While the previous verses were addressing Babylon, verse 24 is a statement about Babylon (much

like verse 20). The deaths of prophets and saints and all those killed on earth have been attributed to her. Because of such a broad scope of destruction being credited to Babylon, many believe that the destruction represents not just the destruction of one city or power, but a representation of all the world's cities that have chosen to operate outside of God's laws.

## REVELATION 19 WORSHIP AND ANGER

Praise for the Judgment of Babylon	19:1-6
The Wedding Celebration	19:7-10
The Return of the Messiah	19:11-16
The Reign of the Messiah	19:17-21

### Setting Up the Section

Chapter 19 includes the great marriage ceremony of the Lamb and the return of Jesus. It is a chapter of both worship and victory, including the final destruction of the beast and his prophet.

### PRAISE FOR THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON

**Revelation 19:1-6** After this vision and announcement I heard what sounded like a great many people in heaven saying: “Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God,<sup>2</sup> because his judgments are true and right. He has punished the prostitute who made the earth evil with her sexual sin. He has paid her back for the death of his servants.”<sup>3</sup> Again they said: “Hallelujah! She is burning, and her smoke will rise forever and ever.”<sup>4</sup> Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bowed down and worshiped God, who sits on the throne. They said: “Amen, Hallelujah!”<sup>5</sup> Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you who serve him and all you who honor him, both small and great!”<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a great many people, like the noise of flooding water, and like the noise of loud thunder. The people were saying: “Hallelujah! Our Lord God, the Almighty, rules.

Chapter 19 opens with a great multitude singing God’s praise. These are probably angels, but John doesn’t specify. In this song, God is worshiped for His twofold work of judgment and of salvation:

1. Salvation and glory and power belong to God.
2. God’s judgments are true and righteous.
3. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality.
4. He has avenged the blood of His servants on her, blood that was on the great prostitute’s hands (19:1-2).

### Critical Observation

The song opens with the word *Hallelujah*, such a familiar word of praise in contemporary culture, yet this is the first time it is used in the New Testament. It does appear in the Psalms and in that case is often related to the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the children of God.

When the multitude sings out a second time, a picture of smoke rising from the battle is a sign of the permanence of the destruction (19:3). Then, for the final time in Revelation, the twenty-four elders and four living creatures, those who have been described as the ones closest to God’s throne, take part in the worship. They offer their agreement. *Amen* means “so let it be.” It is a statement of finality. And they offer their own praise (4:10; 19:4).

### Take It Home

Yet another unidentified voice calls out in verse 5 for all God’s servants to praise Him. The attitude of the worshipers indicates that they fear the Lord. Their praise is simple—the acknowledgment of the reign of God. Today we can still answer this call to worship, acknowledging God’s present and

evolving reign as His established kingdom (19:6). When we worship as the servants of God, we join this multitude.

## THE WEDDING CELEBRATION

**Revelation 19:7-10** Let us rejoice and be happy and give God glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the Lamb's bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear." (The fine linen means the good things done by God's holy people.) <sup>9</sup> And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding meal of the Lamb!" And the angel said, "These are the true words of God." <sup>10</sup> Then I bowed down at the angel's feet to worship him, but he said to me, "Do not worship me! I am a servant like you and your brothers and sisters who have the message of Jesus. Worship God, because the message about Jesus is the spirit that gives all prophecy."

Throughout the scriptures, the picture of a bride has often represented God's faithful people. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah spoke of Israel as God's bride (Isaiah 54:6). Here, in Revelation 19:7, the bride is a picture of the church, and the Lamb is a picture of Jesus. Redeemed believers are welcomed into heaven, and they have the privilege of having union with Christ forever.

The bride of the Lamb is dressed in clean, fine linen, which represents the good works of the faithful. This kind of imagery is common for those who are spiritually clean (Zechariah 3; Revelation 19:8).

In verse 9, the angel instructs John to write. Several times John is instructed to create a written record of what is happening, and only once is he forbidden from doing so (10:4).

### Critical Observation

Those who are invited to take part in the great wedding banquet are called *blessed*. This would have had particular meaning to John's original readers. Facing persecution and even death, they had to wonder if blessings would ever be theirs. The words of the angels, attributed to God, would have been a good reminder to these believers (and to believers through the ages) that in His kingdom there is a different timetable and a different measure of blessing not determined by the circumstances of the moment.

The angel also tells John that these are the words of God, and this declaration prompts John to worship the angel himself (19:10). The angel's response makes several things clear:

- 1) Do not worship angels.
- 2) Angels are fellow servants with Christians, all bearing witness to Jesus.
- 3) The testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The entire prophetic message of God from the beginning of the world has pointed to Jesus. He is central to everything for this life and the next

## THE RETURN OF THE MESSIAH

**Revelation 19:11-16** Then I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse is called Faithful and True, and he is right when he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like burning fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one but himself knows. <sup>13</sup> He is dressed in a robe dipped

**in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> Out of the rider's mouth comes a sharp sword that he will use to defeat the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will crush out the wine in the winepress of the terrible anger of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his upper leg was written this name: king of kings and lord of lords.**

The portrayal of Christ's coming takes the form of a series of symbolic pictures that highlight aspects of an event too great to comprehend in advance. When heaven is opened, the first thing John sees is a white horse, with Faithful and True riding it (19:11). This is a representation of Jesus, the almighty Conqueror, the Word of God (John 1:1-3), coming to subdue the rebellious of earth, which are led by the powers of hell.

His eyes like burning fire relate to judgment (19:12); His many crowns relate to His position as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:12, 16). He has a name that only He knows, yet His names are given in verses 11, 13, and 16.

His blood-dipped robe is that attributed to God by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 63:1-6; Revelation 19:13). First-century rabbis claimed God would wear this kind of robe on the day of His vengeance on Rome.

Verse 14 mentions the armies that follow Jesus, also on white horses. These armies are the angels that surround Him. While the description of their white clothes does resemble the description of the redeemed in verse 8, the church is just described as the bride (19:14). For them to appear as an army here would be too quick of a switch.

Verse 15 uses several descriptions that have already appeared in John's visions. The sword extending from Jesus' mouth is His true weapon, rather than His armies (1:16). The iron rod of His rule depicts His absolute authority (12:5). Finally, the winepress of God's wrath is an image of judgment also used in chapter 14 (14:19-20).

Some translations are unclear as to whether Jesus' name appears both on His thigh and on His clothing (19:16). The name probably does appear twice, but there is some question as to how it appears on His thigh. There is no question, though, that He is coming to earth to enforce the reign of the Word of God.

## **THE REIGN OF THE MESSIAH**

**Revelation 19:17-21 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called with a loud voice to all the birds flying in the sky: "Come and gather together for the great feast of God <sup>18</sup> so that you can eat the bodies of kings, generals, mighty people, horses and their riders, and the bodies of all people—free, slave, small, and great." <sup>19</sup> Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth. Their armies were gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. <sup>20</sup> But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who did the miracles for the beast. The false prophet had used these miracles to trick those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his idol. The false prophet and the beast were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. <sup>21</sup> And their armies were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate the bodies until they were full.**

Verses 17-21 paint a picture of final disaster. An angel appears midair and calls to the birds to come and feast on the flesh of everyone—from those in highest power to the slaves who serve (19:18). This represents everyone who took the mark of the beast including the beast himself and his false prophet (described in chapter 13 as a second beast).

This is a judgment scene that exhibits the power of the Word of God. The picture holds one dominant reality: Christ's victory over those who oppose Him is total. The Antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur—this is complete destruction.

#### **Demystifying Revelation**

This fiery lake is a picture of hell, which in the New Testament is commonly called *Gehenna* (Matthew 5:22; 29, 30; 10:28 et al.). The Greek word is a transliteration of a Hebrew phrase meaning “the valley of Hinnom,” a valley on the south side of Jerusalem where the Jews of Jeremiah’s time offered human sacrifices by fire (Jeremiah 7:31). This was an appalling act that brought God’s judgment upon them. The valley later came to be used as the city’s garbage heap, where fires burned constantly. Such a place of constant stench and burning became an appropriate symbol for the place of eternal judgment.

## REVELATION 20 THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISES OF GOD

Satan Bound	20:1-3
Saints Ruling	20:4-6
The Completion of the Promise to the Serpent	20:7-10
The Completion of the Promise to Humanity	20:11-15

### Setting Up the Section

To this point in Revelation, we have seen all those who stood on the side of the beast destroyed, except one. That is Satan himself. In this section, Satan receives his judgment.

There are many interpretations of the events John describes here, as well as a variety of timetables proposed for those events. The underlying truth remains, though, that John's visions reinforce God's ability and decision to deal with sin once and for all.

## SATAN BOUND

**Revelation 20:1-3** I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the bottomless pit and a large chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> The angel grabbed the dragon, that old snake who is the devil and Satan, and tied him up for a thousand years. <sup>3</sup> Then he threw him into the bottomless pit, closed it, and locked it over him. The angel did this so he could not trick the people of the earth anymore until the thousand years were ended. After a thousand years he must be set free for a short time.

Chapter 20 opens with an unnamed angel descending from heaven holding a key and a chain. The obvious picture here is that the angel has authority over the bottomless pit. It is interesting to note that while we might expect John's vision to include the most famous of angels to deal with Satan himself, in this case it is simply an unnamed angel who is given the task.

The bottomless pit mentioned here is a kind of spiritual holding cell. It is not the final place of judgment.

In verse 2, Satan is identified by several terms that have already been used in Revelation—dragon, snake, devil and Satan. He is thrown into the bottomless pit for one thousand years (20:3).

### Critical Observation

As with much of Revelation, this passage has been interpreted in many ways, much depending on whether the details are viewed symbolically or literally. Some see the binding as a future event that will take place literally after the return of Christ to earth. Others see it as a symbolic binding that occurred at Christ's death and resurrection when he achieved victory over Satan. The length of time is also debated. Many believe the thousand years denotes the actual number of years that Satan will be bound. For others, it is simply a good round number, one that communicates that God will bind Satan's power and influence for the right amount of time that He will determine.

## SAINTS RULING

**Revelation 20:4-6** Then I saw some thrones and people sitting on them who had been given the power to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the message of Jesus and the message from God. They had not

**worshiped the beast or his idol, and they had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands. They came back to life and ruled with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> (The others that were dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first raising of the dead. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy are those who share in this first raising of the dead. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests for God and for Christ and will rule with him for a thousand years.**

The next part of John's vision includes those who have been martyred for their faith. The typical form of execution in first-century Rome was a beheading with an ax or sword. In this case, though, the language probably implies more generally those who were martyred for their faith, whatever the method.

John further describes the restraint of these sufferers: They had not worshiped the beast nor received his mark. Because of this, they were mistreated by the authorities of their world and thus will be given authority by God. They are resurrected to rule with Jesus.

John calls this the first resurrection. He mentions that the rest of the dead will come to life after the thousand years are complete, but he does not refer to that as the second resurrection. Instead, he only speaks of a second death, from which these martyrs are saved (20:5-6).

## **THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE TO THE SERPENT**

**Revelation 20:7-10 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison. <sup>8</sup> Then he will go out to trick the nations in all the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. There are so many people they will be like sand on the seashore. <sup>9</sup> And Satan's army marched across the earth and gathered around the camp of God's people and the city God loves. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up. <sup>10</sup> And Satan, who tricked them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur with the beast and the false prophet. There they will be punished day and night forever and ever.**

At the end of the one thousand years, Satan is released from the bottomless pit and begins to gather his army. Gog and Magog are aggressive leaders included in a prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 38-39). Their names are used here to represent the world's evil. The picture in verse 7 is that of an innumerable army gathered from all over the earth (20:7-8).

The fact that this kind of army can be gathered seems to imply that even though Jesus has ruled the earth for a thousand years, not everyone has followed wholeheartedly.

According to verse 9, the armies of Satan are able to gather in an advantageous position. They encircle the saints and the "city God loves" (20:9). This beloved city stands in stark contrast to the description of wicked Babylon as the "great city" (17:18; 18:10). Many interpret this beloved city to be Jerusalem. Others interpret it to represent the actual body of believers who now embody God's presence as the temple once did.

Notice the understated description of the victory in verse 9. It is no problem for God to defeat Satan when the time is right to do so—fire comes down and the army is destroyed.

Consequently, the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur to accompany the beast and false prophet who are already there. Their torment will be continuous. God had promised Eve that the

serpent would be dealt with eventually, and that promise is fulfilled here (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 20:10).

## THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE TO HUMANITY

**Revelation 20:11-15** Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. Earth and sky ran away from him and disappeared. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and the book of life was opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, which was written in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. Each person was judged by what he had done. <sup>14</sup> And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

The throne in verse 11 is distinguished from the other thrones mentioned in Revelation in that it is large and white. It is such a powerful place of righteousness that nothing will be able to stand before it. While John does not identify who sits on the throne, most likely it is God the Father.

### Demystifying Revelation

Some have noted that things seem out of order in these verses. Verse 11 has heaven and earth running away, yet in verse 13 the sea gives up its dead. There have been several solutions offered for this perceived problem. The mention of heaven and earth fleeing could be simply a metaphor explaining the power of the One who sits on the throne. Others suggest that these events could be happening simultaneously. A final solution is to recognize that John is not arguing for a strict chronology but is writing for emphasis. This is a vision meant to enlighten, not a history lesson with a strict timetable. Verse 11 provides a picture of the power of God's presence, while verse 13 gives the picture that none of those who have died will be overlooked in this resurrection to judgment. Even those lost or buried at sea will be held accountable.

Verse 12 states that this judgment is going to be for everyone who ever lived. John declares that he saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne.

The books mentioned here are apparently records of all the deeds by which these lives will be judged. The book of life, separate from the other books, represents the names of those who have been redeemed and will find their home in heaven.

Verse 13 reinforces the idea that no one will be overlooked in this judgment. All those who have died, no matter their fate, will be called up.

The power that held physical bodies in bondage (death) and the place where all the wicked went until the Day of Judgment (Hades) will both be destroyed in the lake of fire (20:14). There is no reason for these two things to exist because sin is finally being removed from the earth.

Verse 15 paints the picture of two distinct fates. The book of life is the determining factor.

## REVELATION 21 ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL

The New Heaven and Earth	21:1-8
The City of God	21:9-21
The Temple, Sun, and Moon	21:22-27

### Setting Up the Section

Having described the fate of evil in the previous chapters, the remaining two chapters of Revelation describe visions of a new world established and ruled by God. This is the fate of the faithful, a spiritual destiny described here in earthly terms.

## THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

**Revelation 21:1-8** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and there was no sea anymore. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Now God’s presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone.” <sup>5</sup> The One who was sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.” <sup>6</sup> The One on the throne said to me, “It is finished. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give free water from the spring of the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. <sup>7</sup> Those who win the victory will receive this, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. <sup>8</sup> But cowards, those who refuse to believe, who do evil things, who kill, who sin sexually, who do evil magic, who worship idols, and who tell lies—all these will have a place in the lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

John’s vision opens with not only a new earth, but a new heaven. He is describing a whole new existence in the presence of God. The fact that the sea no longer exists is a mysterious image. It may relate to the fact that the dragon came from the sea (21:1). The sea was also viewed by ancient peoples as a place of danger and death, where evil spiritual forces lived. In the new heaven and earth there will be no danger or death.

The New Jerusalem is described as a bride coming down from heaven (21:2). The bride is completely prepared, at her best for her husband.

The great pronouncement in verse 3 is that God is now living among His people. Any separation is gone. Heaven and earth have joined together to make one place; there will be no more pain, sin, tears, or death. All of the misery that the children of God had to endure on their way to heaven will be wiped away. God will restore every believer (21:3-4).

In verse 5, God speaks directly, one of the few times in Revelation. John has to be reminded to write down the proclamation that God is making all things new. Then God continues with a confirmation that what needed to be accomplished is complete. He also identifies Himself as the One with the authority to make this claim—the Alpha and Omega. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter. This imagery shows God’s nature to be eternal.

Finally, this eternal God says He will forever be a source for the water of life—free of charge (21:6). His eternal nature provides people with the new life necessary for participating in this new world.

According to verses 7-8, those who do not succumb to evil and remain true to God are the ones who will engage in this complete relationship with God. There are those who will not, however, and their fate is the second death in the lake of fire as described in the previous chapter. The list given in verse 8 opens with cowards, the opposite of those who persevered and conquered.

## THE CITY OF GOD

**Revelation 21:9-21** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last troubles came to me, saying, “Come with me, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” <sup>10</sup> And the angel carried me away by the Spirit to a very large and high mountain. He showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It was shining with the glory of God and was bright like a very expensive jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> The city had a great high wall with twelve gates with twelve angels at the gates, and on each gate was written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. <sup>14</sup> The walls of the city were built on twelve foundation stones, and on the stones were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod made of gold to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. <sup>16</sup> The city was built in a square, and its length was equal to its width. The angel measured the city with the rod. The city was 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles high. <sup>17</sup> The angel also measured the wall. It was 216 feet high, by human measurements, which the angel was using. <sup>18</sup> The wall was made of jasper, and the city was made of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundation stones of the city walls were decorated with every kind of jewel. The first foundation was jasper, the second was sapphire, the third was chalcedony, the fourth was emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth was onyx, the sixth was carnelian, the seventh was chrysolite, the eighth was beryl, the ninth was topaz, the tenth was chrysoprase, the eleventh was jacinth, and the twelfth was amethyst. <sup>21</sup> The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate having been made from a single pearl. And the street of the city was made of pure gold as clear as glass.

In verse 9, there is a reference not only to the bride of the Lamb, but to the *wife* of the Lamb. This parallels the idea of God’s work being complete. The wedding has taken place, and the relationship is solidified.

Jerusalem is called the bride because the children of God are now all one, and all in the city are married to God. In the past, it was called the bride because of its splendor; now it is called the bride because the redeemed inhabit it.

John again sees Jerusalem descending from heaven (21:10). The city is described as a clear jewel. The stone that is now known as jasper is not transparent, so the name *jasper* may have been applied to a different stone in John’s day (21:11). Nevertheless, the description here of the city of God is that of a beautiful, costly jewel.

A more physical description of the city is given in verses 12-14. The walls, though unnecessary in a world without enemies and natural disasters, still denote a protected and safe place.

The twelve gates, guarded by angels and labeled with the twelve tribes of Israel, can easily be seen

as a fulfillment of God's promises to His chosen people throughout history (21:13). The gates are positioned to reflect the way the twelve tribes encamped around the tabernacle in Numbers 2.

The inclusion of the names of the twelve apostles is an inclusion of the Christian church, the redeemed of God (Revelation 21:14).

The angel measures the city, and while it is described as square, it is actually an even cube, given that the height is also the same as the length and width—about fifteen hundred miles each (21:15-16).

### **Critical Observation**

The next number given is related to the wall of the city. Verse 17 describes it as about 216 feet. The angel doesn't state whether the measurement is of the height or the depth of the wall, but either of these is difficult to reconcile with the measurements given of the city in verses 15-16. This is a good reminder that John's visions point to the underlying truth rather than the specific details.

New Jerusalem's walls are made of jasper (21:18). In Revelation 4:3, God is described as jasper, so there may be an allusion here to God as the city's protector.

### **Demystifying Revelation**

It's puzzling, by contemporary standards, that the city is described as pure gold yet transparent (21:18). Gold, as we know it, is opaque. This may be more of a reference to something very shiny and completely pure. Glass was not crystal clear in the first century, and mirrors were dark and inconsistent in comparison with their modern counterparts. This description may reflect John's attempt to describe something so fine that it would have been unimaginable to his own cultural background.

The stones described in verses 19-20 seem to correlate with the stones in the Jewish high priest's breastplate as described in Exodus 28:17-20. It would be difficult to define each of the stones since not only has the study of stones become much more specific through the centuries, but even in the first century, stones were identified differently in the Hebrew language than in the Greek. It is certain, though, that these stones are of great value, which is the reason they are used as the foundation of the city. The New Jerusalem is not a place built on simple brick, but even the foundation is made of precious jewels.

The gates into the city are not only made of pearl, but each is one giant pearl. And again, as in verse 18, the main street is pure gold, clear and perfect (21:21).

### **Take It Home**

John's vision of the world God creates for His people is one of perfection from the bottom to the top. To the original readers of this letter, this would have spoken to a hope that the imperfect and even cruel world that they endured was not a reflection of God's vision for them, nor the only thing they had to look forward to.

For modern believers, also, this perfect city reminds us to keep looking up to God's standards for life. We cannot imagine the way God actually intended our world to be, but we can participate in that kingdom with our obedience and with our eager anticipation of God's ultimate justice and reign.

## THE TEMPLE, SUN, AND MOON

**Revelation 21:22-27 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is the city's lamp. <sup>24</sup> By its light the people of the world will walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> The city's gates will never be shut on any day, because there is no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing unclean and no one who does shameful things or tells lies will ever go into it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the city.**

Verses 22-27 reveal three things missing from the New Jerusalem: the temple, the sun and moon, and the presence of sin.

There is no temple because the Lord dwells in this place (21:22). God is the temple. There is no sun or moon because God's glory and the light of the Lamb provide all the light needed. There is no night or any need for locked gates for protection (21:23-26).

Verse 24 reveals the wide breadth of redemption. The nations of the earth and the kings of the earth add grandeur to this place, but because of redemption, they bring none of their sin.

Finally, there is no sin (21:27). The description of sin here may apply specifically to idolatry. Also, there is no untruth. The expectation is that those who are included in the Lamb's book of life bring no sin to this place.

## REVELATION 22 EDEN RESTORED

The Tree of Life	22:1-5
Epilogue	22:6-21

### Setting Up the Section

Chapter 22 continues John's vision of the new heaven and earth begun in chapter 21. Then the chapter closes with an epilogue of observations about the collection of visions that make up the book of Revelation and the promise that Jesus is coming again.

### THE TREE OF LIFE

**Revelation 22:1-5** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It was shining like crystal and was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the street of the city. The tree of life was on each side of the river. It produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of all the nations. <sup>3</sup> Nothing that God judges guilty will be in that city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and God's servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will never be night again. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light. And they will rule as kings forever and ever.

In verses 1-2, an angel shows John a vision of a river made up of the water of life. The water sparkles brilliantly, is clear as crystal. It originates with God's throne and flows down the center of the main street (22:1-2). The scriptures offer allusions to the water of life in other places. The Old Testament prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah include mention of such (Ezekiel 47; Zechariah 14:8), as well as Jesus' teaching in the Gospels (John 4:7-14; 7:37-38).

The tree that is on this river is the tree of life. The Genesis creation account includes the description of two trees—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Many see this tree John describes by the river as the tree of life from the Garden of Eden. Somehow, in John's vision, this tree grows on both sides of the river (22:2). Also, it produces a different fruit each month (rather than twelve different fruits all year long).

The leaves of this tree are described as bringing healing to the nations. After the description in chapter 21 of the idyllic surroundings with no tears, sickness, or sin, one can wonder what these leaves will actually heal. Neither John nor the angel answers this question, so we can only appreciate the fact that these leaves are health-giving in some way.

Verse 3 says there will be no more curse, which some see as a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy in Zechariah 14:11. God and the Lamb are there with their people who both offer worship and bear God's name on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1; 22:4).

### Critical Observation

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel described the name of the eternal city of God as, "The Lord is there." Certainly John's vision in chapter 22 bears out that name.

Because God will be the center of this city, there will never be any darkness. No lamps are necessary; no sun is needed to light the way. God is the light for this eternal place. The idea that the inhabitants will reign with God is not to indicate that there will be multitudes to reign over, for everyone there will be a child of God. But it is an indication that everyone there will be considered royalty, children of the King (22:5).

## EPILOGUE

**Revelation 22:6-21** The angel said to me, “These words can be trusted and are true.” The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon. <sup>7</sup> “Listen! I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who obeys the words of prophecy in this book.” <sup>8</sup> I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I bowed down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed these things to me. <sup>9</sup> But the angel said to me, “Do not worship me! I am a servant like you, your brothers the prophets, and all those who obey the words in this book. Worship God!” <sup>10</sup> Then the angel told me, “Do not keep secret the words of prophecy in this book, because the time is near for all this to happen. <sup>11</sup> Let whoever is doing evil continue to do evil. Let whoever is unclean continue to be unclean. Let whoever is doing right continue to do right. Let whoever is holy continue to be holy.” <sup>12</sup> “Listen! I am coming soon! I will bring my reward with me, and I will repay each one of you for what you have done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. <sup>14</sup> “Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they will receive the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> Outside the city are the evil people, those who do evil magic, who sin sexually, who murder, who worship idols, and who love lies and tell lies. <sup>16</sup> “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to tell you these things for the churches. I am the descendant from the family of David, and I am the bright morning star.” <sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Let the one who hears this say, “Come!” Let whoever is thirsty come; whoever wishes may have the water of life as a free gift. <sup>18</sup> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to these words, God will add to that person the disasters written about in this book. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away that one’s share of the tree of life and of the holy city, which are written about in this book. <sup>20</sup> Jesus, the One who says these things are true, says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! <sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

In verse 6, the angel confirms the credibility of what has been revealed to John. While his claim that the words are reliable and trustworthy could simply apply to the immediately preceding verses, it is likely that they can be understood as a claim for this whole book of visions. This prophecy is of God.

The quote in verse 7 can be attributed to Jesus. The word *soon* is used here as in the verse above. In this case, soon means not so much that these events will happen sooner rather than later, but that they are the next event on God’s schedule.

With verse 8, it is clear that John is speaking rather than the angel, offering his own testimony to the credibility of this prophecy. Then he again shows reverence to the angel, who reminds him that only God should be worshiped (19:10; 22:9).

John is told not to seal up the words of this book (22:10). They are to be shared and understood. Keeping a book unsealed means the words will be proclaimed, and God will give understanding to the people who hear it. According to the angel, though, some who hear the words of this book will

continue on in their sin (22:11). In essence, the angel says, let each person respond as he or she will respond, for God will be the One who will judge people by their deeds.

Verses 12-13, just like verse 7, are the words of Jesus. He repeats His promise to come soon and to reward each person according to the life he or she has lived. He also states the same claim that was attributed to God in Revelation 1:8. In this case, Jesus adds two additional descriptive phrases, but all three mean the same thing—He is the beginning and the end.

Verses 14-15 are probably spoken by John, but this is not completely clear. These two verses first claim blessings on the ones who keep their clothes clean—keep their lives righteous—and thus have access to the tree of life and city in which it dwells. Then verse 15 draws a comparison with those who choose to live outside of the city, which in this case implies they are living outside of God's laws. The sins listed here have appeared elsewhere in the descriptions of those who followed the beast (9:21; 21:8).

### **Demystifying Revelation**

It seems odd that there would be talk of all this sinfulness, when just verses ago John includes such a beautiful description of the new heaven and earth after sin is removed. The information in this closing section, though, is outside of the vision. It is a movement back toward the reality faced by John's readers who are attempting to live according to the kingdom of God in a world that resembles this description of those outside the new city gates.

Verses 16-17 again offer an invitation to come to Jesus and drink of the water of life. Jesus describes Himself as both the root of David (that from which David's bloodline sprang) and a descendant of David (that which sprang from David's bloodline). He is the One who came before David and before the great political empire of Israel. He is also the One who is the human descendant of David. He is the center of everything.

Jesus' claim to be the bright morning star may be a reference to Numbers 24:17, a prophecy stated by the prophet Balaam, who claimed a star would come out of the family of Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The warning in Revelation 22:18-19 covers both those who would add to John's prophecy and those who would diminish it. Neither will be tolerated.

John closes this prophecy with both a promise from Jesus that He is coming and a prayer from John that Jesus will come (22:20-21). Notice that in verse 20 Jesus is described as the One who testifies to these prophecies and confirms His intent to return. This must have resonated greatly with those first-century Christians enduring persecution, wondering about God's timetable, praying that their good deeds would not be forgotten by God, even if they were disdained by their own culture and government.

### **Take It Home**

Verse 21 is a typical close to a letter of this era but an unusual close to such a dramatic writing. These closing words are a good reminder to all that no matter the situation—whether facing persecution or any of the situations described in the churches at the beginning of Revelation—we all are in need of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

The point of this book is not to show us who the beast is, but to show us how Jesus is going to overcome the beast. It is not to offer us a mysterious timetable over which we can quarrel, but to unite

us in our eager anticipation of God's kingdom. It is not an apocalypse meant to scare us into obedience, but a promise of God's character no matter what the circumstances of the moment might present to the contrary.