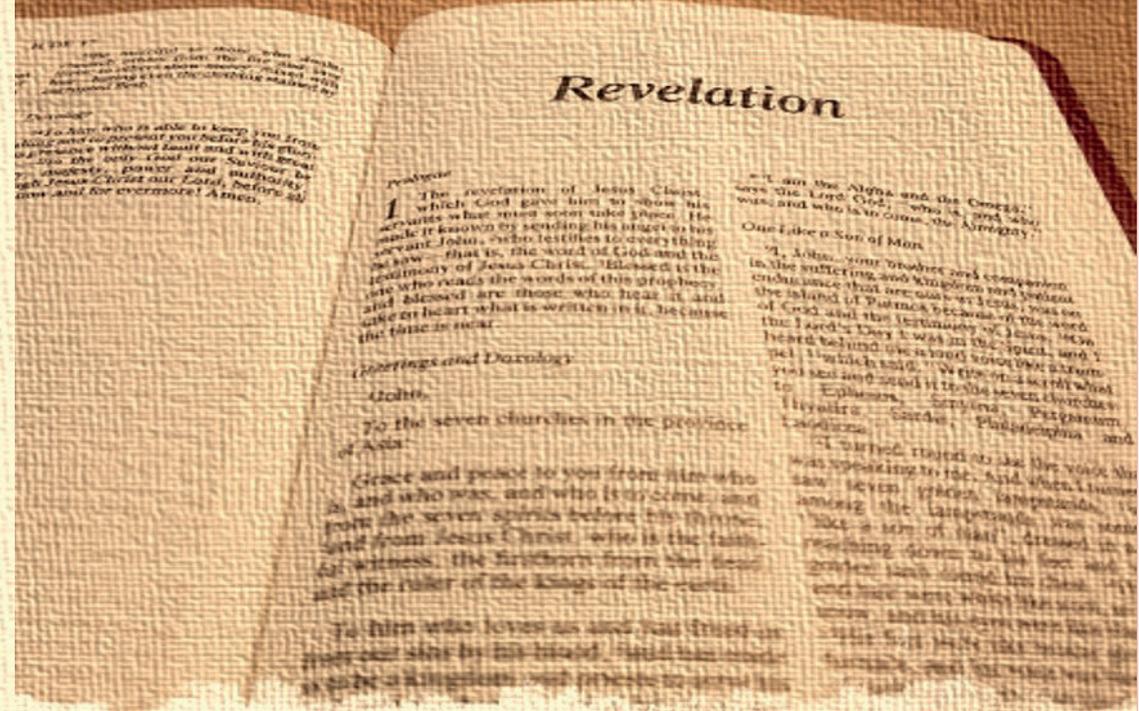


Stephen Williams



STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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Studies
in the book of Revelation

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Foreword

It seems a daunting project to study the book of Revelation which has been the subject of so much controversy and interpretation for so long. But God has promised a blessing to each who will come with a mind open to Him to speak to them. I approach the book in that spirit and manner and trust God to bless.

The book of Revelation is written in such a way that Christians in all ages can draw help and comfort from it. The overall message in a nutshell is that God is in control and rules, Christ is coming again, and this old creation will pass away making way for a new creation.

G.K. Chesterton made an amusing comment. He said, "Though John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators". My approach is not to try to relate current events to Revelation for many have tried and been left with egg on their faces. Endless and wild speculation has put many off studying the book which is not written for speculation or the prediction of timelines. I want rather to concentrate on principles and press on for the promised blessing for all who read and do what is written in the book.



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Chapter 1

Jesus in His Church

Revelation Chapter 1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near⁴ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.⁷ Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."¹² Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. ¹⁹ Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

In or about 95 AD John was exiled to Patmos off eastern Turkey during the persecution under the Roman Emperor Domitian. Many Christians had been martyred and God was sending a word of comfort through John. John was an old man,

likely in His 80's, and in spite of his age he was a prisoner in a labour camp, maybe still working in the stone quarries on the island.

Jesus sent the revelation using sign language. He “signified it” using signs, symbols, and pictures. It has strange beasts, fearful scorpions, and many other weird persons and animals that appear, but they are symbols of something real and literal. The language would only be understood by Gods people. The signs and symbols are to be found mostly in the Old Testament books of Genesis, Ezekiel and Zechariah.

In these few verses there are contained all the vital New Testament doctrines. It is no accident that this is the last book of the Bible for it gathers themes from the whole Bible and brings them into focus. For example

The Trinity

- (a) **“Grace and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come”** (vs 4) The Father, Jehovah is introduced to us.
- (b) **“And from the seven spirits who are before His throne”** (vs 4) The Holy Spirit is introduced, not seven Holy Spirits, Jesus is talking in sign language, seven being the number of perfection and fullness. In other words, the Holy Spirit in His fullness
- (c) **“And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness the firstborn from the dead and the ruler over the kings of the earth”** (vs 5). Jesus is introduced to us

Jesus

- (a) Jesus is the **“Faithful witness”** All He says is true and can be relied upon entirely. We are bombarded by conflicting philosophies and ideas and opinions, many ideas wholly antagonistic to others, and we must often ask ourselves, “Which is right?” Well, here is the word from the Faithful Witness, the one who tells us the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
- (b) Jesus is the **“Firstborn”** that is first person to come back from the dead and live forever. He is risen and the ruler of heaven and earth and all authority belongs to Him.
- (c) **“To Him who loved (loves actually) us and washed us from our sins in His own blood”** (vs 5) I like the story of a pastor in America who was a student at Cambridge University. Moody was invited to speak. Dwight L Moody and Ira D Sankey were American evangelists who attracted vast audiences to their revivalist meetings in the USA and on their visits to Britain. Moody was a powerful preacher. Sankey was a composer and singer with a powerful baritone voice. It was said of Moody that he murdered the kings English and was the only man who could ever pronounce “Jerusalem” in one syllable. The students were angry that such a man could be invited to speak at Cambridge, the great seat of learning and culture, and they determined to mock him. But before Moody spoke, Sankey stood and sang. His voice quieted the crowd. Moody stepped to the platform, pointed his finger at the young men in the front row and said, “Young gentlemen, don't ever think God don't love you, for he do.” They were so

stunned by this ungrammatical beginning that they listened quietly. He came back to his theme a little later and said it again, "Young gentlemen, don't think God don't love you, for he do." The student giving his testimony said that Moody went on to speak of the love of Jesus for a lost race, and as he told us "I began to see myself in a different light, and by the end of the meeting I gave my heart to Christ."

- (d) Jesus **"washed (or loosed) us from our sins"** (vs 5) not merely forgave us. Matt 1 v 21 the angel of the Lord to Joseph "and she will bring forth a son and you shall call His Name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins" How, by the shedding of His precious blood. Sankey would often sing in his powerful baritone voice "there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains".

- (e) We were made **"kings and priests"** (vs 6). Every believer is a priest. In the Old Testament you had to be in a special family and wear special clothes to be a priest, but not in the New. We have an inside dress with a heart of holiness. We minister to Him in worshipping the Lord in holiness. Old Testament priests carried out sacrifices on the altar, but our sacrifices are internal. A priest's work was to heal the sense of alienation which people felt with God. They were brought near by priests. In the Old Testament, the priests explained the meaning of the sacrifices and thus brought people near. That is the work of believers today. We are to

help people in their agony and their injury, their darkness and sinfulness, to realize that God is wanting to draw them to himself and save them.

- (f) **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end says the Lord who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty”** (vs 8). He is coming again. He is the A and the Z. He was there when there was nothing and will be there when all is completed. Jehovah always was and is and is to come. Nothing takes Him by surprise, He is in control and He reigns.

John says it was **“The Lords Day”** (vs 10) which might mean the first day of the week, a Sunday, when the Lords people were in the habit of meeting (Acts 20:7). It is possible it was the one day of the year which was dedicated to the Romans to worship Caesar. Loyal Roman citizens were to declare that “Caesar is Lord” on that day and offer incense to his image. Christians and Jews refused to do this and for a while they were exempt. However, by the end of the first century Christians were denied the right to abstain and this caused much persecution. If that were so, the book of Revelation would be a great comfort for those suffering on that very day. John says **“I was in the Spirit”** a term meaning perhaps he had a conscious awareness of being in the presence of God.

John was told to write what he saw in a book and send it to the seven churches named in Asia. Asia now is a continent, then it was an area in Turkey. These churches were all in the west of Turkey in an area called Asia Minor within 50 miles of each other. Note not **“the church”** not a denomination holding them all together but

“the churches” No bishop to write to asking him to contact the church, no headquarters.

John turns to see the voice and what does He see?

1. Seven golden lampstands. Not candlesticks with a flickering light but a lamp fed perpetually by oil. The priests in the tabernacle would keep the seven branched Menorah constantly burning. Jesus is in the midst of His church trimming the hearts of His people to burn steady and bright with constant love. We are as a church gathered around Him to receive His ministry, and for us in turn to minister to Him.
2. In the middle of the lamp stands is a man described as **“like the son of man”** (vs 13) with seven stars in His hands. In verse 20 Jesus explains the symbols, the signs. He says the seven golden lamp stands are the seven churches and the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. This is none other than Christ walking among His church. This is a shattering and wonderful truth which should make us thrill and tremble at the same time. The living glorious Lord Jesus present in His church. Sometimes we affectionately say, “our church” and we know what we mean, but it’s His Church “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:22). He loves us, has chosen us and has complete authority over us. We shall see Him with absolute fairness and authority commend, rebuke, and encourage. Sometimes He calls for

repentance. Sometimes, in severe cases, He threatens with His judgment and the removal of His life-giving presence. In His right hand seven stars (the angels or messengers) Some commentators believe these are those in the church who have been given authority to lead and teach and pastor and preach

3. He has a Garment down to the feet and a golden sash around His chest. This is the robe of judicial authority. He and He alone has the sole right to pronounce the verdict and the sentence upon all the service which is rendered by each church.
4. He has a sash or girdle or belt around His waist. This symbolises righteousness and faithfulness. Righteousness will be the belt of His waist and faithfulness the belt of His waist” (Isaiah 11:5). Every judgment he pronounces and every sentence he passes is based upon His infinite love and faithfulness.
5. His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow. Daniel when he had this vision of Jesus said, “I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9) The Ancient of Days, pure eternity, older than the snow-covered mountains and yet not old but always Jehovah who was and is and is to come.
6. He has eyes like a flame of fire, Infinite, infallible piecing, knowing everything, detecting all hidden things in His

church. He sees through all our hypocrisy, religious pretence and language hollowness and emptiness.

7. He has feet like burnished brass as if refined in a furnace. They indicate the continuous activity of Christ in the church as He marches, the leader of the host, toward the ultimate and final victory. Brass is for strength fire for purification. No one can oppose this Jesus. “He has set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1 20-23)
8. His voice is as the sound of many waters. You will have stood by a waterfall where the noise drowns out all other noise but with a peace and a harmony about it. He speaks and is the very Word of God.
9. His face as the sun radiating the glory of God. He was revealed like this at the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:2)
10. Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. The power of the truth spoken by Him, penetrating, converting, getting to the depths of who we are. Powerful to transform us.

Other visions of Jesus

- (a) By Daniel “Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.” (Daniel 10:5-6)
- (b) Psalm 29:3-4 “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: The God of glory thundereth: The Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty”.
- (c) Revelation 19:6 “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

It was indeed a strange scene, a night scene yet a day scene. It is a night scene with lampstands and stars yet it's a day scene because the presence of Jesus is like the sun shining in its strength.

The world is in darkness and the only light which shines in that darkness is that which comes from the lampstand, the church. To the people in and of the church Christ shines as the sun. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5) The church is the bearer of the light of Jesus Christ. The world waits for light and the only way the church can provide it is to live in the light which the face of Christ creates for us. Not one of us can provide a

glimmer of light except we live in the sunshine created by the light of His face.

Jesus said "I am the light of the world" "There was a brief eclipse at Calvary, but it broke forth again to shine in all who will receive His life, and from there the light flashes on the night scene of the world. Jesus said "you are the light of the world a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lamp stand and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven ". (Matthew 5:14-16)

When John saw Jesus, He fell at his feet as dead. Oh, for a grander more glorious view of the Lord in our own day and for the expression of joy in His presence, for more awesome trembling and Godly fear.

Jesus graciously lays his hand on John and directs Him to Calvary and an empty tomb "**Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades**" (vs 17-18) John, I became a man for you, died in your place and I rose again and am alive forevermore. Sin is dealt with and I have the keys of death and Hades.

Chapter 2

The Church at Ephesus

Revelation chapter 2:1-7

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ²"I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; ³and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Vs 1-7)

In chapters two and three Jesus dictated to John His messages to the seven churches of Asia, a small Roman province in what is today southern Turkey. The chief city there was Ephesus, and it was through the ministry of Paul that the whole region heard the gospel "This continued for two years so that all those who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts

19:10) It's assumed that all seven churches came into existence at the time of Paul's stay in Ephesus from AD 53-57. John is writing the Revelation some 40 years later.

Some would say that each church is symbolic representing an era of church history (Ephesus being the church of the 1st century which left its first love, and Laodicea is the church of the 20th/21st century, which is lukewarm) That is a view I don't share and would prefer the view that the seven churches represent various kinds of Christian assemblies at any given time in history. The issues, the subject of each letter, are those that can afflict all churches and our challenge is to humbly see what issues may affect the church we attend.

The number Seven

The number seven keeps cropping up and it indicates completeness or perfection. Here are the main occurrences.

1. 7 churches
2. 7 spirits of God
3. 7 seals
4. 7 trumpets
5. 7 songs of worship
6. 7 blessings in the whole book

The number seven assures us of God's perfect plan and order in working in the human race. We are not victims of a random flow of history. God knows and plans the end from the beginning; indeed, He is the Alpha and the Omega.

Ephesus was the largest city of the province and the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the World, a huge temple of the goddess Diana (also known by the pagan Greeks as Artimus) The temple was extravagant, constructed over a period of 220 years, made of pure marble, 345 feet long and 165 feet wide supported by columns 55 feet high. Inside was a bizarre statue of Diana a fertility god the original of which was said to be made of a meteorite which had fallen from the sky. The temple was filled with prostitutes and priestesses. There were heralds blowing trumpets wild dancers orgies and feasting and all kinds of pagan activity. The worship was a kind of hysteria where people were worked up into a frenzy of shameless things. This cult of Diana was so powerful and widespread, to preach the gospel there in Ephesus took some bravery and was very risky. There was a man called Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Diana and made a lot of money from this trade. He arranged a meeting with other craftsmen and said, "this man Paul has persuaded people that these things we make with our hands are not gods" They were filled with wrath and cried out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" Crowds rushed into the theatre seized Paul's travel companions and there was a riot. God pulled out of the middle of that environment a group of believers proclaiming the name of Jesus. The church was born out of a riot (Acts 19)

The church was strong, founded by the apostles themselves. Paul was the pastor there for some time and the apostles taught there too. They were strong in doctrine and they were zealous. It was a properly birthed church, well-nourished with the word of God and prayer.

Jesus commends them:

1. **“I know your works your labour”** Amplified version reads **“I know your industry and activities and laborious toil”** (vs 2) The word “toil” means to work even at the cost of pain.
2. **“I know your patience”** (vs 2) the pagans in the city threatened these church members, they had a battle on their hands.
3. **“You cannot bear those who are evil”** (vs 2) they had a righteous and holy indignation and guarded the church against the intrusion of impure men.
4. **“And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars”** (vs 2) They were not mealy mouthed about false teaches they tested those who came along to see if what they were saying was true.
5. **“And you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary”** (vs 3) Even their motives were sound. They did it for Christ’s sake not to make a name for themselves.

What a strong church, hardworking patient and enduring, not compromising, strong on truth, standing against false teachers and intolerant of sin. It was birthed in revival, one of the most successful churches. How sober then that this church was given a stern warning by Jesus. He says to them (He misses nothing with those searching eyes) **“You have left your first love” Amplified version “You have deserted Me your first love”** (vs 4) The church seemed to be so successful, but it was heading for disaster. It seems they had abandoned their love for the Lord and each other. Sometimes people misquote here and say that they “lost” their first love. No, they had “left” it, they had “abandoned” it. It seems they were excellent in all apparent ways except for love which they had

abandoned. They were cold and close to death. You recall the words of Paul in I Corinthians 13:1-3 “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Marriage is the most perfect symbol of the love existing between Christ and His church. Paul had written to this church at Ephesus about these matters (see Ephesians chapter 5). The love Christ has for his church is pictured by the love of a husband for his wife “husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church” The love of the church is pictured by the love of the wife for the husband “wives be in subjection to your own husbands as unto the Lord”.

Let us focus in and see how Christ loves his church. His love is unselfish with no single thought of Himself. What is to be our response to this love, the submission of love to perfect love, the response of love to love? Our response to His love is to be pure unselfish ardent and humble. This was the love Jesus missed, does He miss it in you and me. Listen again to the words of Jesus to the church “**you have left your first love/you have deserted Me your first love**”.

Do you remember how critical Judas was of Mary of Bethany because her love overstepped the bounds of normality? She sat at

the feet of Jesus and worshipped Him. This love is not to be measured or confined, its quality is expulsive and impromptu, it worships in abandonment. This is what the church at Ephesus lacked for all its good qualities. Christ confronts the church and commends much that is excellent but Oh He says I so miss the first love.

Let's remind ourselves of that lovely account in Luke 7:36-50.

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil,³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you. "So, he said, "Teacher, say it."⁴¹ "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more. "And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but

this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”⁴⁸ Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven ⁴⁹and those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

This woman, this especially wicked sinner, came to Jesus with an alabaster flask of perfumed oil. She stood behind Him weeping and began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. She kissed His feet and anointed them with the perfume. Simon the Pharisee who had invited Jesus into his house where this incident occurred complained. Jesus replied as above but I want to emphasise a phrase that stands out for me in Jesus reply. “You gave Me no kiss” Nothing can take the place of love. Activity in the business of Jesus Christ, sound doctrine etc. will not make up for neglect of Him. Jesus waits for your kiss for your love and nothing will satisfy Him but that.

Jesus issues a solemn warning to the church “**Remember therefore from where you have fallen**” (vs 5). Go back and recall that first love, remind yourself how things were. The warning can be summarized in three words remember, repent and repeat “**Repent and do the first works**” (vs 5). Do what you did or else, says Jesus, “**I will remove your lamp stand from its place**” This in spite of their hard work, patience, endurance, sound doctrine (all of which are

vital) but in themselves were not enough. The removal of the lampstand representing this church is a solemn warning indeed. Jesus can remove a local church whenever he decrees.

There is an interesting quote by a man called F.W. Farrar who wrote a book called the Life and work of St Paul. Mr Farrar visited the ruins of Ephesus in the 19C and wrote,

“Its candlestick has been for centuries removed out of its place; the squalid Mohammedan village which is nearest to its site does not count one Christian in its insignificant population; its temple is a mass of shapeless ruins; its harbour is a reedy pool; the bittern booms amid its pestilent and stagnant marshes; and malaria and oblivion reign supreme over the place where the wealth of ancient civilisation gathered around the scenes of its grossest superstitions and its most degraded sins”.

We can't leave Ephesus until we have spoken of The Nicolaitans whom Jesus mentions. **“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate”** (vs 6). Who were these people whose deeds Jesus hated? There are several suggestions but sufficient to say they were a heretical sect who set themselves over the lives and faith of other church members and tried to force others to submit to their authority. It seems to have reared its ugly head in the sixteenth century in the Roman Catholic Church where it was stated “If anyone shall say that there is not in the Catholic Church a hierarchy established by the divine ordination consisting of bishop's presbyters and ministers let him be an anathema” (a person to be detested and excommunicated). The church was never to be a hierarchy and the apostle Peter warned

the leaders among the church not to dominate over the faith of others but rather exhort and encourage them “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Those folks who have not surrendered to Christ will not be won by anything other than the power of first love. Loss of first love for Christ will result in loss of love for brothers and sisters and will dry up our concern for the lost. When those outside look in and can say “See how these people love” surely their attention will be to the source and centre of that love.

Chapter 3

The church at Smyrna

Revelation chapter 2:8-11

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘these things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Smyrna was thirty-five miles north of Ephesus on the Aegean Sea. There is evidence that there had been a city there for 3000 years though it had been rebuilt many times. The city at this time was 400 years old and had a population of 10,000 people. It was called “The crown of Asia” and was the most beautiful place of the seven churches. It had an impressive natural harbour, one of the finest in the world, magnificent architecture though the city was rather smelly. Unfortunately, the architect responsible for the building of the city forgot the drains and when it rained the streets ran like open sewers. In Roman times it was the place to live having

become the centre of science and medicine. The city is still there, but now known as Ismir.

We don't know how the church was founded; it's not mentioned in the book of Acts. It was probably founded during Paul's ministry in Ephesus. The church there was a dangerous place to worship for three main reasons.

First, there was strong emperor worship and those who refused to take part were put to death. Historians tell us that there were mass executions of Christians who refused to bow the knee. Domitian was the Caesar at this time. He was a monster murdering dictator who hated the church and launched an attack on it which reached fever pitch in Smyrna. Each year every citizen had to burn incense on Caesar's altar and was then issued with a certificate without which your life was in danger.

Second, people of the city were engulfed in pagan worship of different kinds. There were temples, festivals and gods and goddesses by the thousands. There was a temple to the worship of Zeus the god of the sky and thunder. There was a temple to the worship of Aphrodite goddess of love and beauty and raw sexuality.

Third, the Jews hated the Lord Jesus rejected Him as their Lord and Messiah and so in turn hated the church.

Fifty years after John wrote this letter Polycarp was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. He had a dream that his pillow was on fire and he awoke to tell his disciples that he must be burned with fire. His whereabouts were given away to his persecutors by a little slave girl who collapsed under torture. The soldier who came to

arrest him found a humble old man of 86. The soldier did not want to see him die and said to him “what harm is it to say Caesar is lord and to sacrifice and save your life”. Polycarp was adamant that only Jesus Christ is Lord. He entered the arena, and the proconsul gave him the choice, curse Christ and make sacrifice to Caesar. Polycarp replied “eighty and six years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me”? The proconsul threatened him with burning and Polycarp replied “you threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come do what you will” The crowds came flocking with wood from their workshops. The Jews were foremost in bringing wood even though it was the Sabbath and they broke their own law by carrying burdens. They began to bind the old man. Polycarp said, “leave me as I am, for He who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by binding” So they left him loosely in the flames and there he died for Christ

To Smyrna Jesus identifies Himself,” These **things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life**”. This is how John saw Jesus in the vision in chapter one. In the Old Testament God refers to Himself in the same way. Here are some examples.

1. Isaiah 43:1 “You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD”.

2. Isaiah 48:12 “Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last”
3. Jesus says again in Revelation 22 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last”.

To Smyrna Jesus reveals Himself as the eternal and infinite God, already existing when all things were created and remaining after all things are destroyed? He transcends space and time. He is Jehovah always was and is and is to come. This same one was dead and came to life. This truly is an amazing paradox to beat all paradoxes that the eternal living God, beyond space and time, died. He was incarnated for this very purpose, the timeless one entered time for you and me. Praise Him!!!

He is the living resurrected Christ who has passed through death writing to a people, a church, living in great sorrow in the shadow of death. Some of the members had already been martyred and others were to follow. I says Jesus have been there and I know, I am the master of those dark places. I have unlocked death, I have the keys, I have been through death, but I am alive forevermore. It's only because he has died and lives forevermore that we can too. He is bringing comfort to men and women during severe persecution and so reminds them that should they be put to death, they cannot and will not be cut off from His eternal resurrection power.

“I know your tribulation” (Vs 9) this is a strong word not often used. He did not say “trials” (these are common to us all) the word is much stronger it means “pressure of persecution”. It's suggestive of the pressure of stones that grind the wheat or that force the juice out of the grapes. These people were under that kind of pressure and Jesus says **I know**. Think of His pressure in the Garden of

Gethsemane when He sweat great drops of blood. Smyrna means “Myrrh” a substance taken from crushing a thorny tree and used as an embalming ointment. It is mentioned several times in the New Testament. In Matthew chapter two when the wise men brought Myrrh, literally they brought Smyrna. In the gospel of John chapter nineteen Nicodemus brought a mixture of Myrrh and Aloes to the tomb and they took the body of Jesus bound it in strips of lines with the spices. This church in Smyrna suffered and was crushed unto death but produced a wonderful perfume. God permitted Satan to crush them so this perfume could be released. Christians in Smyrna were like those the writer of Hebrews talks about in Chapter 11:35-38 “women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”.

I know, says Jesus I was crushed and poured out and died and rose again. This church was nothing like the church at Ephesus. They loved Him and their faithfulness produced hatred and anger.

“I know your poverty” (Vs 9) Here again a very strong word meaning beggary. There are two Greek words for poor, the first means you have nothing over what are basic needs and the second used here means you have nothing at all. Most of the people were probably slaves who had lost everything, their trade social standing and their bare necessities. They were reduced to beggary

for Christ, so much for those false teachers who teach a so called “prosperity gospel” which is “another gospel”. I know what it is to be poor says Jesus, I had nowhere to lay my head.

“And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Vs 9) In the Roman Empire there were many wealthy Jews who made their fortune by doing business with Rome. They slandered the Christians to the Roman authorities poisoning their minds against them. They had the ear of the authorities and sought to blot out the church. No doubt there was a synagogue in Smyrna but, says Jesus, it was the synagogue of Satan. Do you recall the words of Jesus when he spoke to the Jewish leaders? “Your father is not God and your father is not Abraham your father is the devil” (John 8:44) That poses a question, were they really Jews, yes from the outside from a physical standpoint. Inwardly they were not Jews as Paul says **“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God”** (Romans 2:28-29) It is true that the Jews of the first century not only rejected their Messiah but also were the chief persecutors of the church. (see 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16) Jesus knew the force that brought about His death was the blasphemy of the Jews acting upon a pagan nation that stripped Him of everything. I know, says Jesus, I have experienced the pain, the slander, the vilification, the suffering, and the injustice and the poverty.

“But you are rich” (Vs 9) they had what really matters. This is a poor rich church as opposed to a rich poor church. Later we shall come to Laodicea where Jesus says you are rich, but you are poor. Big

buildings and huge churches mean nothing of themselves. These people had holiness, power, grace, love and a sympathetic Saviour. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9) I know says Jesus, I was rich but for your sakes I became poor, and you can enjoy my riches even in your poverty.

There are no words of comfort for the future, more trouble is coming but don't be afraid. **"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days"** (Vs 10) The devil is not a free agent, God was going to allow him to do this. When John said that some would be thrown into prison, he knew that Roman imprisonment was frequently a prelude to execution. Ten days may be literal or may indicate that the suffering had a beginning and an end. He encouraged them to be **"faithful unto death"**. That word "faithful" is from the root word "convinced". They are to be convinced assured of the faithfulness of Christ and His dependability

I will give you the crown of life (Vs 10) this is the crown of victorious royalty, the crown that adorns the victor who comes laden with spoils. This is life eternal.

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Vs 11) Beyond death those who overcome will find life and the rest will find death. Only those who have put their trust in Christ alone will escape and find that second death abolished.

Chapter 4

The Church at Pergamos

Revelation Chapter 2:12-17

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘these things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

Like the church at Smyrna, we don’t know how the church at Pergamos began but it was probably founded during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. The church was a compromising church, a church permitting corruption. See how Jesus introduces Himself as the one having “**the sharp two-edged sword**” (Vs 12) This is not a happy introduction actually rather threatening since this is a

church facing judgment and danger and the danger was from Jesus Himself. In Revelation chapter 1:16 where John had the vision of Jesus moving among the churches we read **“He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword and his countenance was like the sun shining in its strength”**. Here Jesus is seen as having judicial authority both judge and executioner. What is the sword coming out of his mouth? See Hebrews 4:12 **“For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** God is coming to deal with false teaching and false teachers. In Revelation chapter 19:15 we see the same kind of thing. Christ is seen on a white horse; He is coming in judgment to make war **“Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword that with it He should strike the nations and He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God.”**

Jesus says, **“I know your works and where you dwell where Satan’s throne is”** (Vs 13) Pergamos was 60 miles north of Smyrna, the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. The word Pergamos literally means “parchment” writing material developed from animal skins which was first developed in this area and from which it took its name. There was a large university there and a library of some 300,000 volumes all of course handwritten. It was an important and significant city, but Gods estimation of it is chilling **“Satan’s throne”**. How did it warrant such a description, perhaps for three reasons?

First Emperor Worship

It was the capital city of emperor worship. It was the first city to build a temple to Caesar. As mentioned already in relation to the church in Smyrna, each year every citizen had to burn incense on Caesars altar and was then issued with a certificate. Without this certificate your life was in danger. Caesar was no longer seen as a political or military figure, but as a God to be worshipped.

Second pagan forms of worship/false religion.

There was in the city an altar to the Greek god Zeus. Zeus was the supreme God, the king of gods, the god of sky and thunder. The altar was in the shape of a throne forty feet high and set in the highest place of the city.

In the 19th century a German archaeologist working in the city of Pergamos removed that throne (Satan's throne) from the hillside and took it to Europe. It was taken to the Berlin Pergamum museum where it is to this day. Within a few years Germany was at war and destroyed, then at war again and later shattered and divided. There may be no link between the location of the altar and the throne of Satan, yet it is an intriguing and awful fact of history that Germany was a focus of great evil in the first half of the 20th century.

Third worship of Asclepius

Pergamos had renowned medical schools and a temple to the Greek god of health Asclepius. People went there to be healed. Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple where there were temple snakes. In the night, the sufferer might be touched by one of these tame snakes and have infused in them the power of the healing god. The most famous medical

practitioner in the ancient world was called Hippocrates born on the Greek island of Cos 430 years before Christ. The Hippocratic Oath is or was traditionally taken by newly qualified doctors to uphold certain ethical standards. The second most famous doctor was called Galen and he came from Pergamos. The emblem of this God of healing Asclepius was a snake, still the universal symbol of a pharmacy.

To summarize, Temples to Caesar, altars to Zeus and other gods, and temples to Asclepius, it really was Satan's throne. Do you recall in the case of Smyrna the place was described as "the synagogue of Satan" that is the opposition to the church was hidden behind false religion? The devil operated through the Jewish synagogue. In Pergamos however things are different, Satan's throne is there, and where his throne is, the church is in danger of entering into an alliance with his forces.

Satan is not God, he is not omnipresent, he is not everywhere as God is everywhere and he is not all powerful as God is. He is a fallen angel with the wisdom and the power and the ability to travel which he had before he fell. In order to carry out his work it seems he has a base of operation. It may be that he has more than one and will pass from one to the other. He had chosen Pergamos as one of his bases on the earth. It seems he chooses strategic places from which he can best use his influence.

Listen to its commendation "**you hold fast to My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you where Satan dwells**" (Vs 13) The church had been loyal to the name of Christ. They had not

denied him, they did not deny “His faith” (notice not “their faith”) Hebrews talks of Jesus being “the author and finisher of our faith” Jesus lived on the principle of faith and through his victory was the “author” (the “file leader”) and perfecter and vindicator of faith as a principle of living. Our faith is not in us or our faith but in Him and His. We exercise faith in responding to His faith. The church there were loyal, not only to the person of Christ, but they evidently rested in his accomplished purpose. They had confidence in His cross, they were loyal to the faith of Christ bringing men to salvation. We don’t know who Antipas was, maybe a pastor in the church, but he had been martyred. (Tradition says that he was burned to death inside a brass bull)

Listen now to the condemnation **“But I have a few things against you because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality and you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitians which thing I hate”** (Vs 14-15) They were allowing people in the church to feel comfortable even though they had compromised with the world and had believed false things. As a church they were soft and tolerant when it came to sin and error. Let’s take a closer look at these heresies.

The first heresy

This was one from the Old Testament **“You have people there in the church who hold the doctrine of Balaam”** You will find the story in Numbers chapters 22-25. Balak was the king of Moab and he wanted to rid himself of Israel. The Moabites attacked and opposed Israel seeking to destroy the people of God during

Israel's wilderness wanderings. The Moabites were the descendants of Moab who was the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters. (Gen.19:30-38) The Moabites were known for their lawlessness, gluttony, orgies, fornication, prostitution, debauchery and brutal violence. These was a people opposed to God and His ways. In Psalm 60:8, God says this, "Moab is my wash pot" In the East, the general mode of washing the hands and the feet was with a basin and a jug. Water was poured upon the hands or feet from the jug and it fell into the basin. No Oriental, if he can help it, will wash in standing water he prefers to have it clear and running. He puts his feet into the wash pot, into the bath, into the basin, and then the clear cool liquid is poured upon his feet; the wash pot answering the sole purpose of holding the dirty water which has already passed over the man's flesh. To continue the story, Balak, the king of Moab went to Balaam (a kind of prophet for hire) and paid him to put a curse on Israel. Three times Balaam tried to do this but finished up blessing them instead. So, Balaam devised another plan. If he could not curse them, he would corrupt them. This was his plan. The Moabite women would move in with the Israelite men and sexually seduce them bringing about intermarriage between Moab and Israel. By doing this the men of Israel were also mingling with the pagan gods worshipped by these women and this would result in idolatry. Balaam's trick worked.

This is a perfect example of religious syncretism that is a mixture of different belief systems. The teaching Jesus is referring to is the teaching of Balaam which says you can mix with the world, you can intermarry with the pagan systems of the world, mingling with the world is permitted. You don't have to be separate and

come out from among them. However, God's word says "do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness and what communion has light with darkness" (2 Corinthians 6:14) So here in the church in Pergamos people were saying you can be a Christian and worship idols, commit fornication with a heathen priest or priestess at the temple, go to the orgies and festivals and worship God on a Sunday, and it appears the church was doing nothing about it.

We do have some other clues about the doctrine of Balaam mentioned in the New Testament. In 2 Peter 2:15 Peter is talking about the depravity of false teachers and says "They have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. I think it's interesting that Peter uses the term "wages of unrighteousness" which indicates that these false teachers were motivated by money and power. These are serious warnings in the 21st century in days of prosperity preaching, scandals involving misuse of money and sexual immorality.

It might be a good exercise to consider what idolatry looks like in the 21st Century. In the words of the famous Bishop Ryle, an English evangelical Anglican bishop and first bishop of Liverpool "We have come to a time when the subject of idolatry demands a thorough and searching investigation. I believe that idolatry is near us and about us and in the midst of us to a very fearful extent" The Apostle John said, "Little children keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5 v 2)

The second heresy

“You also have in your number those who hold to the doctrines of the Nicolaitans” There is some speculation as to who they were and what they believed. We do know however that the outcome of their teaching was the same as the outcome of the teaching of Balaam. The early church was moving in power and whenever that happens the devil is at work. Even in the book of Acts (20:29) when Paul is addressing the elders in Ephesus, he says: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood For I know this that savage wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock also from among yourselves men will rise up speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples unto themselves.”

Jesus’s is severe with this church “repent” The word is not addressed to those who hold these beliefs but to the church that tolerates them. Deal with them, put them out of the fellowship “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” The church must keep its teaching under strict and regular scrutiny, there must be no compromise. Jesus says if you don’t repent **“I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth”** (Vs 16)

Jesus makes a promise to those who obey Him and are overcomers **“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat and I will give him a white stone, and, on the stone, a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it”** (Vs 17) Manna we know was the bread given to the people in the wilderness and some was hidden in the Ark. It represented the bread of life. Jesus in effect was saying I will give

you of myself all you need for life, those in the world can feed on food which perishes but you are to have Me.

A white stone

There are several possibilities for the meaning of the “white stone.”

1. A white stone was given to a man justly acquitted and freed from condemnation.
2. A white stone was given to one returning from battle as a reward for victory.
3. A white stone was given to a man as a token that he was made a free man of the city.
4. A white stone was given to an athlete as part of his prize and as an admission to the winners celebration.
5. Two friends are about to part and divide a white stone and write their names on each. Each would carry the stone bearing the name of his friend. If they did not meet again, they would pass the stone to a son in a Will. Sometimes after generations two would meet and an immediate friendship would ensue, an unending friendship.

Application

God’s people are to be a distinct and separate people. Friendship with the world is not an option, we are not to worship at its altars or follow its ways. We must deal with all who would seek to hold a false doctrine so as to lead people astray.

Chapter 5

The church at Thyatira

Revelation chapter 2:18-29

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

“These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

We have looked at the church at Ephesus which had lost its first love, the church at Smyrna which had been persecuted and the church at Pergamos, which was guilty of compromise. Now we come to the church at Thyatira which had gone deep into sin. In this church there was full scale immorality and idolatry and tolerance of both

The city of Thyatira was situated about thirty-five miles from Pergamos and had been occupied by the Romans since about 190 B.C. It was a city without natural defences and so its history was a succession of enemies conquering destroying and rebuilding. However, since the Romans took over they brought in what was called the Pax Romana or the Roman Peace and now this little city of Thyatira flourished. It turned from a military place to become a commercial city.

It also became the centre of wool and dyeing of cloth. Do you recall the story of Lydia in Acts chapter 16? We read this in verses 14-15 “now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So, she persuaded us” She was a businesswoman, a seller of purple. At the time she was in Philippi, probably on business, but her home was Thyatira. Maybe she and her family were responsible for starting the church in Thyatira. The purple dye was famous and came from two sources. One source was from a root called the “madder-root” which grew around Thyatira and from that root they could extract purple dye. The other source was

from a little sea shellfish called “murex” and from the throat of that tiny little sea animal came one drop of precious purple dye. Because it was difficult to get out of the madder-root and even more difficult to get it out of the little murex the dye was very expensive.

The city was also famous for its guilds or unions. The people in the city banded together in the various trades they were engaged in. There were wool workers, linen workers, dyers, tanners, potters, leather workers etc. Each union had a god, a kind of guardian that particularly gave itself to taking care of them. If you were associated with a guild you were in a religious group and there was a god over that group you had to worship. Associated with that worship was immorality, idols, feasts, celebrations, and orgies. Imagine then you were a Christian in the city and you had a trade. In order to have good standing in the guild you would need to engage yourself in the guild activities, otherwise you could lose your job.

See how Jesus identifies Himself to this church **“these things says the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and His feet like fine brass”** (Vs 18) He is identified as **the Son of God** His messianic title, He is God the Son. In chapter one He is described as **the Son of Man** as he moves among the churches tending to them lovingly sensitively, and sympathetically because He too was a man and understands. But here John identifies Him not as the Son of Man but the Son of God. The emphasis is on His divine power His deity. His sympathy is over He is coming in judgement and He is angry. His flaming eyes miss nothing, His feet like blazing bronze are ready to trample in judgment to stamp out the sin. Hebrews

4:13 “and there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”.

There was a commendation since there were some good things to see **“I know your works, love service, faith and your patience (perseverance)”** (Vs 19). These are related, love leads to service and if you love God you will serve his people. It is a sign that you love that you are willing to serve and if you have faith you will persevere. You will understand that God is in control and things will work out according to his purpose. You keep at your work; and will not quit.

So here was a church that had people who loved God and served his people. If you and I had been there at Thyatira we would probably have been greatly impressed by this church. It was a busy bustling active church with some wonderful people in it, but now the blazing eyes and the burning feet of Jesus go into action. We begin to learn deeper facts about the church.

Jesus says. **“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death”** (Vs 20-25). Despite the growth and the apparent faithfulness love and ministry seen in the church they were being misled doctrinally. This church looked good on the

outside but inside it was rotten. We may look at other churches and may say, God is really doing something in their midst, they are loving and look at all the people flocking to their services. They are reaching out to the community and really making an impact. But you can't judge a book by its cover. People rush to hear speakers of large churches thinking that they must have it all together because their church is growing. Thyatira was a growing church, a thriving church filled with love and faithfulness but they were rotten on the inside because they were following wrong doctrine

Evidently there was in the church at Thyatira a woman who was a very dominant lady. Jesus names her "Jezebel." That was probably not her name, but sometimes Jesus seems to name people according to their character. Jesus chooses the name of the most evil woman in the Old Testament. She was the daughter of the king of Sidon a town in Lebanon. She was the wife of King Ahab of the Northern kingdom of Israel. She is particularly noted for having made the worship of the god Baal popular in Israel. Baal was a fertility god, a nature god, and his worship involved immoral practices. There were temple prostitutes both male and female associated with the worship of Baal. It was Jezebel who spread that degraded worship widely among the ten tribes of Israel until it became one of the popular religions of the day. She herself supported over 800 prophets of Baal who ate at her table. She was the one who tried to kill Elijah after his famous encounter with 480 of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. She was also the one who murdered her neighbour Naboth because her husband wanted his vineyard. She was a ruthless immoral seducer of the people and that is why Jesus selects her name for this dominant woman at

Thyatira. Jezebel replaced God's word given through his appointed prophets with a counterfeit one given by the prophets of Baal and Asherah. She sought to replace the worship of God completely with the worship of other gods and introduced idolatry once again to the people of Israel. Jezebel ended her days by being thrown from her palace window into the courtyard below where the dogs came and ate her body and licked up her blood.

This Jezebel in Thyatira called herself a "prophetess." There were women prophets in the Bible, the Old Testament lists a number of them who were well respected in Israel. In the book of Acts in the New Testament we are told that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses. But the trouble with Jezebel is that she was a false prophet. She taught that it was all right for Christians to indulge in sexual immorality and in idolatry.

As I have mentioned, the problem for the Christians in the city was that in order to work in the guilds the unions which constituted the entire business of the city, they had to join a union or guild made up of pagans. The meetings of the guilds were devoted to licentious and debaucheries which were connected with the worship of erotic idols of the Greek world. Apparently "Jezebel" was teaching that it was all right for them to go along with the requirements of the guild. She taught that they needed to submit to the pressures of the world around in order to make a living, and that God would understand and overlook this.

Jesus declares punishment for the people involved. First Jesus says of Jezebel "**I will cast her into a sickbed**" (Vs 22) perhaps a note of irony or sarcasm there She likes beds, so I will give her one, but it will prove to be a bed of agonizing pain and hurt. Second to those

who practice immorality and consequent idolatry as she does. **"And those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds"** (Vs 22) perhaps a sexual disease which was widespread in those days. Third yet another group, Jesus says **"I will kill her children with death"** (Vs 23) that is not just those who practice immorality but who teach it as did Jezebel. The "death" perhaps refers to spiritual death.

Now Jesus speaks to those who overcome; **"I will give him the morning star"** (Vs 28). This expression is mentioned in Job 38:7 when The Lord speaks to Job out of the whirlwind "where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth. Tell me if you understand. He goes on "or what were its foundations fastened or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together all the sons of God shouted for joy" The songs of principalities and powers a sharing of Christ's glory. The expression is also mentioned in Revelation 22:16 "I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David. The Bright and Morning star" They will share in His glory.

Let me finish with a little ditty to make a point
A sailor on duty got frantic
When he fell into the Atlantic
After hours in the sea
He was saved yes sirree
And was hoisted above the Titanic.

It is no good getting saved by a ship that is bound to sink, likewise it is no good following teachers whose doctrines are bound to be condemned. There are many false teachers out there who are

being followed by people in many churches. The doctrine of Jezebel hates God's true Word. Jezebel hated Elijah and tried to destroy all the true prophets who faithfully spoke God's word. Those who call themselves Christians who are bound by Jezebel's doctrine similarly have no regard for God's word. They would rather "experience God" rather than study His word. They don't want to sit under Biblical teaching and are unmoved by proclamations of God's judgment.

King Ahab said about Micaiah, God's faithful prophet in 1Kings 22:8 "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." On the other hand, Jezebel prophets prophesy only good things and see what God has to say of these in Jeremiah 23:16-17 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.¹⁷ they continually say to those who despise Me, "The LORD has said, "You shall have peace "And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'

Despite the dire condition of this church Jesus made a remarkable promise. If they overcame, they would be given power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron. God's grace is wonderful as he raises nobodies to be the noblest princes who will rule and reign with Christ Himself.

Chapter 6

The church at Sardis

Revelation Chapter 3:1-6

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.⁶ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

See how Jesus introduces Himself to Sardis a dead church “**He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars**” (Vs 1). The seven spirits of God depict the perfection of Gods Spirit. To this dead church Christ is revealed to them as the life-giving Spirit. Sardis is lifeless and only the Spirit of God can bring life. The only hope for any church in this condition is the life of God.

Look at those words of Jesus in John 7:37-39; “on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Seven hundred years before this letter was written to the church Sardis had become one of the greatest cities of the world. It was magnificent in luxury and wealth. The king was Croesus whose wealth became proverbial. You could actually pan for gold in the streams within the city limits of Sardis. Gold and silver coins were first minted there. It was the home of Aesop (him of the fables). The city was famous for the industries that operated there, carpet, wool, and dyed cloth were their primary products. It is said that the art of dyeing was invented at Sardis.

Sardis was also a great military power which was not surprising since it stood on a plateau of sheer cliffs fifteen hundred feet above a valley. Approaching enemies could be seen for miles, the city was almost impregnable. However, King Croesus recklessly declared war on Cyrus of Persia and things went badly wrong. Cyrus laid siege to the city and offered a special reward to anyone who could find an entry into the city. One of his soldiers noticed that the composition of the rock on which Sardis stood had cracks and faults in it. One evening as he stood watching the wall above, he saw a soldier from Sardis drop his helmet off the edge. The soldier made his way to what appeared to be a crack below the wall emerged outside retrieved his helmet and disappeared back inside

The Persian soldier realized there must be a gap big enough for a man to get through. The next night he led a party of soldiers to the fault in the rock and found it unguarded and the soldiers of the city asleep: Sardis was defeated that night. The city would certainly understand when Jesus said **“Be watchful”**.

Later the city fell to the Greeks under Alexander the great. When he died and his generals fought each other for control of the Greek empire Sardis was involved in further conflict and another enemy crept through the cracks in the rocks. The people of Sardis had forgotten the lesson of the past. By John’s day Sardis was just a shell of what it had been, the people had grown lazy degenerate immoral and complacent.

Within the city was a church which had become apathetic. Apathy is a compound word, “a” meaning “without” and “pathy” meaning “feeling”. I suppose many have been there at some time in their lives and have exclaimed “I don’t care, I can’t be bothered, I don’t know, and I don’t want to know”.

Now the patron deity of this city was Cybele. Her form was often found on the coins of the city. She was a goddess of nature and fertility and was supposed to have power to restore the dead to life again. She however, no surprise here, was unable to bring the once great city back to its former glory. Sadly, the church at Sardis had become like the city, alive in name only but dead and no sign of resurrection. We don’t know how the church was founded and again assume that it came about through the ministry of Paul at Ephesus.

Sadly, there is no word of commendation for Sardis church but a summary by Jesus which must have been like a trumpet blast of terror. No word of comfort to this dead church but this **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”** (Vs 1)

How do we understand what a dead church is and how might we make that assessment? Is it dead because there are a lot of empty seats and people are singing old hymns? Is a church alive because it is packed every week and singing modern choruses and has marvellous facilities and talented musicians? That would be an absurd assessment, but we tend to look at things in a superficial way at times.

Jesus says to this dead church **“I know your works, that you have a name (a reputation) that you are alive, but you are dead”** (Vs 1) People probably thought this church was great and if you wanted a good lively church you must join the church at Sardis. Perhaps they were going through the motions, continuing in prayer, breaking of bread, fellowship and the apostle’s doctrine. Perhaps nothing external was missing but God seeks inward things of the heart. Unless the outward expresses the inward then things are dead. Scaffolding is of no value unless a building is being erected behind it. Breaking of bread is nothing if we are not daily feeding on Christ. Meetings for worship mean nothing if there is no real communion with God. Gifts are unacceptable if they are merely made out of duty. To Sardis Jesus said **“you are dead”** the life which expresses itself in love was missing. The church was like a vase of artificial flowers without life or fragrance. There was a body there, but the eyes had no life because the body was dead. Rigor mortis

has begun and corruption would soon follow. Nothing in Sardis could satisfy the heart of Christ.

Wake up!

Jesus counsels this church with these words **"Be watchful"** (vs 2) wake up from your sleep. A person freezing to death is aware for a while, but he just can't muster the strength to move. It feels good just to drift into sleep and though he is dying, in his condition he doesn't care. This is so much like apathy. **"And strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die"** (Vs 2) There were at least some dry bones, but they needed flesh and the life of the Spirit. They were not to cease from assembling for worship, but they must worship. They were to give and send help to others, but these were to be expressions of devotion to the Lord. **"Remember therefore how you have received and heard"** (Vs 3) You need to remember the real issues of life that brought you to Christ in the first place. Things haven't changed there is still a heaven and a hell, and you are nearer to one or the other than you were. There is still sickness and disappointment and aging and death to deal with. There is still a need to have guidance in your life that is bigger than your own fallible abilities. Don't wait for it to happen and unless you take specific steps now apathy can claim you back for the devil. Do you recall the repeated warnings to be found in Hebrews about going back and slipping away? The writer makes this point right at the beginning of his letter "therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest we drift away" (Hebrews 2:1). Jesus continues **"hold fast"** what you have heard and received, keep it fast. If you buy a car and you intend to keep it awhile do you neglect it? No, you maintain it you don't let it fall into disrepair. In James we read this "For if anyone is a hearer

of the word and not a doer, his is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was” (James 1:24) James seems to associate forgetting with not doing.

Jesus continues with His counsel and says **“Repent”** (Vs 3) You make up your mind that you'll go no further on your present course and turn around. In the Greek the word "repent" describes a determined definite point of action. Repentance is the act of changing. The person who is apathetic may reply “I don't want to wake up and repent I don't feel like it” Sometimes you have to do things that at the moment you just don't feel like doing like getting up and going to work on Monday morning. Wake up! Strengthen what remains! Remember what you have received and determine to keep it. Repent while there is still time to overcome your apathy.

Or else

Jesus warns **“Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you** (Vs 3) This is a stern warning to a lifeless church. God can visit an individual or a church at any time not just at the time of the second coming. God's severity is not to be underestimated though He will exercise His love in caring for His sheep and for the ministers and seeks to bring them back to Himself.

There was a small faithful remnant at this church who were walking in white and whose names were written in the Lambs Book of Life. Jesus says **“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life”** (Vs 5) See the warning in Revelation 22:19 which is similar for any who take away the words of God in the book **“For I testify to**

everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”

Finally lets each search our hearts by asking ourselves some questions. Is there anything in my life which is not satisfying the heart of God? Does He hear my prayers or am I just stringing some words together? Is my cry to Him from a sincere heart? Does He delight in my singing or is it just a musical expression of a pleasant feeling? You might observe on the one hand a large apparently successful church with great musicians and facilities which is not satisfying Gods heart, and on the other hand an old lady in a small gathering singing and satisfying the heart of God. Is our giving grudging or without sacrifice or is it with love and sacrifice and received as a sweet smell before the throne of God? In Sardis everything stopped short of the throne of God. They were dead.

Please bear in mind that apathy is progressive. First there is a lack of zeal for God and His church. This is a condition not to be ignored since it can only get worse. It will spiral with no desire for prayer or meeting with other believers and though the Holy Spirit will prick our conscience we can rationalise our state and tell our conscience to be quiet. Satan comes with an offer of something apparently better, something that you would have rejected out of hand in more zealous and attentive days. Jesus says WAKE UP!!

When I was younger, I read a lot by Leonard Ravenhill and I will finish with a quote of his "Someone asked me, "Do you pray for the dead?" I said, "No, I preach to them!" I think every pew in every church is death row. Think about that! They're dead! They sing about God; they talk about God, but they're dead! They have no living relationship (with God) I want to see a fellowship where your burdens become mine! Your grief over your children becomes my grief! Where we really bear each other's burdens; where we love each other and let the world come and see that we are the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus who cared only to do the will of His Father."

Chapter 7

The church at Philadelphia

Revelation chapter 3:7-13

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’: ⁸‘I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. ¹⁰Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹²He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. ¹³‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Philadelphia was situated in the youngest and smallest of all the seven cities. The city was founded about 150BC by King Attalus of

Pergamum. His nickname was “Philadelphus” which means “one who loves his brother” The King was noted for the admiration and love he had for his brother and the city was named in honour of Him. So then Philadelphia became known as the city of brotherly love. The City was located in a narrow pass between two mountain ranges. It stood as a doorway between Asia Minor and Asia. It was built on a geological fault and plagued by frequent earthquakes and tremors. People were often forced to flee the city to avoid being injured or killed by falling buildings. It was the home to numerous temples dedicated to the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece. It was the last of the seven cities to lose its Christian testimony. There was a thriving Christian community there as late as 1,000 AD, when the city was captured by the Muslim armies of the Middle East.

The introduction from Jesus was **“These things says He who is holy, He who is true”** The church comprised of people who were walking with the Lord, earnestly seeking to glorify Him in their life together.

He who is Holy

The Bible testifies of His holiness.

1. Heaven testified of His holiness “And the angel answered and said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

2. Hell testified of His holiness “Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you

come to destroy us? I know who You are the Holy One of God!"
(Mark 1:24)

3. Jesus testifies of His holiness "Which of you convicts Me of sin?"
(John 8:46). Note His question was never answered.

4. In Revelation 4:8 in the throne room of heaven we see the four living creatures who day and night cry "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come".

5. Isaiah saw "The Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up" and there the Seraphim cried one to another "Holy, Holy is The Lord of Hosts the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6)

6. Peter said 1 Peter 1:15 "Be as He who called you is holy you also be holy in all your conduct".

Jesus is holy and has all the power to enable us to live Holy in this world. Praise Him!

He who is true

These believers were surrounded daily by false gods and false worship. When they came to Jesus Christ they came to truth, to the one who said, "I am the way the truth and the life no man comes to the Father except through Me" Salvation is real, prayer is real, grace is real, heaven is real, His presence is real, His Word is real, His power is real. Holiness and truth go hand in hand, truth accompanies holiness and truth is the consequence of holiness. No holiness no truth.

“He who has the key of David, He who opens, and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens” (Vs 1)

The Old Testament is the background for this phrase “key of David”. In Isaiah 22 Isaiah pronounces judgment upon Shebna the king’s treasurer and chief officer. The office would be taken from him and given to another man named Eliakim a more worthy character. The one who held the key could open the door and let people into the treasury, could release the riches of the king or lock them up, could decide who should enter into the presence of the king and who should not. Jesus holds the key no one can come to the Father except through Him. Isaiah predicted Jesus’ day “The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house” (Isaiah 22:21-23). Keys represent authority, access and availability. Jesus comes to this little church and says, I have the keys of divine treasure and I decide who is shut out and who receives it. I decide who is blessed and who is cursed. I am holy and true and have absolute authority.

Jesus comes to this weak but faithful church with no word of rebuke or complaint rather with words of praise and promise **“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Vs 2)**

Probably most of the members were slaves or servants. They were few and they were poor low class and undistinguished. They were small and faithful. One small fellowship of believers in a city of

maybe ten thousand. They were like those Jesus called His little flock “do not fear little flock for it is your Fathers good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). “My grace is sufficient for you and My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

“I know your works” I know all about you. I opened a door for you, and you walked right through faithfully. We don’t know what opportunity Jesus gave them, but they took it up even though they had just little power. They were a little grain of mustard seed moving a few mountains which reminds me of one of Wesley’s hymns

“Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build Thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart overpower,
And all my simple soul devour.”

Originally Wesley wrote the first verse like this:

“O that I was as heretofore
when first sent forth in Jesus’ Name.
I rush through’ every **open Door.**
and cry to All, ‘Behold the Lamb!’
Seize the poor trembling Slaves of Sin
and force the Outcasts to come in”.

“You Kept My word” They heard the word and obeyed it. Do you recall the words at the beginning of the book of Revelation? I urge you to forget the timelines and the endless speculations and hold

to this promise **“blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written in it”** Philadelphia heard the word of God and obeyed and kept it.

“You have not denied My Name” They were loyal to Jesus Christ, just a little independent church not affiliated or part of a denomination. No matter how strong the cultural influences, how fierce the defamation and persecution they did not deny Jesus

“You have kept My command to persevere” (vs 10). The life of Job is perhaps the best example of perseverance (not patience) they are different. He lost his wealth, family and health yet he was preserved through faith and obedience crying out to God in his darkest hour. James writes in Chapter 5:11 “Indeed we count the blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by The Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful”.

“Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Vs 9) Do you recall that Jesus referred to the synagogue of Satan when addressing Smyrna, the persecuted church? He said, **“I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan”** Something similar was going on in the cities of Smyrna and Philadelphia. The so-called Jews were causing trouble for the church. In Smyrna they had stirred up the pagan community to oppose the church and perhaps the same was happening in Philadelphia. The Jews were irritated because they believed the Gentiles would be excluded from Gods kingdom.

Effectively you might describe them as racist. The Gentiles were the scum of the earth and the Jews would not so much as rub up against the shoulders of a gentile contaminate. If they passed through a gentile area, they would not come into their own area without first shaking the dust off their feet. They did not want Gentile dirt in Israel. When the church came along and pronounced Jesus was the Messiah of Israel and that this was the culmination of Judaism this was too much. Here then in the local synagogue led, not by God but by Satan, they attacked this little church. They claimed to be Jews genetically legally and ceremonially, but Jesus said they were not Jews because they rejected Christ.

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Vs 10). In the immediate context there was to come a wave of anti-Christian persecution and fury that would sweep the whole of the then known world. Yet there is a wider reference as in many ages such waves of hatred have occurred and do to this day. **“I will keep you from the hour of trial”** The verb can be rendered **“keep you right through”**. Jesus will keep His church to the very end. Many have suffered death and have been just as much “kept” as those whose lives were not required of them.

“I am coming quickly hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown” (Vs11) To this small faithful often struggling church Jesus says **“I am coming soon”** Soon the struggle will be over the battle fought the victory won, temptation will cease and there will be no more sin or sickness no more tears and heartaches”

“I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Vs 12) You are mine you belong to me I love you says Jesus. You will enter into the closest richest loveliest, sweetest and brightest most glorious relationship imaginable with God in glory.

We read of the New Jerusalem in chapter 21. This is the place of permanence which replaces all that is temporary. Jesus will give these over comers, these faithful ones, a place of honour in the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. Philadelphia was subject to earthquakes. People sometimes had to flee their homes as the ground shook beneath them. What the Lord is promising the church in Philadelphia is that they can look forward to a new city, the New Jerusalem with sturdy pillars and names indelibly engraved, will last forever.

To conclude here is a small church with no prestige. Because it was weak it relied on God who looked down saw their works and the way they lived and had no word of rebuke or threat

Finally, an extract from a talk by David Wilkerson who is talking about the marriage at Canaan when Jesus turned water into wine **“let me ask you have you ever wondered why Jesus waited to do this miracle. He waited till every bottle was dry, every glass empty, even as the worried host wrung his hands. I tell you Jesus waited purposely at that wedding for all human resources to fail, so nothing could solve the problem short of a miracle that was when Gods hour came Here is an important truth for every believer. The hour of Christ power is manifested at the very point of our**

helplessness. Jesus hour had to do with something that was happening at the feast. That is His hour of power is when there is no wine left in the bottles, when we are empty of solutions, when all our human effort is in vain and only a miracle can answer the problem. We find this principle at work throughout the Bible. In man's darkest hour the Lord has a history of manifesting His power. When we come to our wits end, God has already prepared a great work of deliverance on our behalf.

Chapter 8

The church at Laodicea

Revelation chapter 3; 14-22

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, these things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

We don't know how the church began but evidently there was a link between this church and the church at Colossae. There are

three references to the Laodicea church in Paul's letter to the Colossians. They are:

1. Ch. 2:1-3 "For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2.Ch. 4:12 "Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.

3.Ch. 4:15-16 "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.¹⁶ Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

See how Jesus introduces Himself to the church "**These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God**" (Vs 14) Jesus is "the Amen" the last word the end to which nothing can be added. He is certain, faithful and unchangeable. Paul says "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us (2 Cor1:20). Everything God has ever planned purposed or promised for man

finds its certainty in Christ. Christ is Gods Amen. Listen you lukewarm church I am certain and final, the ultimate authority the Amen and there is no appeal from Me

Jesus is “**the beginning of God’s creation**” Writing to the church in Colossae Paul says “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Colossians 1:14-17). John says in his Gospel “All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3)

Jesus is God Himself and He comes to this church with an authority beyond any other. He is the very essence of cause and creation. Wherever you look there is the work of Christ. His footprints are everywhere. The flowers mountains rivers majestic landscapes declare the beauty of Christ. The rising and the setting of the sun, the seasons, the glories of autumn, the snow etc. In it all is the glory and majestic Christ. To this church conceited because of its wealth and independence Jesus announces his wealth and independence. To this lifeless indifferent lukewarm church, He announces Himself as the one who is the source of all life, “**the beginning of God’s creation**”.

I love that old hymn “loved with everlasting love”.

Heaven above is softer blue
Earth beneath is sweeter Green
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow
Flowers with deeper beauties shine
Since I know as now I know
I am His and He is mine.

The city of Laodicea was important because it was on a trade route. People crossed north and south and east and west and came through the city. Crucial to the city was its water supply. As the population grew and water became scarce water had to be brought in via an underground aqueduct brought from hot springs six miles away, so by time it reached city it was tepid.

Money (Gold)

It was a banking centre because it was a business hub, so when in AD 60 the city was flattened by an earthquake the city refused financial help from Rome to rebuild because it had enough money of its own. Indeed, it was one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

Clothing

There was a flourishing wool industry and its major product was a soft wool that was glossy black in colour used for clothing and for carpet weaving.

Medicine (eye ointment)

It also had a medical school which had developed an ointment for the eye. People with eye problems would come to that part of the world to get the ointment.

There was no commendation for this church. Jesus simply says “**I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were either one or the other**” (Vs 15) In Hierapolis, a town six miles north, were famous hot springs you could bathe in. They had a therapeutic value. In Colossae ten miles south, there was a cold stream coming from the mountains. It was famous because it was cold and thirst quenching. The water coming into the city in Laodicea through the underground aqueduct had flowed for miles and it was tepid, neither cold nor hot. Any visitors to Laodicea not used to the water would put it in their mouths and immediately spit it out. The people in the church were not cold, not frozen, not completely indifferent, neither were they hot and zealous and fervent. They were lukewarm-tepid something which evidently God detests in a church and in an individual. Tepid is utterly repugnant to him. No emotion, no enthusiasm, no urgency, no passion, no compassion.

Do you know what first stirred William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army? He said, “I was made a red-hot Salvationist by an infidel lecturer” He was in a class listening to a lecturer who said “If I believed what some of you Christians believed I would never rest night or day telling men about it” Williams Booth acted on that and it drove him from tepid to red hot.

Jesus would rather have had them cold than in this tepid condition. There is a greater chance for someone who is cold than someone who is lukewarm. There is more hope for the man outside the church in all his coldness and lack of life and love of the world, than for a man in the church near enough the warmth to appreciate it but far enough away from its burning heat to be any use to God or man. The heathen who have not heard the gospel have a greater chance than the man who has become an evangelised heathen. There is a lesson here, I think, the gospel message does not have to be repeated endlessly to people who know it but have not been saved. There is a danger that they become hardened to the message. Each time it is preached another layer goes on the heart making him or her more difficult to win.

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’ (Vs 17). If you had visited the church, they may have shown you, with pride, their lovely buildings and facilities etc. Apparently, they did not need a thing. The word **“wretched”** means oppressed with a burden. Their wealth was their burden. What they thought carried them was a burden to them. Here was not a church burdened with debt but with wealth. Jesus said they were **“miserable”** The Lord was moved in pity for them. **“Poor”** means poor as a pauper a beggar on the street. From Jesus point of view they were cringing beggars having nothing worth having. **“Blind”** seeing nothing lacking vision. **“Naked”** stripped of beauty and glory which should adorn the church. These are not words of anger but of pity and Jesus is able to remedy their situation, if they will let Him. His anger is that they

are satisfied with such rubbish. He wanted to give them real riches, open their eyes and give them some clothes.

“I will vomit you out of my mouth” (Vs 16) In Laodicea they had everything except Christ. They had thrown Him out and He knocked at the door to get back in **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.** (Vs 20) (incidentally this is not addressed to the unsaved though it is often used in gospel preaching). The bride had thrown the bridegroom out. The bride lived quite satisfied and smug in the delusion that the bridegroom still lived with her. Oh, the infinite love of God who knocked on the door for admission, how He suffered and still does. He excluded Himself from His own heaven and glory to come to earth to die. He was excluded from His nation by their blindness. Men and women don't want Him in their lives and exclude Him. But here it's the church by tepid indifference locking Him out and excluding Him.

Jesus is about to reject their work and spit them out of His mouth but here is the remedy. **“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see** (Vs 18) It's as if Jesus is saying, you rich city and church of Laodicea with your money, your black wool, and your eye ointment, I have a solution for you. It's similar to the words of Isaiah 55:1 **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost”** How can we buy if we have

no money no currency. The answer is simple, the one thing we have in this condition is our own wretchedness that is our currency, the recognition of that is the key to the purchase. Back to those words of Paul to Colossae Col 2:2 “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Jesus opens the storehouse of Himself to this pitiful deluded self-satisfied failed church. If you will admit to your condition, I have riches for you GOLD CLOTHES AND OINTMENT the most important commodities in the city. What they needed however were the spiritual equivalents.

Gold

1 Peter 1:6-9 “in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not ^[d]seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” Faith, says Peter, is of greater worth than Gold, and only Jesus can give this. Faith in His word, faith in Him, faithfulness to Him

Clothes

Isaiah 61:10 “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom **decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels**” Jesus offers to them the clothes of His own righteousness.

Salve or eye ointment

I could not resist including the brief account in John 9 of the man born blind a wonderful story “Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. ⁷And He said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So, he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore, the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, “Is not this he who sat and begged?” The church was blind to its own condition and needed its eyes opening to see its state and condition and to see Jesus.

What then was Jesus waiting for, let me repeat His offer “**Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.** He waits for one man, one woman to respond and invite Him

as a guest for dinner. Jesus says if you just hear the knocking and open not only will I be your guest, but you will be mine

A glorious promise follows **“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.** (Vs 21) It seems The Lord recognises the difficulty of life in the Laodicean church and He makes them the most gracious and wonderful promise Jesus said, **“as I also overcame (was victorious)”** Now remember he is talking to people who were taking it easy had no compassion no enthusiasm and he says to them “overcome” as I also overcame. In the wilderness Satan came to him and said **“all these kingdoms will I give you”** by an easy way without the cross the passion the crucifixion. His own disciples brought the same suggestion that He should spare Himself. But The Lord overcame and sat with His Father in His throne. Now he says to Laodicea self-satisfied Luke warm complacent be zealous and repent and sit with me in mine.

Brothers and sisters “how are you”, a familiar English greeting, normally followed by “I’m fine thanks” The more important question is “how is Christ feeling” Is He feeling sick about your life and mine? Is He feeling sick about the life of the church? Am I lukewarm, have I excluded Christ and locked Him out? Do I think I am healthy when I am not? Am I deluded? Do I have a heart for seeking God? Do I have a heart for communion with God in private and corporate prayer? Do I have a heart for the lost? Can Christ be seen in me? Who among us wants a lukewarm relationship with someone? No life, no passion no laughing or crying together. We are the church there is no one else out there to carry out the work of Jesus. It belongs to Jesus and he has entrusted it to us.

Chapter 9

An interlude

We have finished the first three chapters which are relatively easy to interpret and understand, but now if we are not careful, we might just begin to show signs of a serious disorder PTRRD (Post-Traumatic Revelation Reading Disorder). This malady often occurs once you have completed the first three chapters (the letters to the seven churches) then things can get difficult and confusing. There are visions from heaven, strange creatures, plagues, horses of different colours, and angels. There are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, not to mention a dragon, giant hail stones etc. etc. I am anxious that we manage to find our way through unscathed, indeed more than that, that God will speak to us.

Let us keep in mind that the book was written for the benefit of the seven churches to whom it is addressed, and therefore we must assume it was relevant for them and they would understand the rather strange apocalyptic language. The word “apocalypse” has become associated with a catastrophic event, but the term actually means “to unveil”. Revelation is a revealing (apocalypse) of the biblical view of how all things come to an end.

More than two thirds of Revelations four hundred and four verses allude to the Old Testament with which the seven churches were familiar. They were aware of apocalyptic language and writings. They lived in what is sometime described as a poly-chronic

culture, that is to say they tended to do many things simultaneously where time was not linear but fluid. The focus was on the task rather than a timeframe. If we read the book from a Western perspective and expect a series of chronological events, we shall miss the message entirely. Pictures are flashing before us, and what I want us to look at is some of the pictures without trying to work it all out with a timeline. People who visit India for the first time describe how the sights, smells, noise, and bustle assault their senses (in a good way) and this is what happens in Revelation to some extent. There are all sorts of pictures. Angels, a dragon armies, rainbows, thunder and lightning, trumpets which assault our senses (in a great way). So then, don't expect a traditional linear story beginning at a particular point and using some progressive scenes to move characters and events to a destination. Revelation does not fit such a western cultural approach to literature.

In view of all the difficulties, why read the book? Well, we have the promise right at the beginning in chapter 1:3 **"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near"**. Here are some more reasons.

1. It explains the Biblical view of God and His relationship to human beings. Let's not endeavour to find definitive answers about the future, but rather see the nature of God and His love for those who trust Him.
2. We shall get a glimpse of heaven. There is very little in the Bible about what heaven is like, but in the final chapters we are given a glimpse into a new heaven and a new earth.

3. There is a clear message of hope in all the gloom described. There is, in the end, victory where good will triumph over evil and suffering.

Let's take a little time to consider the allusions from the Old Testament to which I have referred. Apocalyptic language was normally employed during times of hardship and suffering. It warned the readers to be prepared and hope in God. For example, Zechariah wrote his book to a defeated people of Israel who had just returned from exile. It used symbolism to represent real world counterparts, it used literature using bizarre imagery which added drama and deepened the meaning of the message. Apocalyptic writing, for example, represented people and countries as animals such as a lamb, a dragon, or strange beast. In Daniel 8:21 reference is made to a male goat as the king of Greece. Similarly, real cities and nations receive symbolic names such as Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Social and political problems are often depicted as natural disasters involving the sun and the moon and the stars. Apocalyptic literature uses numbers to convey meanings, such as seven repeated many times in Revelation. The numbers carry significance beyond and instead of their arithmetic purpose.

Revelation not only contains prophecy but the whole book is prophecy. Go back to Revelation 1:3 and see for example Chapter 22:18-19 **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.**

Let's take a look at a few of the two hundred and fifty references and allusions to the Old Testament. There are references to Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Psalms, Exodus, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Amos and Joel. There are no direct quotes from these books, but the references are clear. Here are some, but there are many more.

1. Revelation mentions the tree of life (Genesis 3:22) four times 2:7, 22:2, 22:14, and 22:19
2. Judgment on Gods enemies in Revelation 19:20, and 20:10 (being thrown into a lake of fire burning with sulphur) resembles the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24
3. The symbol of the woman clothed with the sun having the moon under her feet and wearing a crown of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1) is similar to the imagery in Josephs dream (Genesis 37:9)
4. Several times John alludes to Exodus 3:14 (I AM WHO I AM) when he refers to God as "he who is and who was and who is to come (Revelation 1:4, 1:8, 11:17, 16:5)
5. The plagues of hail (Revelation 8:7) locusts (Revelation 9:3) sores (Revelation 16:2) water changed to blood (Revelation 16:3-4) darkness (Revelation 16:10) and unclean spirits that look like frogs (Revelation 16:12-14) resemble six of the plagues that occurred in Egypt.
6. John says in Revelation 15:3 that those redeemed sing the "song of Moses" which is similar to what Israel does after crossing the red sea.
7. The winepress of the wrath of God in Revelation 14:9 echoes the winepress in Joel 3:13 and Isaiah 63:3

There are many more, but we will stick with seven a favourite number in the book.

We are bound to take a look at the various interpretations of the book throughout church history, which we will have to refer to from time to time. Over the span of that history four major interpretations of the book of Revelation have emerged. These are,

1. FUTURISTS Everything is going to happen in the future,
1. PRETERISTS Everything has already happened,
2. HISTORICIST Some things have happened, some are happening now, and some are yet to happen,
3. IDEALISTS Nothing literal happens everything is symbolic.

We shall need to look at these in a bit more detail (not too much lest we get bogged down and begin to suffer the dreaded PTRRD).

The early church in the second and third centuries usually interpreted the book in a literal way, tying John's words into actual events that would take place soon, maybe in their own lifetimes. Some of the other views mentioned above were adopted by others in the middle ages and beyond. Coming to the modern era, during the reformation Spanish Jesuits developed the preterist and futurists ideas which served to counter the suggestion that the Pope was the antichrist. A man by the name of J.N. Darby (founder of the Brethren) came up with what is called "Dispensationalism" or eras represented by the seven churches. We shall look more closely at this in a moment. This futurist approach to the book gained momentum in the 20th Century, in particular in the evangelical church. Today in the 21st Century the historicist view

had faded significantly, while futurism, preterism and idealism have strong followings.

However, the most popular and well known in our day and generation is the futurist model which most of us will have heard of. This view is the basis of the “left behind” book series. I am anxious that we don’t get bogged down but it is important to consider in a little more detail the futurist view. The futurist view is that much of John’s prophecy starting with Revelation 4 (which we are now up to) chronicles events which will occur sometime in the future. In other words, John uses Revelation as a platform on which to give specific details of the End Times, including

1. A seven-year period of judgment called the Tribulation (Revelation 6-18),
2. The Second Coming of Jesus which immediately follows the Tribulation (Revelation 19),
3. A final judgment on the world (Revelation 20),
4. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

This view has gained popularity over the past 150 years and is probably the mainstream position for many evangelical churches. Sadly, many who hold to this view have received it slavishly without proper study, though some have, and are content with the position which they believe they can sustain from Scripture. The futurist position is the most literal rather than symbolic. For example, they tend to see numbers in the book as literal e.g., 144,000 in Revelation 7 or the 1000-year reign of Christ in Revelation 20. There are subdivisions of the futurist camp, but I want to look particularly at one of them which I have already referred to which we call “dispensationalist”. Those who call

themselves “dispensationalists” argue that each church in the first three chapters of the book represent a period of church history. They believe in what is called the “rapture” which is the point in time when all Christians still alive on earth will be taken up to heaven to be with Christ. Now again we have a division of thinking. Some believe that the church will be snatched away before the tribulation (pre-tribulationists) which means the church has disappeared at the start of Revelation 4. Some believe it will happen at the end of the judgment period, just before the second coming, and yet another group believe it will be mid- way between these two times. Oh dear, are you beginning to suffer PTRRD? I am!

Those who subscribe to the futurist position tend to promote sensationalism and want to interpret Revelation based on current events. They see, for example, things like eye-scanning technology and become convinced that this is a precursor to the mark of the beast. The Antichrist tends to be the most notorious villain of the moment. These are no more than guessing games, for God alone knows the future and how it will all pan out.

In Revelation 1 and 22 John clearly says the events he is writing about will “soon” take place which presents a problem for the futurist position. Further, much of the book of Revelation becomes less relevant, or even irrelevant, to those seven churches if everything after chapter 4 happens in the future.

Some may have heard of an American Author called Tim LaHaye one of the modern pioneers of the revival of “dispensationalism” or “rapture theology” He together with a man called Hal Lindsey, who wrote “late great planet earth” helped popularise this way of thinking in the late 1960s and 70s. The ideas these men

propounded first appeared in the 1830s so in the context of church history it hasn't been around for long. Its main characteristic is the church being snatched away. This, they say, could happen at any moment followed by a seven-year Tribulation after which Jesus comes again and his one thousand year reign will begin. Much of this thinking is also tied in with the return of the Jews to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

There are many red faces involved in the rapture theory, for example Tim LeHaye predicted in his book "the beginning of the End" that people who had been alive since 1914 would experience the Rapture. Books have been rewritten and corrected as predictions and silly theories have been discounted or have failed to materialise.

I'm conscious there may be some who are thinking, for example, of the verses in Matthew 24:36-41, often quoted by the left behind folks as a proof text for the Rapture. Let's quote it here so we get the context.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Watch therefore, for you do not know what ^[e]hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief

would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus links this passage with the story of Noah where those taken away were taken for judgment not to heaven to be rescued. It was those left behind who were safe.

Another passage may come to mind in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen-asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are ^[a]asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ therefore comfort one another with these words".

Now, far from being a silent and stealthy snatching away (which is suggested) as Jesus comes for His saints and takes them back to heaven, the passage is very noisy with trumpets, shouting, and archangels and no mention of us returning with Jesus to heaven.

We must finish here and what we must not do is fall out with any brother or sister who takes a different view on these matters. My hope is that we can get through as peacefully as possible looking

at the big picture of the book, which is that Christ wins in the end and we are on the victory side.

Chapter 10

The Throne room of Heaven

Revelation chapter 4

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.⁴ Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.⁶ Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying 'Holy, holy, holy Is the Lord God Almighty Who was, and is, and is to come.'⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,¹⁰ the twenty-four

elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and sa¹¹ “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power for you created all thing and by your will they were create and have their being.”

John begins by telling us of his ascent into heaven and now we follow him on a guided tour of the throne room. First, he describes in highly symbolic language, the one seated on the throne. Then starting from the outside and working inward he depicts different types of beings who circle the throne. The one seated looks like jasper and ruby, and around the throne is a rainbow that shone like an emerald. Clearly a throne signifies rule, authority, and power. John’s vision of the throne is about the sovereignty of God. This is the central theme that he emphasizes over and over again in the book of Revelation.

The Bible consistently shies away from describing God in visual terms. Judaism prohibits any images to represent God. This goes all the way back to Moses when God tells the Israelites “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Exodus 20:4). However, the Old Testament does describe God using visual imagery. In the book of Daniel God is called “The Ancient of Days” and His clothing is “white as snow; the hair of His head white like wool (Daniel 7:9). In Ezekiel’s vision of a mobile throne chariot, he describes the glory of God as a figure “like that of a man” and this figure from the waist up is like “glowing metal” and from the waist down “looked like fire” (Ezekiel 1:26-27) These passages seem to provide a background for Johns vision of the exalted Jesus in the throne room, and later in the book as we shall see.

In the New Testament, because Jesus is the son of God in the flesh, we have those marvellous words in John 14:9 "Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" We also have the verse in 2 Corinthians 4:6 where Paul says, "For God who says let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

God's throne was surrounded by a perfect circle of a rainbow of emerald green. God established the rainbow as a sign of His covenant and sees things through the perspective of His everlasting covenant. The Psalmists tells us "He always remembers His covenant" (Psalm 111:5). This covenant is referred to as "an eternal covenant" in Hebrews 13:20-21 "now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" That phrase "eternal covenant" is a further description of the "new Covenant" through which we received salvation, and reminds us that it has an eternal context that transcends time. The marvel of the new covenant arising out of the pure love of God, is that human beings become partakers of the same life and nature that is in God. Humanity is grafted into the Godhead. Humanity does not become divine but is indwelt by the divine life of God Himself.

Around the throne were twenty four thrones with elders sitting upon them. These may be saints of old like Abraham and Moses, and it may be their number was greater than twenty four, which

may be just symbolic of this group of men and women who have taken their place around the throne. The number twenty four occurs in 1 Chronicles 24:7-18 and 25:9-31 where twenty four divisions of priests and musicians were appointed to worship in the temple that David planned, according to the pattern given to him by the Spirit. There are a number of speculations here and this is where we cannot speak with certainty.

“In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God (Vs 5). Around the throne were seven lamps representing the seven Spirits of God. The number seven suggests the perfect aspects of the Spirit working in the human race. The Bible is clear that there is one Spirit not seven (Ephesians 4:4) and the Bible describes different aspects of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit of wisdom and understanding (Isaiah 11:2)
2. The Spirit of counsel and might (Isaiah 11:2)
3. The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:2)
4. The Spirit of power and love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7)
5. The Spirit of faith (2 Corinthians 4:13)
6. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:17)
7. The Spirit of grace and supplication (Zechariah 12:10)
8. The Spirit of glory (1 Peter 4:14)

What a scene of worship we have here. John saw before the throne a lake of such perfect stillness that it was like purest glass, as clear as crystal. There was no impurity in its depths and no waves troubled its surface. These four living creatures were closest to the throne and the description of them seems to be drawn from the

Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel's vision of the mobile throne chariot (Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10) and the seraphim in Isaiah (Isaiah 6:2-3).

The living ones each had a different face, a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle. Now again we are in the realms of speculation and some would say that each creature represents one of the four gospels i.e.

- The lion is the gospel of Matthew. The lion being a kingly figure and Matthew presents Jesus as King of the Jews.
- The ox is the gospel of Mark. An ox is a humble servant figure and Mark portrays Jesus as the servant of the Lord.
- The man is the gospel of Luke. The man matches Luke's depiction of the humanity of Jesus.
- The eagle is the gospel of John The eagle describes John's soaring portrait of the divine Son of God.

Others would speculate (by reference to Daniel and Ezekiel) that in neither of these books is the slightest suggestion that the creatures represent anything other than angelic beings.

In the end, the message of Revelation 4 to the seven churches is clear. They need not fear what Caesar or any worldly empire may do to them. God is on the throne and all will be well.

This is the message to us too, and it's worth repeating those verses in Romans 8; 33-39.

“Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of

God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

Chapter 11

The Lamb and the scroll

Revelation Chapter 5

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. ⁴ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. ⁵ But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." ⁶ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to

our God; and we shall reign on the earth. "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honour and glory and blessing!¹³ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

The focus of chapter 4 was the throne, but now John shifts the focus on the scroll held by the enthroned Lord. This scroll was rather unusual in that it had writing on both sides. This was not common practice, and evidently there was a lot of content which needed lots of room for writing. The rolls of the scroll were on the left and the right, and the writing lay in narrow columns about three inches wide. The scroll was held in the left hand and unrolled with the right. As the reading went on the previously read portion would be re-rolled.

When a roll was finished, it was fastened with strings and the strings were sealed with wax at the knots. The scroll was sealed with seven seals, so there would be seven strings around the scroll, each string sealed with wax. All the seals had to be opened before the scroll could be read. The scroll would probably have looked like this.



Now what does this scroll mean, and here we could look at different ideas suggested by commentators over centuries. The one I personally favour is that the scroll was akin to the title deed to planet earth. The best connection to this suggestion is with Jeremiah 32:6-15 which describes Jewish title deeds as being sealed. A last will and testament also seems to fit the description of the scroll which would be sealed by the testator (the one who makes the will) and verified by witnesses. Only after the death of the testator would the seals be broken and the scroll unrolled. Now we know Jesus died, but He came back to life and now bequeaths His vast estate to those who believe in Him. They become Joint heirs (Romans 8:17; and 1 Corinthians 3:22-23). It seems that the scroll is more than a will since we discover, as it is opened, that it includes divine judgments poured out on unbelievers.

God is not sitting on His throne wondering what is going to happen, rather He is calmly surveying an unfolding story whose every twist and turn is within His control and knowledge. This would serve to remind those first century Christians that God is in complete control of everything that happens.

A crisis occurs in John's vision. An angel issues a challenge **who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?** To John's dismay and grief no one steps forward. John weeps and sobs openly. The scroll must be opened if its contents are to become real. This is the book of destiny containing the course of redemptive history and its completion. If no one opens it, the kingdom of God won't come in all its fullness. There was no answer to the angels challenge, because creation is incapable of deciding or effecting its own destiny. Someone above the order of created beings must determine the course of history, and only God can unfold this plan.

One of the elders rescued John from his grief and said **Do not weep behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals** This one "the lion" was the great figure of Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah. Here are some references.

1. **Genesis 49:9-10** Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?¹⁰ The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
2. **Isaiah 31:4** "For thus the LORD has spoken to me: "As a lion roars,
And a young lion over his prey (When a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him, He will not be afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise), So the LORD of hosts will come down To fight for Mount Zion and for its hill.

3. **Hosea 11:10** “They shall walk after the LORD. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then His sons shall come trembling from the west.”

Because of the elders announcement John expected to see a lion, but instead he saw “a lamb” John even uses the specific word for a little lamb, he signifies “a little or delicate lamb”. When men want symbols of power, they conjure up powerful beasts, but the representative of the kingdom is a lamb representing humility, gentleness and sacrificial love. The lamb looks as though it had been slain, evidently it had marks of sacrifice on it. The judgments to come is dictated and administered by the lamb, who has already offered a way of escape by taking the judgment upon Himself. Judgment will come upon a world who hates the lamb and rejects Him and His offer of escape.

John saw the lamb **as though it had been slain**. Perhaps the wonderful thought here, is that the sacrifice of Jesus is as fresh today and current before God the Father as it ever was when Jesus died on the cross.

The lamb is not presented as an object of pity. He is depicted as **having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth** He is God Himself omnipotent (seven horns) and omniscience (seven eyes). In the Bible horns suggest power, and eyes knowledge and wisdom, which Jesus has in perfection, thus again the number seven. The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father but also the Spirit of Christ. (Acts 16:7 and Romans 8:9). Jesus takes the scroll as the lamb who is worthy, and he alone can dictate the destiny of creation.

This is followed by praise to Him who is worthy. The song of the elders and the cherubim (vs 8-10). High ranking angels (the four living creatures) and redeemed men (twenty four elders) join in corporate worship. Each one had a harp (there is music in heaven). This is the passage that started the idea that people in heaven will have harps! They also had **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints** they symbolically presented the prayers of the saints. They were not mediators on behalf of the saints, there is only one mediator between God and man and that is Christ Himself. How amazing that God considers the prayers of His people so precious, and they rise to Him as a sweet aroma.

They sang **a new song You are worthy**. In those days Roman Emperors were celebrated upon arrival with the Latin expression “vere dignus” translated “you are worthy”. But now the true ruler of the world is honoured. In chapter four the song of praise is regarding Gods work in creation but here the emphasis is on His work of redemption and recreation. **You were slain, have redeemed us to God, by Your blood, every tribe tongue and people and nation, made us kings and priests for our God and we shall reign on the earth**. We are kings because of our royal birth and destiny to reign with Christ, and priests because we need no mediator other than Christ.

Now countless angels join in declaring the worthiness of the lamb and what He has accomplished. **Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever**. The living God reigns forever. The Caesars come and go, and others who persecute the people of God, but the Lord is eternal and worthy of our praise.

Chapter 12

Six Seals

Revelation chapter 6

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!"² I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.³ When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"⁴ Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword.⁵ 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! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand.⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"⁷ When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"⁸ 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 by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How

long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been. ¹² I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, ¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

In Revelation chapter 5 the Lamb emerges as the only one worthy to take the scroll, break the seals, and reveal its contents. Now in this chapter, the Lamb is breaking the seals which trigger a series of events leading to His triumph. The Old Testament prophets warned that before the final triumph of the kingdom of God fearful judgments would affect the earth. They refer to this time as "the day of the Lord" For example see Jeremiah 4-7

The synoptic gospels (Matthew Mark and Luke) seem to provide a key to unlocking the meaning of the seals we are to look at in this chapter. It's a though the seven seals parallel a message Jesus gave to His disciples, in which Jesus explains what will happen before the end of the world. This is known as the "Olivet Discourse" and if

you care to remind yourself this can be found in Matthew 24:3-44, Mark 13:3-37 and Luke 21:7-36. In these passages Jesus tells of catastrophic events such as war, famine, earthquakes, pestilence, and persecution, which will recur throughout the present age. Life between Jesus life on earth and His eventual return to earth is punctuated by disasters and devastating events.

So, let's get into this chapter and first look first at verses 1-8 sometimes referred to as "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" Each one signifies disaster for the planet. Revelation portrays each of the first four seals as a differently coloured horse with a rider. John may be borrowing imagery from the Old Testament (see Zechariah 1:7-17 for example)

First seal a white horse (vs 1-3)

This seal is probably the most difficult of the seven seals to understand. Some suggest the rider is Jesus, using a reference to Revelation 19:11-16 in which Jesus is depicted riding a white horse in His triumphal return to earth. Some suggest the rider is the antichrist, because the other three horses represent negative and destructive forces, and so you would expect the first horseman to be consistent with this. What is the answer and here we must speculate and compare scripture with scripture, in an attempt to make sense of this first horse and its rider. First it was not uncommon for generals in the ancient world to ride on white horses as a sign of prestige. Second it would seem strange that an angelic being would summon Jesus to go forth. Also, the rider has a bow in his hand, which deviates from the references in Revelation where Jesus has a sword issuing from His mouth (Rev 1:16). For me however, the most persuasive point here is to

compare the parallel scriptures teaching on the end times which have been mentioned already, that is the Olivet Discourse. There the first thing Jesus warns about is false Messiahs. Mathew 24:1-5 “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”⁴ Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many” Could it be then, that this first horse and rider represent false messiahs which have been present in history from the first century till now. The Jewish historian Josephus describes several false messiahs.

Second seal a red horse (vs 4)

Clearly this a negative image, its rider being permitted to take peace from the earth so that people would kill each other. He was given a large sword. Could this red horse represent blood, for bloodshed has characterised human history. Revelation 12:3 refers to Satan as an “enormous red dragon” who continues to shake the planet. Praise God as the Psalmist says, “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth” (Psalm 46:9). Look again at Matthew 24. After false messiahs Jesus talks of wars vs 6 “You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Third seal a black horse (vs 5-6)

In this passage a famine strikes, but not everyone suffers. The wealthy enjoy luxuries, while the poor can't even afford necessities. An entire day's wage (a denarius) is required just to feed one family. This disparity in prices and commodities

illustrates a distressing feature of human history that is inequity and injustice. Throughout the history of the Roman Empire famine ravaged the population (see Acts 11:27-30). In 1921-22 in Russia there were awful famines, while the communist party bosses were still enjoying luxury goods from the west. See again the words of Jesus in Matthew 24 verse 7 “There will be famines and earthquakes in various places”.

Fourth seal a pale horse (vs 7-8)

Epidemics regularly decimated the Roman Empire. In Ephesus, plagues killed one third of the population during the years 165-251. The Black Death of 1348 is estimated to have killed 30-60% of the population of Europe. The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, the deadliest flu epidemic in history, infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide, about one third of the world's population, and killed an estimated 20 to 50 million people. More recently we had the AIDS epidemic where more than 70 million people have been infected with the HIV virus, and more than 35 million people have died. Just now as I am writing we are in the throes of Covid 19.

Fifth seal persecution (vs 9-11)

Religious persecution has always been with us, and will no doubt be with us until Jesus returns. Keep in mind that John wrote Revelation at the end of the first century. Already in 64 AD Nero Caesar had put many Christians to death. Many died in the arena torn to shreds by lions. Others were crucified, and some burned alive at night to serve as torches for Nero's nightly dinner parties. Nearer our time, we have seen Christians imprisoned and tortured all over the world. See again Matthew 24 and verse 9

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me”.

Sixth seal The Day of the Lord has come (vs 12-17)

What we have seen so far are events and suffering that humans have encountered over the centuries. However, the description of the sixth seal is in a different category from the others. Here a great earthquake, accompanied by unprecedented cosmic disturbances, indicate something beyond what we have seen in history. People from all walks of life cower in caves and cringe, as terrible events unfold all around them. It's as if creation is going back to its former state of chaos. How similar this is again to what Jesus warned in Matthew 24 “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. We shall delve further into this as we continue our study.

Chapter 13

Sealed and safe

Revelation chapter 7

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honour and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know" So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.¹⁵ Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Chapter 7 describes the calm before the storm of Gods wrath is poured out on the nations. John identifies two groups of people who stand before the throne of God, "the 144,000" and "a great

multitude” These individuals survive the Day of the Lord because God seals and saves them. This is not something that they have achieved as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God”. The whole Bible is the grand story of Gods mercy and how He rescues sinful people from otherwise inevitable judgment.

John sees four angels holding back the four winds of the earth which represent destructive forces about to be unleashed in the world, but God intends to protect His people.

Please read Ezekiel 9 which is a parallel chapter, when the prophet saw a man with an inkhorn set out to put a mark on the forehead of the faithful believers of Israel. Those marked were spared from the angel of judgment passing through the land. Judgment is delayed until Gods people have been prepared to come through the terrible storms of Gods judgment unharmed.

Now when we come to Chapter 13, we shall read about the mark of the beast on the foreheads of those who worship Satan (Rev 13:16; 20:4) and this is when speculation goes wild and people talk about microchip implants and such. However, the seal of Gods people is not a physical mark or a chip. The Greek word describes the seal used to imprint the crest and identity of an individual or a government. It was pressed into hot wax and like a coin would leave the outline on the head of the letters and symbols identifying ownership. The mark has to do with ownership. Please be reminded that all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit. “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) “And do not grieve

the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30) The seal of God is on all His people to keep them from the coming judgment.

Who then are the 144,000? John gives a roll call of the tribes of Israel and here considerable speculation and controversy surround their identification. Let's tread carefully and explore briefly two of the most likely speculations.

1. The 144,000 may symbolize all Christians, and on this basis, they are virtually the same group as the great multitude in verses 9-17. The difference is just one of perspective. The listing of the tribes of Israel here is different from the Old Testament (the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are omitted) which may support the idea of a purely symbolic nature of the group. In the New Testament, it is an often repeated truth that not all who are of the blood line of Abraham are spiritually sons of Abraham. For example, in Romans 9:6-7 "For they are not all Israel that are of Israel. Neither because they are Abrahams offspring are they all children" Several passages in the New Testament view the church as Israel and Gentiles and Jews who have trusted Christ make up the new people of God. Romans 2:28-29 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" Galatians 6:15-16 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation and as many as walk according to this rule,

peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” This is reflected in the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia where we hear of “those who say that they are Jews but are not” (Rev 2:9, 3:9).

2. The 144,000 may symbolize Jewish Christians, not Jewish and Gentiles Christians together. Paul speaks of a present remnant of Israel who do believe and seems to say at the end of the age there will be many Jews turning to Christ. Romans 11:25-26 “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved”.

Now we must turn to those referred to in verse 9:17 “a great multitude” who have come out of the great ordeal, commonly known as “the tribulation” linked to the “Day of The Lord”. See the sixth seal (Rev 6:12-17). These are drawn from all nations tribes peoples and tongues, too many to number. They cry with a loud voice “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” The Bible is consistent in saying that God saves His people, they don’t save themselves. The angelic choir fills the heavens with a sevenfold song of worship to God. Praise, blessing, glory, wisdom, honour, power and might. During the time John wrote the book of Revelation people directed such attributes to Caesar. John is making clear that these attributes befit only God Himself.

The chapter concludes with John combining seven Old Testament texts (Isaiah 49:10; Psalm 121:6, 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:23-24; Isaiah 25:8)

with the blessings that await the multitude of the redeemed, those who have been faithful to Jesus. The redeemed surround and serenade the sovereign God. He in turn shelters them from the scorching sun.

As the chapter ends there is a wonderful paradox from John when the Lamb is also designated as the shepherd of the redeemed. This picks up on John's Gospel where Jesus is both "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and "the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11)

Chapter 14

Sounding trumpets

Revelation chapter 8

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ²And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. ³Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. ⁵Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake⁶ so the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

First Trumpet: Vegetation Struck

⁷The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Second Trumpet: The Seas Struck

⁸Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of

the sea became blood. ⁹ And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Third Trumpet: The Waters Struck

¹⁰ Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Struck

¹² Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

¹³ And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

You will recall that so far six seals have been opened, and when a seal is opened it releases things on earth that continue through the history of the world until the return of Christ. It's possible to see repeatedly in history the first five seals in relation to wars, famines, pandemics, persecutions, etc. However, we have not yet seen the major cosmic disturbances referred to in the opening of the sixth seal which we read of in chapter 6:12-17.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. ¹³ And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. ¹⁴ Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

There seems to be little evidence of the opening of the sixth seal, and equally we shall find that as the seventh seal is opened there is only partial evidence of the natural disasters which are described, and we shall cover partly in this study. We shall look at the opening of the seventh seal and the sounding of the seven trumpets. Natural disasters have been a part of earth history for thousands of years, but these trumpets seem to indicate a rapid and progressive countdown of global catastrophes which precede the return of Christ.

The first thing John notices, after the seventh seal was opened, was an awesome silence that filled heaven for half an hour. Then John sees the prayers of believers offered with incense on a golden altar before Gods throne. John describes the incense, the fragrance drifting over the heavenly sanctuary, as a sweet accompaniment to the prayers of believers. We don't know what these prayers are, but no doubt the prayers of the martyrs mentioned in the opening of

the fifth seal were included. Perhaps all prayer is included down the centuries of time, especially by those who have cried for vindication. His answers to prayer include His sovereign activity to allow natural disasters to warn the human race of the great and terrible day of the Lord. God's judgments are motivated by His love for lost sinners, and it is not His will that any should perish.

The heavenly incense burner is hurled down to the earth (Vs 5). Cast your mind back to an Old Testament passage that illuminates the text here. On Mount Sinai (in Exodus 19) God descends on the mountain accompanied by various earthly and celestial phenomena. See how it's described in verse 16 and 18 and 19 "Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thundering's and lightning's, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and] the whole mountain quaked greatly.¹⁹ And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder". God is about to reveal Himself as He did in the past in order to accomplish the salvation of His people.

Do you recall in our study of chapter 6 seeing a key to unlocking the meaning of the seals, by comparing the words of Jesus in what is known as the Oliver Discourse Matthew 24:3-44. Now we shall find the sequence of trumpets shows some similarities to the plagues that God sent to Egypt on the rebellious Pharaoh and his empire. There are, as we shall see, some common features and perhaps these are not accidental. God endeavoured to break Pharaohs will as well as punish him for his crimes against Gods

people. He had an opportunity to repent but he refused, though some Egyptians choose to believe God, and according to Exodus 12:38 a few believing Egyptians even left Egypt with the Hebrews. God takes no delight in the punishment of defiant sinners, but He allows evil to overtake those who embrace it. He also allows repentance up until the last possible moment. Let's keep in mind that the trumpet judgments we are about to look at, aren't merely a warning to unbelievers, but an opportunity for repentance.

Trumpets play an important role in biblical history as well as the Roman world of the first century. During their wilderness wanderings the children of Israel assembled and moved out when they heard a blast from trumpets. During wars trumpets indicated attack and retreat. The blowing of trumpets heralded various appointed festivals and were blown at the coronation of Israelite kings. Perhaps the most famous though is the sound of trumpets at the battle of Jericho. Seven priests with seven trumpets, blowing continuously, lead the army of Israel around the city for seven days, until one final blast as the people shouted and the walls of Jericho collapsed. How similar as like Jericho an evil empire led by Satan is about to fall.

So, we shall consider the first four trumpets, the subject of this chapter and which focus on planet earth. It's worth reading Isaiah 24:4-13 where the prophet speaks of the dire consequences of sin on the environment.

Trumpet 1: Plague on the land (vs 7)

Vegetation of all kinds is wiped out in large proportions of the earth. If the third and fourth seals (see chapter 6:5-8) depict the ravages of famine in the course of world history, this first trumpet

results in famine on an unprecedented scale at the end of world history. Incidentally we don't have to insist on a literal understanding of the one third fraction. Fractions such as this are a regular feature of apocalyptic imagery (See Zechariah 13:8-9 and Ezekiel 5:1-2)

Trumpet 2 Plague on the high seas (vs 8-9)

One perspective is that this could refer to an asteroid or comet slamming into the earth, which has occurred in history with devastating consequences. Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 AD, killing as many as 10,000 people. The imagery is typical of that found in other Jewish apocalyptic writings. John sees a planetary disaster on a much larger scale indeed a world-wide disaster.

Trumpet 3 plague on fresh water (vs 10-11)

Adding to an already desperate world in chaos, much of the freshwater sources of the planet are rendered toxic when the third angel blows his trumpet. We must consider the name of this angel "Wormwood". You will recall the Chernobyl disaster which sent vast quantities of radioactive material into the atmosphere falling over many parts of Europe, including parts of the UK. The word Chernobyl in Russian and Ukrainian is the name of the plant "Aetimisa vulgaris" which is a species of wormwood, a type of bitter and poisonous herb (Jeremiah 9:15, 23:15). Some modern commentators endorsing a literal interpretation of Revelation draw attention to the increasing danger posed to world peace by inadequate drinking water. However, we must not lose sight that

these are the very end times described and are without parallel in human history.

Trumpet 4 Plague on the sources of light (vs 12)

What an unimaginable and inexplicable thing to happen. The light from the heavenly bodies diminishes by a third. How similar to the plague of darkness upon Egypt (Exodus 10:21-22). Inevitably this would affect plant life and animals that feed on them. In the Old Testament judgment is depicted in terms of darkness. Amos likens the Day of the Lord to a day of darkness, as does Joel, and you will recall the words of Jesus “the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light” (Amos 5:18 Joel 2:2 Mark13:24). However, darkness has an even darker side in scripture, since it sometimes symbolises the demonic. Perhaps this fourth trumpet is an announcement of even worse things to come. It points towards the fifth trumpet and a demonic invasion.

Finally, in this harrowing chapter, three woes are uttered by an angel (Vs 13). This is addressed directly at humanity itself with a stark warning that the last three trumpets (chapter 9) are to be the most severe of all.

Chapter 15

The fifth and sixth trumpets

Revelation chapter 9

Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. ² And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. ³ Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. ⁴ They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. ⁶ In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. ⁷ The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. ⁸ They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. ⁹ And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. ¹⁰ They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. ¹¹ And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name

in Hebrew is Abaddon but in the Greek he has the name Apollyon¹² One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.¹⁶ Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.¹⁷ And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulphur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.¹⁹ For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.²⁰ But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.²¹ And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

John sees a star fall from heaven to earth and it/he receives a key to the bottomless pit. The fallen star then opens up a shaft allowing smoke and locusts to escape and envelop the earth. The star is probably an angel, and the bottomless pit is a standard

apocalyptic expression for the underworld, the place of the dead and demonic spirits.

The bottomless pit is mentioned several times in the New Testament. In Luke 8:31 Jesus meets a demon-possessed man who was naked and lived in the tombs. Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man and the man cried "what have I to do with you Jesus son of The Most High God I beg you do not torment me" Jesus asked the man his name and he replied "legion" because many demons had entered him. The demons spoke in verse 31 "and they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss" The word "abyss" is the anglicised form of the Greek word "abussos" meaning bottomless deep. The parallel scripture in Matthew 8:29 puts it this way "behold they cried out saying "what have we to do with you Jesus Son of God Have you come here to torment us before the time".

A swarm of locusts

Come with me to Joel chapter 1:1-11 which reads,

"The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethu² hear this, you elders, And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, Or even in the days of your fathers?³ Tell your children about it, Let your children tell their children, And their children another generation.⁴ What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you drinkers of wine, Because of the new wine, For it has been cut off from your mouth.⁶ For a nation has come up against My land,

Strong, and without number; His teeth are the teeth of a lion, And he has the fangs of a fierce lion.⁷ He has laid waste My vine, And ruined My fig tree; He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; Its branches are made white.”

Joel here envisions locusts descending upon the land of Judah in huge numbers. At first, he seems to be describing the well-known dreaded locusts that periodically infest the Middle East, but then his prophecy takes a strange turn as he describes locust-like creatures that do the Lords bidding. In this case they wreak total destruction on the land. Joes describes this plague as occurring during the Day of the Lord.

Read on Joel 2:1-11.

“Blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in my holy mountain!

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand:² A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, The like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations.³ A fire devours before them, And behind them a flame burns; The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, And behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them.⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like swift steeds, so they run.⁵ With a noise like chariots Over mountaintops they leap, Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, Like a strong people set in battle array.⁶ Before them the people writhe in pain; All faces are drained of color.⁷ They run like mighty men, They climb the wall like men of war; Every one marches in

formation, And they do not break ranks.⁸ They do not push one another; Every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, They are not cut down.⁹ They run to and fro in the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter at the windows like a thief.¹⁰ The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness.¹¹ The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"

John's description of these demonic locusts is awful. They are like powerful war horses with human faces. They wear crowns, and have long flowing hair like women, and teeth like lions. They are covered with armour and have a scorpion like tail with a sting that inflicts intense agony. Their assault is limited to five months (incidentally the lifespan of ordinary locusts) Not only Joel seems to be the backdrop for Revelation Chapter 9 but also the eight plague against Egypt. Exodus 10:3-6:

"³ So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ⁴ Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. ⁵ And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. ⁶ They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen, since the

day that they were on the earth to this day.’ ” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh”.

John gives a name to the angel, the king of the bottomless pit **“whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon”** (Vs 11) Abaddon is Hebrew for destruction and Apollyon is Greek for Destroyer. The destroyer orders his horde of demons from the bottomless pit to assault the earth. This king of the bottomless pit may be Satan and it's suggested by some that the angels (referred to by Jude in 1:6) are these demonic beings bound since the date of the flood known as the “Sons of God” mentioned in Genesis 6:2-4. See next.

One school of thought

One school of thought is that the first 11 verses of chapter 9 are a second demonic invasion of the earth. Those who hold to this theory refer to the first invasion occurring before the flood and was the reason for the destruction of all living things. In this theory the “sons of God” referred to in Genesis 6:1-4 refer to fallen angels or demons who take possession of human beings and coexist with them. The result is the awful hybrid, the Nephilim. Here the Lord intervenes with cosmic judgment and initiates a new beginning (Genesis 7-8). The pre-flood world perished by water and the post flood world perishes by fire (2 Peter 2:4-10; 3:1-13).

A divine command begins the sixth trumpet **“release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates”** (Vs 14) Evil angels are depicted as bound or restricted to certain locations, and these four angels appear to fall into this category. Perhaps these were spirits active at the time of Noah, we don't know. These

unleash an even more devastating demonic invasion, resulting in the torture and death of one-third of the world's population. They gather the world to a final war with 200 million being the number of their army. Commentators differ on the occasion and the competents involved in the slaughter following the sixth trumpet according to their view on the book of Revelation. You may recall in an earlier study that I gave a brief description of the main four views and we will look briefly at these in relation to this sixth trumpet.

Idealists view

This view is that nothing literal happens in Revelation, everything is symbolic. So as far as the sixth trumpet is concerned those taking this view simply speak in generalities, namely that world conflict will result.

Preterits view

This view is that everything in Revelation has already happened. They most often suggest that the sixth trumpet was a Parthian invasion. Parthia a kingdom lying to the east of the Euphrates River and stretching across Iran, was an eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. The Parthians were a feared opponent, having more than once bloodied the eastern legions. John pictures this vast army as cavalry, the Parthians were famous for their swift horses.

Historicists view

This view is that some things have happened, that are mentioned in Revelation, some are happening now, and some are yet to happen. The sixth trumpet, according to this view, involves a

number of historical possibilities from Genghis Khan to Lawrence of Arabia.

Futurists view

This view is that everything is yet to happen. Futurists of an earlier generation expected a literal army of 200 million to descend on Israel during the Tribulation. More recently many have considered China as the invader, which supposedly will force the Antichrist to intervene in the Middle East. Some take the reference to sulphur, fire, and smoke, and the great casualty rate, as evidence of thermonuclear weapons. Some more bizarre authors find allusions to a host of modern weapon systems in the book of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation, including attack helicopters, armed with a tail mount that sprays chemical and biological weapons. The speculation continues with the futurist view and is in the main misleading and unhelpful.

Whatever the truth, and leaving aside all the speculation, the havoc is real yet in spite of these terrible judgments the survivors **did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.**²¹ **And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Vs 20-21)**

Chapter 16

A little book

Revelation chapter 10

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. ² He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, ³ and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. ⁴ Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." ⁵ The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, ⁷ but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth." ⁹ So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as

sweet as honey in your mouth.”¹⁰ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. ¹¹ And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.”

Coming from the heavens in brilliant sunlight is a “mighty angel”. John now seems to be viewing the action from earth. Before this, he was taken into the heavenly throne room (Rev 4:1) and there he was looking down on the earth. John describes the descent of a powerful angelic figure. Some have wondered whether the angel might be Jesus Himself. However, the phrase “another mighty angel” may hold the key. The Greek word for “another” is “allos” meaning another of the same kind. This would appear to suggest that this mighty angel is yet another of the same order we have seen before in the book. Jesus is not just another anything. He is almighty God.

The angel roared, and John heard seven thunders. He was about to write what he had heard but was stopped by the angel. This is not the only time that revelation was given but not shared. Paul describes a similar experience in 2 Cor. 12:4 “how he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which is not lawful for a man to utter” Daniel is instructed not to let the contents of his prophecy be made known to his generation (Daniel 7:28; 8:26; 12:4, 9). In John gospel Jesus cries out “Father glorify Your name” “Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. Therefore, the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.” (John 12; 28-29). None of those present really understood what was said and what it meant. One thing is clear the

end is imminent and when the seventh trumpet sounds **“the mystery of God will be fulfilled”** (Vs 7)

It's far from easy to visualize this strange scene. Imagine a gigantic angel straddling the continents and seas, and apparently John zooming upwards and asking for the scroll the angel was holding. Something like this happened in Ezekiel 2:10-3:3. John is asked to eat the scroll, being warned that at first it will taste sweet but then will turn bitter in his stomach. We have no explanation of the meaning of this, perhaps it refers to how God's word is sweet, if it is believed, but if ignored it becomes a bitter word of judgment. The fact that John ingests the scroll implies that the message itself becomes a part of his life. Being a true messenger of God involves living out its message, and sometimes that message is harsh and bitter. Judgment is hard to digest.

We have a book, the Bible, the word of God. No one can understand the Bible unless that understanding is given by God. John had to say, “give me the little book”. We must in all humility ask God for understanding of the book. It's closed to the arrogant and is to be read with the heart and not just the intellect. Only God's grace can break open the words to impart to us revelation from God Himself.

Many of Gods servants read the Bible on their knees. Weeks after George Whitfield was converted, he wrote “I began to read the Holy Scriptures on my knees laying aside all other books and praying over if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light and power from above”. We must take the word of God, eat it and absorb it into our hearts.

Smith Wigglesworth wrote this “God’s word is supernatural in origin, eternal in duration, inexpressible in valour, infinite in scope, regenerate in power, infallible in authority, universal in application, inspired in totality. Read it through: write it down; pray in it; work it out; pass it on. The word of God changes a man until he becomes an epistle of God”.

We must like John devour the word of God and absorb it into ourselves. It’s like eating food and we don’t stop eating. Sometimes it will be sweet and lead to times of delight, sometimes it will be bitter, convicting of sin and pride, and will produce brokenness and repentance which will lead to life.

Chapter 17

Two witnesses

Revelation chapter 11

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. ²But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. ³And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. ⁵And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. ⁶These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

The Witnesses Killed

⁷When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. ⁹Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half

days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰ And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The Witnesses Resurrected

¹¹ Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³ In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Seventh Trumpet: The Kingdom Proclaimed

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying:

"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

¹⁸ The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the

saints,

**And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”**

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail”.

Now we have a second interlude which further delays the blowing of the seventh trumpet. John is taken to the streets of Jerusalem to witness a remarkable example of street preaching.

Let's take a look at the highlights of this second interlude and then begin to make an attempt to understand. In just 14 verses we have all this happening!

1. John is told to measure the Temple.
2. John is told about two witnesses who appear and prophesy for 1260 days.
3. Fire comes from their mouths to kill any attackers.
4. They can stop rain and turn rivers into blood.
5. They can release any manner of plague anywhere on the earth.
6. John is told about a beast from a bottomless pit that comes and kills the two witnesses.
7. The people of the world celebrate the death of the witnesses.
8. After three and a half days the two witnesses return to life and go up into heaven.

9. John is told about an earthquake that destroys one tenth of the city. 7000 people die and the survivors give praise to God.

Measuring the Temple

John is instructed to take a special measuring stick and measure the Temple of God and the great altar in front of it, as well as to count the worshippers. Now questions arise which are not easy to answer. The first question is “what is the temple”. Let’s take a brief look at the history.

1. When John wrote Revelation the second Jerusalem temple had lain in ruins for more than 20 years. The first temple was built by Solomon and finished around 950 BC. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC (2 chronicles 36:13-19).
2. The second temple was built by Joshua and Zerubbabel around 500 BC (Ezra 3:8; Zechariah4:9). This second temple was expanded and lavishly embellished by Herod the Great in his reign which lasted for 33 years. This temple was destroyed by Titus in AD 70 as Jesus had prophesised.

Jerusalem came under Muslim control in AD 637 and the Dome of the Rock was built on the temple mount around AD 69. Muslims believe that Mohammed was supernaturally transported to Jerusalem by the angel Gabriel, and that Mohammed ascended into heaven from mount Moriah, the temple mount. The rock around which the Dome is built is generally believed to be the place on which Abraham was led to offer Isaac his son as a

sacrifice. It is believed to be the place of the Holy of Holies of the first and second temple.

So, if John is to measure the Temple, does this mean a literal temple will be rebuilt, or is it symbolic? If you opt for a literal understanding, you are landed in the middle of a highly charged and controversial political issue. Will there be a third temple, and if so, what happens to the Mosque of Omar, the famous Dome of the rock which was built over the site of the original Temple? The Dome of the Rock is a Muslim prayer shrine, and its bears many inscriptions in Arabic around the interior, including this God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son”.

Why do so many people believe there will be an actual third temple in the end times? The answer is that Jesus and Paul give prophecies that some would seem to imply the existence of a literal temple. Jesus prophesied that the second temple would be destroyed “Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. ² And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:1-2) He also prophesied about the “abomination of desolation” (referring to antichrist) being set up in “the holy place” “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand).

Paul says that the antichrist will sit in the temple of God claiming to be God “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be

soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

It could be inferred from these verses that a third temple will be built in order for antichrist to sit there claiming to be God. Even now there are plans in place to build a third temple. In Jerusalem there is a temple institute which has prepared the vestments and utensils and altar for this event. Many Jewish people are praying for the events to take place which will enable their dream to become a reality.

There is much disagreement about this matter since for example Paul in other places says that believers themselves are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) For my tiny and insignificant part I don't think a third temple will be built.

Measuring the temple

The background of John's action in measuring the temple recalls a similar task undertaken by two Old Testament prophets, Zechariah and Ezekiel. Let's look briefly at these.

Zechariah 2:1-5

"Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand.² So I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length. "And there was the angel who talked with me,

going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, ⁴who said to him, “Run, speak to this young man, saying: ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. ⁵For I,’ says the LORD, ‘will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.’” Jerusalem had been burned to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar’s army in 586 BC. Zechariah observes an angelic surveyor taking a measuring line to determine the measurement of a restored and rebuilt Jerusalem. Living in the era of return and restoration, before the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah (444 BC) Zechariah is informed by his angelic guide that the city will grow and sprawl beyond its historic boundaries.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel assumes a rebuilt Jerusalem and focuses on the blueprint of an enlarged temple replacing Solomon’s structure (See chapters 40-48). His detailed measurements make up the bulk of this section of his book. An angelic being does the actual measuring with a six-foot-long reed, Ezekiel writes down the measurements.

What are we to make of this, as John evidently recalls these Old Testament prophets? The point seems to be a divine promise of protection for Gods people. That which God measures for restoration is safe from all alarms. This protection seems to accord with Revelation 7 where John describes the sealing of Gods people prior to the trumpet judgments (See chapter 9)

Two witnesses

At this point John is content to inform his readers about a power encounter in Jerusalem. The two witnesses seem invincible. They possess unprecedented power over nature. Who can stand against them? This beast appears from the bottomless pit, takes them on and defeats them. The beast leaves their bodies exposed as an act of humiliation. None dare oppose the beast without mortal consequences, but it seems most earth dwellers are quite happy with the outcome. There are great celebrations, indeed global ones, over the demise of the two witnesses, the two prophets. Evidently the preaching of the two witnesses and their call to repentance is a torment for many, because they cannot bear to hear the truth. The beast however does not get the last word, and the two witnesses are raised up to heaven in plain view of eyewitnesses. This is followed by an earthquake for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, levelling a tenth of the city and resulting in the death of 7000. The survivors though filled with terror “gave glory to the God of heaven”.

The identity of these witnesses is the subject of one of the most difficult chapters to interpret in a whole book of Revelation. The only thing that seems to be agreed, in the array of candidates, is that the number two is significant being the number of witnesses required to sustain a charge in court (Deuteronomy 19:15). Here are some of the many options.

1. **Zerubbabel and Joshua**

In verse 4 of Revelation 11 the two witnesses are identified as **“the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the God of the earth”** (Zechariah 4:3-14) where it refers to these two leaders.

2. **Peter and Paul**

This suggestion comes from an early dating of Revelation because both apostles were martyred at about the same time during the latter part of the reign of Nero Caesar. This has its problems since neither apostle was brought back to life.

3. Enoch and Elijah

These are selected for obvious reasons, since neither of them saw death but were taken up into heaven. Some commentators say that they are required to return and experience death like all mortals before being resurrected and taken to heaven again.

4. Moses and Elijah

Look at Revelation 11:5 "And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies". This corresponds to an episode in the life of Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-12) as does Revelation 11:6 "These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire" which recalls Moses and the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12).

Who these witnesses are is uncertain, to say the least. You can marshal a credible case for a more or less literal interpretation. The witnesses are killed and lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days. It would be difficult to interpret this part other than literally, but other parts are more difficult. For example, fire proceeding from their mouths to kill their enemies. Isaiah prophesied of Jesus in chapter 11:4 of Isaiah "But with righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for

the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked". This is an example of a symbolic description of the power of the ministry of Jesus to convict of sin and bring fierce judgment on those who reject Him.

Let's take a brief look at the symbolic significance of the two witnesses that is Jew and Gentile. God has one people, not two, though the Bible recognises that the church is made up of Jews and Gentiles. Job was a Gentile and witnesses of his assurance in a bodily resurrection (Job 19:25-27) Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8) and Caleb was of the tribe of Judah (Numbers 13:6) but Caleb was not born of that tribe. He was the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite (Numbers 32:12). The Kenizzites were one of the nations that lived in the land of Canaan before the conquest of Joshua. Caleb was a Gentile converted to the God of Israel. There were many like him in Israel including Ruth, Rahab, Uriah and Obed Edom. When Joshua and Caleb entered the land of Canaan it was an Israelite and a Gentile walking side by side as one. The early church was a hundred percent Jewish until Gentiles were added in Acts 10 (Cornelius) and Acts 11:19-22 (Greeks). Since then, the church has been composed of Jews and Gentiles witnessing together to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. If the two witnesses symbolise the church at the end of the age it will be a church being prophetic in warning of imminent judgment and uncovering sin, having power in prayer (vs 6), being filled with grief at the state of the world (verse 3), full of faith, suffering awful persecution, rising from the ashes and growing stronger when persecuted (vs 11)

We could spend time looking at the times mentioned in chapter 11 that is forty two months, three and a half days and 1260 days, but I am anxious we don't go down too many avenues and lose the big picture. There are many things in the book of Revelation of which we are unsure, but we can be sure that God will ensure that there are preachers right at the end of time, and though these people will be persuasive the world still won't listen. Here is another rebuttal of the novel idea (which came into being in the 19th century) that a secret rapture of the saints will take place in chapter 4. The church is still on the earth and faithful witnesses are praying and preaching the gospel. The nearer we get to the end, and the more the gospel is proclaimed, the more the opposition there will be. The nearer we get to the end of history the more the witnesses of Jesus will be persecuted.

May I offer a word of caution? We must avoid thinking of the future alone, as if these things have not happened in the past. Revelation was not written for speculation about the future but as a comfort to those seven churches warning them what was ahead. Having said that there is a future element to be considered because the Holy War imagery, which we are now delving into, is an ongoing battle which will one day come to a head before Jesus returns.

Let me give you an example of how some (whom I greatly respect) would argue these things have already occurred. Revelation was written during the reign of the sixth Roman Emperor Nero. In AD 64 persecutions against Christians began in earnest. Vast numbers were arrested, convicted and sentenced to death. Many were covered with the skins of animals and torn to bits by dogs. Some were nailed to crosses or were burnt to serve as nightly illumination for Nero's parties. We could look further into these

things and in particular consider the number 666 (we shall look at this number in a later study) but we must not be too side-tracked at this stage. I simply want to point out that there are other credible interpretations of Revelation and we must never assume that we have the exclusive truth on these matters. We must show due respect to those serious students of the Word, who have studied the book in considerably more detail than have we. So, we must not read the book with time itself being the major concern but Christian theology i.e. our understanding of the nature of God. I prefer to read the book in terms of what has already occurred, what is occurring and what will occur before Jesus returns to earth.

The seventh trumpet

At last, a breath of fresh air as the seventh angel blows his trumpet, but now instead of woe and tragedy, instead of announcements of terrible things happening or to happen, what does John hear. He hears voices of joy and thanksgiving because at last Christ will rule the earth, and the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. His kingdom will replace all the evil kingdoms of the world. Like the sirens of the Second World War, the first was a warning, the second was all clear. God here sounds the all clear. The end is in sight and heaven sings, including a song about the nations raging **“The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged”** (Vs18) Sounds a bit like Psalm 2. God always has the last word. “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break their

bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath and distress them in His deep displeasure: “Yet I have set My King ^lOn My holy hill of Zion.”

Finally verse 19, **“then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thundering’s, an earthquake, and great hail”** John who has measured an earthy temple and place of worship, now sees the real thing of which all earthly temples were but a copy, a type, an illustration. He sees a temple where God will be worshipped forever, where there will be no more war or bloodshed or disease or sorrow or death. All the troubles over, the centuries will be over, famine and plague will be no more, there is a new heaven and a new earth. All tears will be wiped away and suffering and pain will be gone.

Chapter 18

A woman, a child and a dragon

Revelation chapter 12

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. ² Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. ⁵ She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. ⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸ but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before

our God day and night, has been cast down.¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.¹² Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

¹³ Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.¹⁴ But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.¹⁵ So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.¹⁷ And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We have so far had seven seals and seven trumpets, and soon we shall come to seven bowls. Chapters twelve and thirteen could be described as something of a flashback. Chapter 12 is an overview of history stretching from the time before humans existed until the time just before the return of Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The chapter begins with the statement “**Now a great sign appeared in heaven**”. The word “sign” comes from the Greek word *semeion* meaning sign, mark, token, an unusual occurrence transcending

the common course of nature. The first sign is described in verses 1-2 **“a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth.** Then in verse 3 we read of another sign **“a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads”** These signs comprise three symbols, a woman, a child, and a dragon representing things beyond the ordinary events of nature. We shall see that these three figures symbolise three major spiritual forces that have been at work for several thousand years.

Let's consider and identify the three leading characters in this drama, starting with the first two which are the easiest to identify.

1. **A red dragon with seven heads**

There is very little disagreement as to the identity of this awful beast, indeed you can hardly miss the symbolism. Surely this is Satan himself and helpfully John decodes this symbolism in verse 9 *“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him”*.

2. **A Male child with a rod of iron**

This would appear to be an obvious reference to Jesus who will **“rule all nations with a rod of iron”**. In chapter 19 when Jesus finally returns, we read in verse 15 that **“He will rule them (the nations) with a rod of iron.** The phrase is taken from Psalm 2 which is quoted or referred to four different times In Revelation.

3. **A Pregnant woman clothed with the sun**

Now the question is who this woman represents. Several suggestions have been made over time promoting some disagreement. The Roman Catholics see the woman as Mary and the male child as Jesus. They see this picture as representing Mary bringing forth a Jesus and the devil waiting to kill Him at birth, as He tried through Herod when the babies at Bethlehem were killed. The problem with this is that there is no way you can fit Mary into verse 6 **“Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days”**. That never happened to Mary. This is not a picture of an individual but rather a group of people. Some see the woman as representing Old Testament Israel. In the Old Testament God referred to His people as a woman whom He had dressed in honour and splendour (Ezekiel 16). The garland with twelve stars may, it is suggested, be the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 37:9-10). But it's true to say that in the New Testament Gods church is called “The Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and likened to “Jerusalem above” which is called “the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26 and see also Hebrews 12:22-23) It seems clear that the women represent Gods people Jew and Gentile all one in Christ and this is the most common and accepted view of the identity of the women.

The dragon and Jesus

The dragon, that is Satan, is the arch enemy of God, especially as it relates to the fulfilment of God's plan. He opposes the manifestation of God in Christ and has attempted to blot out the seed of David on several occasions. As Genesis 3:15 had predicted, there would be ongoing enmity between the serpent (Satan) and the woman (Gods people) and the "seed" (Jesus) who would come from the woman. This passage also indicated that Satan would have a limited success in being able to "bruise" Christ's heel, but Jesus would bruise his head. In verse 4 we read "**And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born**". This appears to be a historical reference to King Herod's attempt to destroy Jesus as a young child, by ordering the deaths of all male children from two years old and under who lived in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18). Satan however did not give up and continued his onslaught. Prior to the beginning of Jesus ministry, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4). Satan attempted to get Jesus to worship him, but as we know he failed in that attempt also. When the time had come for Jesus to go to the cross Satan "put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him" (John 13:20) Why did Satan expend so much effort to destroy Jesus? Because if there had not been a perfect saviour to pay the price of sin, Gods eternal plan would have been thwarted. The warfare between Satan and the church has continued down the centuries. Satan hates the church and has done his best to obliterate it. Many martyrs have died but they ascend straight to glory beyond Satan's reach.

War in Heaven

Verses 7-12 describe a great angelic battle in which Satan and those with him are removed from heaven. When did this battle take place? Satan's original fall from heaven took place before Satan tempted Adam and Eve. See Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 to find where the Bible speaks of this event. However, it seems that Satan is still allowed temporary access to God's presence in heaven at a time of God's choosing. See for example Job 1-2 where Satan is seen before the Lord in heaven accusing Job. See also Zechariah 3 where Satan appears before God to accuse Joshua of wrongdoing. Some suggest that this war in heaven mentioned in verse 7-12 describes a future event during which Satan will be completely expelled from heaven? If so Satan will only have a limited time to attack God's people **"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."** (Verse 12)

The dragon and God's people

In addition to his efforts to destroy Jesus, Satan has a long history of persecuting God's people, represented by the woman in the latter portion of this chapter. There was fierce persecution from the earliest days of the New Testament church but God allowed the woman to **"fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent"** (Vs 14) This may indicate that the church was protected by God for 1260 years (see Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4: showing that a day can represent a year) During this time, which may have continued through the middle ages, the church was protected from its enemies including the Roman Empire and false Christianity.

It's confusing sometimes to look back and to look forward and decide when something has already happened or whether John is speaking of an event yet to happen. Sometimes both these things are true, but we must always look at the larger picture. God will protect His church and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.

Whether we realise it or not Satan hates us and will do everything possible to keep us from loving and obeying God. He is not just angry with God and His church; he is angry with you and me. Peter warned "Be sober be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8)

Overcoming (vs 11)

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death".

1. The blood of the Lamb

It is the death of the conquering Jesus that is the overcoming weapon "We preach Christ crucified" said the apostle Paul. Jesus died to deal with our sin and defeat Satan, so now we have a life of hope and victory. He died in our place, hence the reference to a lamb, a substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus has taken away sin by His death, and believers are clear of guilt and condemnation. What a glorious and powerful weapon against Satan. We are to regard Satan as literally and truly overcome by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan is already a vanquished enemy, and by faith we are to grasp His victory as ours too. We were crucified with Jesus on the cross, we have been buried with Him and have risen with Him "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Satan is still our accuser, and at times

we may hear his voice arousing memories and disturbing our conscience and arousing guilt from past sins. Things we have forgotten he cunningly revives in our memories. Since we were saved he has observed our sins and failures and asked “are you really a child of God or just one big hypocrite”. He brings to our attention the impure thoughts we may have and the failure to pray etc., and sometimes he is right, but the Scriptures affirm “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

2. The word of their testimony

We are to bear witness to the truth of the gospel and its power to save. We are to speak it and live it out in practice.

3. They did not love their lives to the death

If we do not cling to our earthly lives, then there is no threat Satan can bring against us. If we believe to “live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21) Satan’s violence cannot be effective. Many have died, and are still dying for Christ, and we must pray for those who know these things day to day.

Finally, Satan’s power is real and terrifying, but he is, and knows he is, beaten and has only a short time. He is like a wounded, cornered animal that fights ferociously, but we have the victory.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come

Let this blest assurance control

That Christ has regarded my helpless estate

And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

Chapter 19

Two beasts

Revelation chapter 13

The Beast from the Sea

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.² Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.³ And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast.⁴ So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"⁵ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.⁷ It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear.¹⁰ He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he

who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The beast from the earth

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. ¹² And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, who's deadly wound was healed. ¹³ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵ He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. ¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

John describes how the dragon (Satan) spawns and empowers two henchmen to destroy the world. We are introduced to the members of an unholy trinity, including Satan himself of course. **First the beast from the sea**, which John describes as having seven heads and ten horns and the features of a Leopard, a Bear, and a Lion. Daniel (chapter 7) uses these three animals to depict a

sequence of four world empires, that precede the final empire of the kingdom of God. It's generally accepted that these empires Daniel refers to are represented as follows.

1. The Lion represents Babylon under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar.
2. The Bear represents the large powerful kingdom of Persia ruled by Cyrus the Great.
3. The Leopard represents the lightning-fast conquests of the Macedonian Greeks ruled by Alexander the Great.
4. The nondescript beast which supplants the previous kingdoms is represented by Rome.
5. The little horn with human like eyes and an arrogant mouth, is possibly Antiochus Epiphanes and perhaps a further picture of the final antichrist. We shall look at Antiochus Epiphanes later when we consider former candidates for antichrists who have arisen in history.

This beast from the sea is so terrifying and awful and incorporates all the evils of the wicked world empires preceding him. His source of power and authority and energy is the dragon, that is Satan himself. Let's consider this beast in more detail.

1. He will rise from the sea which represents humanity, that is he will be human.
2. He has seven heads, ten horns and ten diadems or crowns which suggest he will bring together an immense

international, economic and political coalition, all under the direct control of Satan.

3. He receives power from Satan. Unlike Jesus who refused to bow to Satan, antichrist will bow to him.
4. antichrist will be so popular to the point of adoration, worshipped by the whole world.
5. He will be blasphemous speaking evil of God and His people.
6. He will have military supremacy, and no one will be able to make war with him.
7. He will persecute and kill Christians.
8. He will suffer an assassination attempt but will survive as if by a miracle. This appears to be a parody of the resurrection of Jesus.
9. He will rule as supreme ruler of the world unopposed for forty two months.
10. His end is inevitable. He will be destroyed.

Believers however refuse to worship the beast or receive his mysterious mark. The saints must do the one thing in their power to do, that is be faithful to the Lamb even at the cost of their lives.

Now for the second beast, the beast from the earth. The dragon (Satan) conjures up a second beast, this time from the depths of the earth; he has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon. Now again this is not a literal monster but is rather a symbol of an

individual who heads up a world government. The horns like a lamb could imply an attempt to appear like the Lamb of God. In apocalyptic literature animals with horns, like sheep and goats are regularly used as symbols of strength and power (See Daniel 8). He speaks like a dragon. John has introduced us to the dragon Satan, so it's safe to say this beast, this individual, will speak with deceptive and dangerous words. If we combine the two symbols (that is the lamb like horns and the dragon tongue) we get a wolf in sheep's clothing. He is the consummate false prophet and is designated so later (Rev19:20; 20:10). This beast from the earth serves as the minister of propaganda for the beast from the sea. He performs miraculous signs, like a modern Moses or Elijah, and hoodwinks a credulous world. What do we have then, an unholy trinity, Satan, antichrist and the false prophet?

Now those who subscribe to the futurist position (that is to say all things beyond chapter 4 of Revelation are to happen in the future) have a question to answer, and that is, what possible relevance would Revelation have had to the seven churches to whom it is addressed. It's important to remember when we read Revelation, as indeed other parts of the Scriptures, that God uses what we sometimes call "typology" that is a way of linking persons events or institutions from one biblical era to a later one, especially the Old and New Testaments. It's a kind of foreshadowing and assumes that a pattern unfolds within salvation history. With this in mind let's look at what the Bible teaches us about antichrist and briefly consider some relevant history.

The Antichrist will be the culmination of a series of antichrists with similar characteristics. John writes this "little children it is the last hour and as you heard that the Antichrist is coming, even

now many antichrists have come by which we know it is the last hour (1John 2:18). The Antichrist will propagate religious beliefs that contradict sound Biblical teaching. He will deny the trinity. John also says “who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is Antichrist he who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). He will deny the incarnation, again scriptures in the epistles of John “And every spirit who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world” (1 John 4:3) “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist” (2 John 1:7) His title is “the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and “the lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:8). His character is the very opposite of Jesus Christ who humbled Himself, while Antichrist will exalt himself (Daniel 11:37). Jesus came from heaven, but Antichrist rises from the pit (Revelation 11:7). As mentioned earlier the activity of Satan in the last days is a blasphemous parody of the Trinity and the culmination of his desire to be like the most high (Isaiah 14:14).

Now to look briefly at some figures in history who have been seen by many to be Antichrist or at least preludes to the final Antichrist.

1. Antiochus Epiphanes

He was a Greek king of the Seleucid Empire who reigned over Syria from 175 BC until 164 BC. He is famous for his brutal persecution of the Jews. He massacred some 400,000 Jews in Judea, while another 40,000 were sold into slavery. He was utterly ruthless and took upon himself the title

“Epiphanes” which means “Illustrious one or God manifest” However his behaviour earned him another nickname among the Jews “Epimanes” meaning “mad one”. He stopped the daily sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem and ordered the public burning of the Torah in Israel. He forbade circumcision and Sabbath observance. He offered pigs on the altar in Jerusalem, dedicating it to the Greek God Zeus. The Maccabeus family (a group of Jewish rebel warriors) rebelled, and the temple was cleansed in 164 BC exactly 42 months after the desecration occurred. Daniel had prophesied that this would happen in Chapter 11. Daniel also prophesied that Antiochus would die suddenly but not by human means (Daniel 11:25). He died suddenly of a disease in 164 BC.

2. Nero

He like Caesar Augustus was worshipped as God during his lifetime. Nero (AD 54 to 68) was the first political persecutor of Christians and murdered the apostles Peter and Paul. Early Christians believed he was the Antichrist. Nero blamed the Christians for the fire that destroyed Rome in AD 64 and brutally murdered thousands. Nero died in AD 68 and two years later Rome conquered Jerusalem destroying the temple and defiling the Holy Places.

3. The Pope

The Reformers found what they considered a good deal of ammunition by designating the pope as the antichrist. Their primary source comes later in Revelation 17-18. The

mention of seven mountains (Rev 17:9) seemed to point to Rome the centre of papal power. Mention of being clothed in purple and scarlet, gold and jewels, along with a golden cup of abominations (thought to refer to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation which asserts that the bread and the wine of communion actually become the body and the blood of Christ when consecrated by the priest) seemed sufficient for the reformers, that beyond doubt the Pope was indeed the antichrist. The number 666 was viewed as symbolic of the evil papal system. Because 6 falls short of perfection (represented by the number 7) it is suitable as a number for fallen humanity. Three times six intensifies the evil of this wicked person and institution. Indeed, the first edition of the Church of England's Westminster Confession of faith (1646) which has long since been deleted, asserts that Jesus is the head of the church not the Pope, who is referred to as antichrist.

4. **Adolf Hitler**

Hitler rose to power promising to rid Germany of the Jews whom he blamed for all the woes of the world. Six million Jews died under this wicked man. He fulfilled many of the prophecies of Antichrist, though he never claimed to be God. People worshipped him and he actively encouraged them to do so. He and his henchmen were heavily into the dark arts, astrology, tarot cards magic etc. Certainly, Hitler presided over a period of great tribulation for Jews and Christians.

There are many more in history who may be described as antichrist, Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Tung for example, both of whom presided over atheist governments which slaughtered millions of people. Some who believed that the antichrist is a Jew, latched onto one of the most charismatic political leaders of the twentieth century, Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon. Others pointed to Mikhail Gorbachev whose only real credential (apart from being General Secretary of the Communist party and President of the Soviet Union) was a rather prominent birthmark on his forehead.

666?

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666. (Vs 18)

Perhaps no single feature of the book of Revelation has intrigued readers as much as this mysterious number 666, the subject of endless speculation, and at times absurd notions. This is the mark of the beast from the earth who institutes a registration system whereby followers of the beast from the sea all receive a number stamped on either their right hand or forehead. Without this number, no one can buy and sell. Speculation has run riot about the number 666 for those who subscribe to a futurist interpretation. Bar codes and micro-chips provide a field day for these folks. The internet abounds with theories, and new sightings regularly surface with crass absurdity. The number has taken on a life of its own as sales figures for the Left Behind books (millions of copies sold) attest.

Please bear in mind that Revelation is an apocalypse, a word used to describe a kind of literature that flourished first among Jews and then Christians for about four hundred years. It was born during the time of powerful world empires, times often of persecution of the Jewish community. John has provided us with a combination of apocalyptic and prophetic language, and he sometimes uses cryptic language, ultimately dealing with salvation and judgment. The book is a kind of epistle for the seven churches in their then current situations. He writes for their encouragement, those that stood on the brink of a holocaust to be let loose on them by the Roman Empire. In the light of that let me end with what I see at least as the most likely interpretation of this figure 666. You of course are free to disagree.

The early church Father Irenaeus in the second century, mentions that people were already suggesting candidates for the role of Antichrist, but one in particular was at the top of the list. Nero Caesar's brief and bloody persecution of Christians after the fire in Rome qualified him, they believed, because in Revelation 17:6 there is a description of a woman (closely identified with the beast) "**drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus**". There was also a legend at the time that Nero had not died and would reappear. Now there was at that time a system of calculation called gematria, popular in Jewish circles, and examples of this can be seen on the walls of the Roman city of Pompeii. If you take the name of Nero Caesar and convert it into Hebrew letters and then takes the numerical value of the letters according to their order in the alphabet the sum is 666.

Many historical figures and regimes have embodied some of the features of the antichrist, but have they come close to matching

the scale of deception and devastation depicted in Revelation chapter 13. Time will tell, God knows and I'm content to avoid speculation. If's that's a definitive non-answer to the mystery of 666 I will have succeeded.

Chapter 20

The Lamb and 144,000

Revelation chapter 14

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.⁴ These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb.⁵ And in their mouth was found no-deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—⁷ saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."⁸ And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her

fornication.”⁹ Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand,¹⁰ he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”¹² Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them.”

¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.¹⁸ And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.”¹⁹ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and

gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.²⁰ And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

John's gaze has turned from the Antichrist and the false prophet to a wonderful scene in heaven. He sees the redeemed standing on Mount Zion (that is in heaven) with the Lamb. There are 144,000 (representing the perfect number of the redeemed) who have the name of the Lamb, and the Fathers name written on their foreheads. The numerical reference takes us back to Revelation chapter 7:4-8 where this (probably the same) group is first introduced, as those who will experience great tribulation at the hands of Gods enemies. Whether this refers to the martyrs or to all believers we cannot say. However, the writer to the Hebrews (see later quote) affirms that believers on earth have already joined with a host of believers who have died and are alive around the throne of God in heaven. These are those who have been redeemed, and have not bowed the knee to The Antichrist, and have not compromised with the world. They stand in contrast with those in the previous chapter, who have on them the mark of the beast that is the mark of the ownership of Satan. What is written on the foreheads of the believers, here described, is not just a mark, but the very name of both the Lamb and the Father. How about that for the seal of ownership. I'm reminded of the last verse of an old hymn called "dear Saviour Thou are mine" It goes like this "So let me sing Thy praise so let me call Thee mine I cannot doubt Thy word I know that I am Thine".

Hebrews 12:22-24 "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable

company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

The voice of Jesus thunders like many waters, and the redeemed play harps (perhaps not literal). One preacher amusingly described the guitar as a backslidden harp!! There was music in heaven, the swell of many musicians playing on their stringed instruments at once. I often visited a church in Moldova, where on the platform lots of youngsters played mandolins; it reduced me to tears on many occasions. I think melody is so wonderful, a gift from God to give Him praise. The stringed musicians were accompanying the ultimate choir when they sang “**a new song**” before the Father, the Son, the four living creatures and the elders (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The redeemed are described as virgins who kept themselves pure. This is a reference to spiritual fidelity and chastity. In the Old Testament Israelites frequently turned away from God and worshipped other Gods, committing a kind of spiritual adultery. In the New Testament believers are warned about mixed loyalties (1 John 2:15, 5:21). In this context the redeemed are called virgins because they confess that only Jesus is Lord. These “**follow the Lamb wherever He goes**” (vs 14). They are the bride of Christ. In the first Century Christians had to make a choice. Is Caesar Lord, or is Jesus Lord. Those who choose Jesus ended up as macabre entertainment and food for lions. Perhaps the end time generation will have to make a similar choice, is the beast of the sea Lord, or is

the Lamb Lord. The redeemed choose the Lamb and celebrate their choice by singing a song only they can sing.

Now John sees three angels and we will look at these as follows.

First Angel proclaiming the eternal gospel

Here we have a flying preacher proclaiming the gospel. It seems right up to the last minute, God will give people an opportunity to turn to Him. In the midst of all the terrible troubles that are to come, people will not be without opportunity. The message given by this angel does not begin with the all too familiar message of today declaring “God loves you”. Rather it begins with this message; **“fear God”** and unless we do this first, we will not seek His forgiveness and life. The angel continues that people are to **“give glory to God”** He alone gives us breath and life, and the gospel challenges us to come in humility recognising our total reliance on Him. The angel declares **“the hour of judgment has come”** for the history of the world demands a judgment day. We have the great privilege of meeting Jesus as Saviour and Lord now, but if we refuse, we shall meet Him as judge. Then finally the angel says, **“worship God”**. All creatures will one day bow to God (Philippians 2:10-11) but in this present age we may do so voluntarily and with great joy.

This flying angel was an inspiration for Flight Lieutenant Murray Kendon. In the war he had been out over the Atlantic and had succeeded, with his crew, in destroying a German U-boat. At first, he was elated, but began to think further; here I am with the skill to fly and I’m using it to destroy and kill. Why, he thought, should we not have an air force to do well? He was demobilised in 1946, went to London, and took a small office. He prayed for an

aeroplane and was given one. From that one aeroplane has grown the Missionary Aviation Fellowship. Murray Kendon's inspiration was the text **"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth"**.

Second Angel proclaiming the fall of Babylon

This angel announces the judgment of Babylon, referred to as a **"great city"**. There have been a number of suggestions as to what this "city" is depending on the approach to Revelation. Those who follow a literal approach insist that ancient Babylon (located in Iraq) will rise from the desert sands and become the global capital of the evil world of the antichrist. In 1990 when Saddam Hussein began restoring the ancient site of Babylon, the prophecy buffs were excited, though their initial enthusiasm was cooled in the light of the events that followed. Some think Babylon is more likely a code name for Rome, and that John is encouraging the faithful by predicting the demise of Imperial Rome. Sufficient to say that the worlds systems are doomed, and their fate is already sealed. Though Babylon is described as a city, the scope of Babylon spreads through the whole of human civilisation world-wide. Babylon can be described as the spirit of the world in its fullest expression.

Third angel proclaiming a warning with assurance

All who accept the mark of the beast are to experience Gods wrath. This angel delivers a sombre warning. God's wrath will be at its full strength without a trace of mercy. Their fate will be the eternal torment of Hell, described as fire producing pain. Here the Bible indicates that Jesus and the Holy angels will administer the

righteous punishment for sin. There is no end indicated for this eternal punishment. They have no rest and no sleep in that awful state, and the smoke of the fires of hell rise forever and ever. What an awful eternity. That bad news is followed by good news in verse 12 and an exhortation to the faithful to hold fast. A voice from heaven follows with a blessing **“blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on”**. Perhaps this is the voice of Jesus, and this is strengthened by the fact that the Spirit responds **“Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them.”** This is one of the biblical passages suggesting the threefold nature of God. Revelation 14:13 is the second of seven blessings or benedictions (“Blessed are”) interspersed throughout the book of Revelation. The others are found in Revelation 1:3, 16:15, 19:9, and 20:6. and 22: 7, 14)

Now we come to more angels and a pair of agricultural metaphors, both of them well known to the Middle Eastern culture of John’s time. One harvest is of grain, the other of grapes. There has been an issue as to whether both of the metaphors are negative or whether one is positive and the other negative. Most would accept that the second harvest is a negative one, a picture of divine judgment. The disagreement therefore concerns the first harvest, that is the harvest of grain, and I shall take the positive view for the purpose of this study. Harvest time typically denotes a time of joy and thanksgiving and in this passage, what is reaped are human beings. Consequently, some interpret the reaping as the ingathering of the church. This view is strengthened by the fact that the one sitting on the white cloud, who does the reaping, is said to look like **“The son of Man”** another title for Jesus. Support for this is the parable of the sower (Mark 4) where some “hear the

word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold". Also, the parable of the farmer who sows a field which afterwards sprouts and yields ripe grain. The farmer "goes in with his sickle because the harvest has come". An even closer connection is John's narrative of the Samaritan women in his gospel. Jesus says to His disciples "do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶ And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:35-36). Not surprisingly then, some take a positive view of this first harvest of the earth and some suggest that there will be an end time revival. Time will tell.

Now to the second harvest which involves gathering, and then stomping on symbolic grapes. Typically, the grape vintage would be another joyous occasion in biblical times. The entire family would participate with singing and games, while crushing the grapes barefoot in the wine press. However, what we have here seems quite different from such a happy scene. Here John seems to borrow a terrifying metaphor of God's judgment from the imagery found in Isaiah 63:1-6, "Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, This One who is glorious in His apparel, Traveling in the greatness of His strength? — "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."² Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes.⁴ For the day of

vengeance is in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come.⁵I looked, but there was no one to help, And I wondered That there was no one to uphold; Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; And My own fury, it sustained Me.⁶ I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, Made them drunk in My fury, And brought down their strength to the earth.” Most likely then, the image of squeezing out the juice like blood, vividly conveys another picture of Gods wrath poured out on unbelievers during the great Tribulation.

Chapter 14 ends with a grisly depiction of death “**blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.** (About 200 miles). This is another dramatic image that most don’t take in a literal way. Several accounts of ancient battles employ hyperbole in order to impress upon the reader the enormity of the loss of life.

My friends the day of Gods wrath is coming, it is being stored up even now, and will burst with alarming consequences, concluding the history of planet earth. When sin has reached its full growth, like grapes on a vine, sinners who could have turned to God but refused to repent, will be carried on to the full expression of darkness and will be judged for it.

Chapter 21

A preamble to Gods final wrath

Revelation chapter 15

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.² And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

“Great and marvellous are Your works,

Lord God Almighty!

Just and true are Your ways,

O King of the saints!

⁴Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

For You alone are holy.

For all nations shall come and worship before You,

For Your judgments have been manifested.”

⁵After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. ⁷Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. ⁸The temple was filled with

smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

The chapter opens with Johns view from heaven. The first time Johns perspective shifts to heaven occurs in chapter 4, where he is caught up to the heavenly throne room. This remains his view until Revelation 10-11 when John seems to be back on earth that is until chapter 12 when he appears to describe again his perspective from heaven. In chapter 13 he's back on earth to witness the rise of the beast and the false prophet. In chapter 14 he pays another visit to heaven where he remains in chapter 15. One of the characteristics of apocalyptic writings is this kind of alternation of views between heaven and earth. You see this in Exodus chapters 19-40 where Moses makes several ascents and descents on Mount Sinai in the course of the narrative. Perhaps this served as a model for later visionary experiences.

The first eight verses prepare readers for the final onslaught of Gods wrath. The action takes place in the form of a heavenly worship service. John's first glimpse is of the faithful martyrs worshipping God around a sea of glass. They sing a song named after two figures in redemptive history: Moses, and the Lamb. Moses represents the Old Covenant made at Mount Sinai with Israel. The Lamb represents the New Covenant made at Mount Calvary, between Jesus and those who receive Him as Saviour and Lord. The Old Covenant festival of Passover featured a lamb whose blood was smeared on the lintel and doorposts of Hebrew homes, so the destroying angel passes over them, and they are safe. Jesus the Lamb shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins and the

imparting of His life to believers. Believers are to be spared from the wrath of God. Paul reminds us of this in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 “and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” This promise sustains believers through the ordeals described in Revelation. The song they sing echoes the words of the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-18 and Deuteronomy 32.

Then seven angels emerge from the throne room, and one of the four living creatures gives them seven golden bowls containing the wrath of God. They prepare to pour out the contents, like the priests in the Jerusalem temple regularly poured out drink offerings on the great bronze altar in front of the temple (1 Kings 7:50, 2 Kings 12:13). Here though, the bowls are not poured out on the altar but on the earth. Now the temple in heaven is filled with smoke and none was able to enter Gods inner sanctuary. Who can say what this means, except perhaps to recall that there was a time at Calvary when the sun was darkened so that none could see the face of Jesus as He bore the sin of the world. In this final hour of judgment God draws a veil. God’s reaction to human sin and rebellion is no light matter.

Retuning for a moment to the song sung by the redeemed, will you note that the emphasis is not on the love of God but on His justice “Just and true are Your ways. You might say that love and justice are two sides of the same coin, though unfortunately in our day and age the notion of justice is often ignored or relegated to second place. Scripture however insists that Gods holiness and glory cannot be upheld without His legitimate right (indeed necessity) to punish those who ultimately reject Him. Indeed, Gods judgment

reveals His glory as surely as does His mercy. Romans 2; 4-10 “or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality; ⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, ⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰ but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good”.

Gospel preaching has concentrated much on the love of God, but in the same letter, (1st John) where this is declared, we also read that God is light. Today more is said about the mercy of God than His justice, more about pardon for sin than punishment for sin. What we are looking at in the book of Revelation does not fit in with some people’s idea of God. The book presents us with a side of Gods nature that’s not very “nice” to some, nevertheless it’s true. How often we hear people say they don’t like the Old Testament but they like the New, yet if they were to honestly read the book of Revelation, they would find there things more awful than they could ever find in the Old Testament. Similarly, we hear people say they like the Gospel, and the words of Jesus, but there is no contradiction between the Gospels and the book of Revelation. Indeed, it is the book that come from Jesus, it is the Revelation of Christ Jesus. We must either accept who God really is, and face

these realities, or we shall be guilty of idolatry by inventing a God of our own making and preference.

We are about to see, in the chapters that follow, the final display of the wrath of God, which has been building for centuries. The Greek language has two words for anger, one meaning a slow resentment which simmers inside, the other a word for boiling over and coming out. The words are *orge* and *thermos*. The word *orge* means settled inside anger that does not immediately come out. *Thermos* is a word that means to boil over, to reach the point where it cannot be contained, and it erupts. All through the New Testament (or the most part) the word *orge* is used for the anger of God. It's the anger that does not immediately show, God contains it. God's anger is being held in, but one day it will erupt as the final moments of history play out. It's true that His anger has been displayed from time to time, as we see in the scriptures, but I think of this as God scooping out some water from a reservoir and pouring his anger out from time to time, until one day he will burst the dam and His anger will be seen in its awful and righteous fruition. Today Gods wrath is being stored up and kept back by the dam of His mercy. When the dam bursts His judgment will come flooding down upon all unrepentant sinners.

I shall end with an invitation from the Psalms "kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Chapter 22

Seven bowls poured out

Revelation chapter 16

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

First Bowl: Loathsome Sores

²So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood

³Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.

Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood

⁴Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,

Because You have judged these things.

⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and You have given them blood to drink.

For it is their just due.”

⁷ And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

Fourth Bowl: Men Are Scorched

⁸ Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain

¹⁰ Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up

¹² Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. ¹³ And I saw three unclean spirits 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. ¹⁴ For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the

kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.¹⁵ “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”¹⁶ And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken

¹⁷ Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, and “It is done!” ¹⁸ And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. ¹⁹ Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. ²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

We have seen seven seals, seven trumpets, and we now come to seven bowls. A loud voice from the heavenly temple orders the pouring out of the bowls, the final series of divine judgments. In the verses that follow, seven angels pour out the contents of their bowls, the wrath of God. Just like the trumpets (see chapters 8, 9, and 11) the bowls are reminiscent of the plagues of Israel. The most notable difference is the scale and the intensity of these bowl

judgments. They are indeed horrific and global in their impact. In rapid succession, the contents of the seven bowls rain down and obliterate all resistance.

Since the seven trumpets and the seven bowl judgments appear to describe the same events (from a different perspective), I think it will be helpful to remind ourselves, when dealing with each bowl, of the corresponding scripture regarding the trumpets

Bowl 1: Loathsome Sores

1st Trumpet. Revelation 8 vs 7 **“The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up”.**

1st Bowl (vs 2) **“So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.**

The first trumpet and the first bowl judgments both impact the earth. The trumpet judgment describes the effect on vegetation, whilst the bowl judgment describes the impact on people. This plague is reminiscent of the sixth plague of boils in Egypt (Exodus 9:10-11)

Bowl 2. The sea turns to blood

Second trumpet - Revelation 8:8-9. **“Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

2nd Bowl (vs 3) **“Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died”.**

This time the whole sea becomes blood, and all life in it perishes.

Bowl 3. The waters turn to blood

3rd Trumpet Revelation 8: 10-11 **“Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter”.**

3rd Bowl (vs 4-7) **Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are righteous, Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things.⁶For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.”⁷And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”**

The third angel pours his bowl into fresh waters and they too turn to blood. Both bowls two and three correspond to the first plague of Egypt, when the river Nile was turned to blood (Exodus 7:19-21)

Now comes a small interruption in the sequence of the judgments, as the angel of the waters justifies the actions of God (vs 5-7). God’s justice could be described as “blood for blood”. God is absolutely

fair in his recompense for evil, He is just, and His judgments are “true and righteous”.

Bowl 4 Men are scorched

4th Trumpet Revelation 8:12 **“Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night”.**

4th Bowl (vs 8-9) **“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory”.**

The earth is scorched, and the sun bears down on earths inhabitants with deadly intensity. Incidentally, the highest recorded temperature on earth was 136 degrees Fahrenheit in Libya in 1922. No doubt this plague far exceeds that temperature. How do the inhabitants of the earth react to this “act of God”? They blaspheme His name and do not repent.

Bowl 5 Darkness and pain

5th Trumpet Revelation 9:1-2 **“Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. ²And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So, the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit”**

5th Bowl (vs 10-11) **Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.**

The fifth trumpet, and the fifth bowl both cause darkness on the earth. Chapter 16:10-11 gives a brief summary whilst chapter 9:1-12 gives an extensive description of a swarm of demons released from the bottomless pit. The angel pours his bowl on the throne of the beast, and the epicentre of his empire is stricken with total darkness.

Bowl 6 Euphrates Dried Up

6th Trumpet Revelation 9:13-20 **“Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar, which is before God,¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.¹⁶ Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.¹⁷ And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulphur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.¹⁹ For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.²⁰ But the rest of mankind, who**

were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.²¹ And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

6th Bowl (vs 12-16) "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.¹³ And I saw three unclean spirits 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.¹⁴ For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.¹⁵ "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."¹⁶ And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

In both the 6th trumpet and the 6th bowl, the river Euphrates figures prominently in the action. Demonic activity stirs up a final showdown between the dragon and the Lamb. The 6th bowl dries up the Euphrates, apparently allowing an invading force to sweep in from the east, finding a potential barrier suddenly removed. The 6th bowl describes the last battle, the location of which has become a famous place and word "Armageddon". The unholy trinity, that is the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, send forth demonic emissaries to mobilise the forces of the earth against the Lamb. These spirits look like frogs and are reminiscent of the second Egyptian plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1-6). The demons are successful in their propaganda, and a massive army assembles

at a place laden with memories of former battles, that is a place called “Megiddo” in the Jezreel Valley of Israel. Many scholars prefer to see this as symbolic, seeing Megiddo as a meeting point for coalition forces allied with the beast, but not the site of a final battle. The Old Testament prophets Joel and Zechariah however, located the main action of the Day of the Lord in the Holy Land and in particular Jerusalem (Joel 3:1-21; Zechariah 12-14)

The term Armageddon refers to the ancient site of Megiddo a strategic city guarding the main north-south route from Egypt to Syria. This route, later called “Via Maris” (Way of the Sea) passes through a low ridge of hills into the fertile Jezreel valley. Hebrew kings, from Solomon onward, fortified the site as it serves as a choke point controlling traffic and commerce along this vital artery. Whoever controls Megiddo controls much of the Promised Land. Megiddo figures in the famous battle between the Canaanites and Israel in the days of Deborah, the prophetess and judge (Judges 4-5). The Assyrians, and later the Babylonians, conquered Megiddo in their conquests of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Napoleon Bonaparte won a convincing victory there, and also General Allenby, during World War 1, where he defeated the Ottoman Turks.

Bowl 7 The earth shaken

7th Trumpet Revelation 11:15 and 19) **“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His**

covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

7th Bowl (vs 17-21) “Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”¹⁸ And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.¹⁹ Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.²¹ And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

When the 7th trumpet sounds, and the 7th bowl is poured out, there are voices, lightening, thundering, an earthquake and a great plague of hailstones. These are the events that accompany the return of Christ, and the end of the last war. An unprecedented earthquake convulses the planet, and a massive hailstorm pounds the planet with 100 pound hailstones. The devastation is complete and the evil empire collapses like a house of cards. Babylon splits into three parts and all the cities of the world fall in ruins.

As we have seen by comparing them, the trumpet and bowl judgments harmonise, and rather than thinking there are two Armageddon's, perhaps the trumpet judgments were blown by way of warning of what was to come.

It seems, as the return of Christ draws near, God will plead with the nations to repent by sending these fearful judgments of natural disasters. Sadly, as we have read, many will blaspheme and curse God in spite of everything they have seen.

Finally, and we can't leave this study without being reminded, that tucked into the vision of the 6th bowl we have a word of exhortation. Vs 15 **“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”** John here inserts a word from the Lamb Himself. We don't read of the Lamb in chapter 16, but he's there alright, leading the charge against the evil empire, orchestrating its total destruction. This exhortation, for believers only encourages them not to despair, not to give up, but remain steadfast. This is similar to the words of Jesus during His earthly ministry, for example Matthew 24:42-44 “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known what ^lhour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

This should remind us of the underlying purpose of the book of Revelation, that is to encourage the seven churches and subsequent believers, to trust Christ and be committed to Him over and against all counterfeits, whether they be the imperial (Rome) cult of the first century or its End Times counterpart, during the reign of the Antichrist.

Chapter 23

The mystery of Babylon the Great

Revelation chapter 17

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."³ So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS
OF THE EARTH.

⁶I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marvelled with great amazement.

The Meaning of the Woman and the Beast

⁷But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to ^[d]perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.⁹ “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. ¹⁰There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. ¹¹The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.¹² “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. ¹³These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”¹⁵ Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. ¹⁶And the ten horns which you ^[g]saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷For God has put it into their hearts to fulfil His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

Charles Dickens wrote the book *A Tale of Two Cities*, those cities being Paris and London. Revelation chapters 17-22 is also a tale of two cities, namely Babylon and the New Jerusalem. John devotes two chapters to Babylon, and two chapters to the New Jerusalem. Babylon passes away, but the New Jerusalem lasts forever. The two cities are portrayed under the guise of two women, the great whore and the bride of the Lamb. John is now rewinding, since the seventh bowl in chapter 16 ends with the complete destruction of Babylon. He is now going to review the career of this wicked city, portraying it as a notorious prostitute. One of the seven angels in charge of the bowls is John's guide.

Before we look any further, it might be helpful to see how Babylon appears in the Old Testament. We find it in the book of Genesis, and in the prophets, where the sin and darkness of Babylon is described. In the history of the people of God, Babylon was the chief enemy of Judah in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. It was Babylon that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, taking the nation into captivity.

Nimrod

Nimrod was the founder of Babel/Babylon, and we must go back to Genesis chapter 10:8-10 where we have the first mention of it. "Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore, it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." ¹⁰ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar". Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, founded the city. His name comes from a Hebrew word "marad" meaning "to rebel". Don't be confused by the text which reads "He was a mighty hunter before

the Lord". This is the same Hebrew word which is used in Genesis Chapter 6:11 "The whole earth was corrupt before God" in other words, Nimrods rebellious activities were under the scrutiny of God. He was a rebel before the Lord. There is a legend that he even shot an arrow into heaven at God. Rabbis believed that Nimrod himself built the tower of Babel and they often called it "the house of Nimrod"

The Tower of Babel/Babylon

We read of the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11:1-9 "Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.³ Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.⁴ And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.⁶ And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.⁹ Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" The descendants of Noah were living in the area of Mesopotamia in Babylon, and they

settled in the land of Shinar. The population was growing, and they all spoke the same language. The people decided to build a tall proud symbol of how great they had made the nation. The Babylonians wanted a tower that would “reach to the heavens” so they could be like God and live without Him. It was a monument of the ambitions and arrogance of man, and so God caused the people to suddenly speak different languages and scattered them over the face of the earth. This perhaps causes us to think about the day and age in which we live, one of Globalisation and the spread of communication through the internet and other means.

The spirit behind Babylon

Isaiah chapters 13 and 14 are the beginning of a series of prophecies against the nations around Israel. See how Isaiah begins in chapter 13 with a proclamation against Babylon “The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw”. Now Babylon was not then the dominant world power, nor would it be for another hundred years, yet Isaiah begins his prophecies against Babylon. This is because the Bible identifies this city as the head and foundation of all nations. Isaiah goes on to speak of the spirit behind the king of Babylon and addresses Satan himself, the inspiration and power behind it, and indeed all world empires. See Isaiah 14:12-15 “How you are fallen from heaven Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!¹³ For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit”.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

In Daniel chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and saw a statue. Vs 32-33 "this image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay". God reveals the meaning of the dream to Daniel and tells Nebuchadnezzar he is the head of Gold. After him would come three other kingdoms, each represented by different materials. After the succession of kingdoms, then will come the final kingdom set up by God. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon, and the three dominating kingdoms that would follow, would be Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The nature of these empires is accurately reflected by the nature of the image in the dream.

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, there has never been a world dominating empire equal to it. Many have tried – The Huns, Islam, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, but none has succeeded. Though each of these had amazing power and influence, nothing compared to that of the Roman Empire. Some believe that the Roman Empire, in some form or another, will be revived under the leadership of the final fallen dictator, the Antichrist.

The power behind Babylon is Lucifer, and this is the unchanging truth behind world empires. This is also true of all world religions, if they build for the glory of man and not of God. Only the church that is built by Jesus Christ will stand for eternity.

Daniel and other believers were threatened and persecuted in Babylon, indicating that believers will have to (and indeed do now) contend for the faith, as they live and work in the world. Daniel proved that this is possible, for though geographically he

lived in Babylon, he did not live there spiritually, and remained true to God. He had to be willing to die, preferring to be eaten by lions, rather than to cease praying. God kept His people and still keeps His people through the fiercest trial.

Rome

While Peter was in Rome, he wrote these words “she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, greets you” (1 Peter 5:13). He refers to Rome as Babylon, indicating that the name of Babylon is not just to identify one world power, but all centres of human government, both political and financial. Peter also speaks of the believers in Rome, personifying them as a woman (She who is in Babylon). In John's day Babylon was typified by Rome, and in our day and throughout history Babylon is the system of the world both commercial and religious.

The Great Prostitute

Babylon is the great whore, the very opposite of the bride. The whore is unfaithful to God, which speaks of the nations which allow the Antichrist to take power and rule. Babylon holds no moral or spiritual values, and its only principle of behaviour is self-enrichment and pleasure. The rulers of the earth have committed spiritual fornication, as have those individuals who have followed their lead. John sees them as satiated with the drunken pleasures that abound in the hearts and lives that are unfaithful to God. It's possible that John's readers saw Rome as Babylon, and some suggest that John's description points that way. For example, the reference to seven heads, representing seven

mountains (Revelation 17:9) is seen, perhaps as identifying the city of Rome famous for its seven hills.

John saw the women as being in the wilderness, which is a good description of the state of the world without God. John saw the unity between Babylon and the beast, the Antichrist of chapter 13. The woman is dressed in luxurious clothing, covered with gold and gems of fabulous wealth. Could this be likened perhaps to the riches of the popes, the royal houses of Europe and vast financial empires of modern business? The prostitute, harlot, great whore was drinking of all the unclean and ungodly activities of those unfaithful to God. The word “fornication” is repeated and indicates God being like a rejected suitor. He has done all to bring sinners to Himself, and to win their love, and they have rejected Him, instead indulging themselves in all manner of repugnant pleasures and the worship of false Gods.

John sees her name “**Mystery Babylon the great the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**” (vs 5). Paul talks of the mystery of lawlessness or iniquity in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming”.

John also saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints. This woman not only persecutes, but she also revels in her persecution of the Godly, as a drunk revel in wine.

John is Amazed

John was amazed, perhaps because this isn't pagan persecution (which he knew in his day) but religious error and persecution. This is false religion, thirsty for the blood of the saints. We should recall that some of the most vicious persecution conducted against true believers has been done in the name of the church. In the days when the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ruled England (known for good reason as "Bloody Mary") some 288 Christians were burnt at the stake for their stand for Christ, between 1555 and 1558. But now the angel approaches John and proceeds to explain what he has seen (vs 7-18)

The woman and the beast

The Antichrist, the beast, ascends out of the bottomless pit, indicating his demonically inspired nature and origin. His destiny is certain that is perdition, literally "the place of destruction" The seven heads of Antichrist, John is told, are seven mountains which symbolise nations. John is told that there are a total of seven kings. It's not clear whether these are individuals or kingdoms. The angel says in verses 10-11 **"There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time."**¹¹ **The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition"** Five kings have fallen and "one is". Could that be a reference to the Roman Empire, and were the five empires which had fallen before, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. We must be careful of too much speculation and be ready to admit when we are beaten in our so limited understanding. I will however give you one way of thinking, not shared by all commentators. Five kingdoms have fallen, Rome is the sixth and still in power. The other at the time John writes "has not yet come".

Now has it come and gone in history or is it yet to come. The seventh, John is told, will be quickly taken over by the eighth that is the state of the Antichrist. This is a difficult passage, and we must be aware that there are other views. Some believe the seventh will be a revival of the Roman Empire for reasons I will deal with briefly.

Revival of Roman Empire

After the Second World War ended in 1945, the Treaty of Rome of 1957 was the beginning of the European Union. Many see in this confederation of nation states, a continuation of the Roman Empire, represented by the toes of the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar. The European Parliament building was designed, using a painting completed in 1563, of The Tower of Babel by Pieter Brueghel. During its construction, a poster was issued by the EU showing the tower of Babel and carrying the slogan "many tongues one voice". In 1984 the elections to the European parliament were marked in Britain by a set of stamps with two designs. One shows a woman riding on a beast, or bull led by a winged boy. The animal was riding over seven hills, or waves of the sea. This was to represent the pagan goddess Europa, whom Jupiter led away in the form of a bull. The Brussels headquarters of the Council of Europe also has a bronze statue of a woman riding a beast, and the beast is depicted riding on waves. So is the European Union Babylon, and will the Antichrist arise from among its member states? Who knows, we can however be certain that the spirit of Babylon is not confined to Europe but can be seen and found worldwide.

Two captivities of Israel

In the history of Israel, there were two captivities, each quite different in nature. The Egyptian captivity was one of cruelty and slavery, whilst the Babylonian one was one of assimilation and compromise. In Egypt Gods people were hated and kept in isolation. In Babylon they were given opportunities and encouraged to buy land and houses and settle down. Does this remind you of what is happening today, there being two attacks on Christians. First Direct and cruel persecution, and second the seduction of believers to compromise and worldliness.

Ten kings allies to antichrist (vs 12-15)

This may allude to a ten-nation confederation (as in the toes of the Daniel 2:24-45 image). These are of one mind and will give their power and authority to the beast. Whatever their exact identity, their actions are clear. They ally with the Antichrist in the war against Christ, in the battle alluded to in the sixth and seventh bowl (Revelation 16:12-21).

The beast bites back

This is quite a shock **“6 And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to fulfil His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. (Vs 16-17)** In spite of using Babylon to achieve his own ends, the beast and his ten king allies harbour deep hatred of Babylon. The plot, which they carry out, is its complete destruction. These kings are

ambitious, and no doubt loathe to share power and glory. One thing is clear, God decrees the total destruction of mystery Babylon by fire. This is divine retribution.

This is a notoriously difficult chapter to interpret and we tread with caution as to details but hold fast to the message that Babylon will be destroyed and Gods kingdom will endure forever.

Chapter 24

Celebrating the fall of Babylon

Revelation chapter 18

The Fall of Babylon the Great

18 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.² And he cried] mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!³ For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the—abundance of her luxury.”⁴ And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.⁵ For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.⁶ Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.⁷ In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’⁸ Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.

The World Mourns Babylon's Fall

⁹“The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’¹¹ “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: ¹²merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; ¹³and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. ¹⁴The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. ¹⁵The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, ¹⁶and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! ¹⁷For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance ¹⁸and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’¹⁹ “They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she made desolate.’²⁰ “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”

Finality of Babylon's Fall

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. ²² The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. ²³ The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. ²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.

The spotlight now falls on Queen Babylon the great whore (Chapter 17:1-2). She speaks in a soliloquy affording a window into her thoughts "**I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.**" (Vs 7). She foolishly considers herself invincible, a mistake many powerful people make. Nebuchadnezzar was once swept away by his own self-importance as he surveyed the great city of Babylon "is this not magnificent Babylon which I have built as a royal captain by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty" (Daniel 4:30). In the following verse, while the words of self-praise were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven "It is decreed to you King Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom has departed from you". Nebuchadnezzar at once was driven from human company, ate grass like an ox, and was soaked in heavens dew. His hair grew like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails like the claws of a hawk. Later after his punishment the king makes a very different confession "I blessed the Most High and praised and

honoured the one who lives forever. For His sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty and His kingdom endues from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:34).

Before his grand fall from power, Saddam Hussein spent great sums to restore and reconstruct the ancient site of Babylon. He had gigantic statues of himself portrayed like Nebuchadnezzar. Like these two dictators, Queen Babylon never gets the point and pays dearly for her arrogance.

A mighty angel announces the fall of Babylon the Great. This section is composed of a dirge, a lament sung at funerals (vs 2-3). In popular imagination undesirable creatures haunted the abandoned ruins of ancient cities. Isaiah 13; 21-22 (referring to Babylon) gives expression to these fears “But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there.²² the hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. This is a lament with a twist, it’s actually a taunt song, and a mocking dirge that is it celebrates the demise of a tyrant or wicked regime under the guise of a funeral lament. The language of verses 2 and 3 draws on the language of several Old Testament taunt songs (Isaiah 21:9. Jeremiah 50:39, 51:8) One of the most famous taunt songs celebrates the death of a Babylonian dictator (Isaiah 14; 3-21)

In verse 3 John uses the word “fornication” and we have seen that word before. It means to break faith with the God of Israel and follow other so-called Gods. Babylon the Great proclaims another God, one of consumption, wealth, pleasure, and self-indulgence. Her motto is - spend your way to happiness. You might liken this

to what Paul says in his letter to the Romans “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever Amen” (Romans 1:25)

In verse 4 John warns believers to escape from Babylon and have nothing to do with her. They are not to become enmeshed in the attitudes and lifestyle of Babylon. Perhaps we should pause here and consider how this applies to our day and generation of consumerism, pleasure and self-indulgence? Christians in the first century struggled with making a clean break from the old idol worshipping Greco-Roman culture in which they lived and worked. Several New Testament passages highlight the temptation to backslide into their previous lifestyle (see 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 4:8-11; Ephesians 4:17-24, 5:6-14; 1 John 2: 15-17)

In verse 5-8 John justifies the harshness of the sentence on Babylon. She deserves what she gets, her sins have “**reached to heaven**”. Indeed because of her sins and refusal to acknowledge God, she receives a sentence twice as harsh as may be expected, “**repay her double**”.

The angel prophecies the sudden and total collapse of Babylon in the space of a single day. The empires of men have been and will be swept away. So many physical and ideological edifices look strong and invincible, but they will collapse. Communism, capitalism, false religions and philosophies are all built on sand and will finally crumble and fall and be no more.

The world mourns the Fall of Babylon (vs 9-20)

The fall of Babylon will be greeted with fearful dismay by kings of the earth and merchants who made themselves rich by trading with her. The merchants express their grief in weeping and wailing. No more sales! No more profits! Their livelihood has suddenly been taken away. Those who experienced the American Stock Market Crash of 1929, Black Tuesday could probably best appreciate the feelings of these merchants. First century Rome was like a magnet attracting an unending flow of goods arriving on a vast network of waterways. The volume of trade created a huge transportation industry. Following Middle Eastern customs, the mariners throw dust on their heads as a sign of extreme grief.

Given that Rome was a type and picture of Babylon, it's relevant when reading these verses to note, that the luxury items were beyond the reach of the citizens and non-citizens of the empire, who could not possibly afford them. One third to one half of the population of Imperial Rome were slaves, and you will note that in verse 13, at the end of the catalogue of goods, we have a reference to slaves and human lives. Slave trafficking was a common evil in the economic fabric of the empire. Those individuals who were born free or able to work themselves out of slavery, were craftsman and day labourers who did the work for the empire. The nobility and upper classes controlled the wealth and resources of the empire, and though they often acted as benefactors and provided public works for the masses, this was little more than appeasement to those who lived mostly miserable lives.

One group doesn't lament the demise of Babylon that is the people of God (vs 20). To them it is a day of rejoicing. Many saints have been murdered and Gods verdict is to declare Babylon guilty as charged and sentenced to extinction.

Imagery describing Babylon's end (vs 21-24)

A mighty angel tosses a huge millstone into the sea and gives voice to this dramatic symbolic action **“Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore”**. This may appear to conflict with the earlier image of destruction by fire, but please remember that this is poetry and not prose. The point is clear enough, Babylon sinks to the bottom of the sea, a fitting end to a city and system which arose up from the depths of the abyss. This is very similar to Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's day in the 6th Century BC. “And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words,⁶² then you shall say, ‘O LORD, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.’⁶³ Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates.⁶⁴ Then you shall say, ‘Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her’ (Jeremiah 51; 61-64)

May I repeat the exhortation to reflect, in the day that we live, and ensure that the spirit of Babylon does not impact us or the church. **“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Vs 4)**

Chapter 25

The coming of The Kingdom

Revelation chapter 19

Heaven Exults over Babylon

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power belong to the Lord our God! ²for true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." ³Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" ⁴And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" ⁵Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" ⁶And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! ⁷Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." ⁸And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.⁹Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." ¹⁰And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am

your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Christ on a White Horse

¹¹ Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in ^[3]fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS.

The Beast and His Armies Defeated

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸ that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.” ¹⁹ And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together

to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.²⁰ Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

A huge heavenly choir leads off the celebration with a doxology (a giving of praise or blessing to God). The anthem begins with a rousing “ALLELUIA” and an explanation for the outburst. God acts in accord with His faithfulness and justice. The great harlot receives her just rewards in return for her persecution of the people of God. A second “ALLELUIA” rings out declaring the duration of her punishment. It is to be **“forever and ever”**. Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bow before the throne of God and add their voices “AMEN ALLELUIA”. That word Amen comes from the Hebrew and conveys the notion of that which is firm and true. God’s judgment is affirmed and welcomed by those closest to the throne. Next a voice (unidentified) cries from the throne and sings a short solo **“Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!”** The angelic choir responds, and the sound is overwhelming, like the sound of many waters and mighty thunder.

The first element in the song is **“The Lord reigns”**. His enemies have been dealt with and The Lord’s Prayer is realised “Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. The second element in the song concerns a wedding which has come. The Lamb is the groom, and the church is the bride. John, the writer,

makes reference to this in his gospel in chapter 3:29. The multitude of believers that is the bride, are clothed in the pure and fine linen of righteous acts. This will be a day of unlimited joy. Jesus uses the metaphor of a wedding banquet in Matthew 22:2-12. This is a parable about a king who prepares a lavish wedding banquet for his son, only to be humiliated by the invited guests' refusal to come. Jesus talks about a person who attends the wedding banquet without the proper clothes. One must be an invited guest to attend this banquet, and the clothes are provided by the host.

The person who spoke to John was so glorious in appearance that John fell at his feet to worship him. But John was stopped from doing so with the astonishing words, that he is none other than an ordinary believer, now glorified in heaven “. **But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus”** (vs 10). Eternal life is so much more than living forever, it is life on another plane through our union with God. We partake of the divine nature. It is obvious that believers will never be equal to God, but Gods plan was, not just to forgive us, though that is glorious, but to share His own life with us, and to make us partakers of His substance. We are to share His love and holiness, His joy, His peace. 2 Peter 1:2-4 “ Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” Romans 8:30

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The second coming of Christ

In verse 11 John writes **“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war”** You will find another reference to a white horse in chapter 6 of Revelation, but this rider appears to be different. This rider clearly trumps the first rider, it is surely Jesus Himself. Four names identify Him and speak of His character and qualification for being king, redeemer and the only true ruler of humanity.

Faithful and true

The faithfulness of Jesus is a keynote in the book of Revelation. He is **“the faithful witness”** (Revelation 1:5, 3:14). He cannot break His own word, and He never fails. He stands in stark contrast to the beast and the false prophet who specialise in deceit.

The Word of God

The very expression of the person of God, His love and righteousness. This title connects the book of Revelation with Johns Gospel which opens with this theme (John 1:1-5)

King of kings and Lord of lords

The repetition in the title (King of kings) is a characteristic of Hebrew language, emphasising something superlative and

unique. He has absolute authority over all humanity, and all must bow to Him freely or reluctantly.

John also saw that His eyes were like a flame of fire, piercing and searching the hearts. His clothing has been dipped in blood. This may refer to Jesus death at Calvary, also the image of a warrior whose garment is stained with the blood of his fallen enemies. Perhaps both images are intended; both are rooted in Biblical thought. Taking multiple descriptive names is a traditional practice among monarchs ancient and modern. For example, Isaiah 9:6 lists four throne names of the prophesied Messiah “Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” What a wonderful name for The Lord Jesus, the retuning King.

John now rewinds the tape of the last days events, as the chapter concludes. He shows the battle of Armageddon for one last time. Here we have another invitation to a banquet, called the great supper of God **“Come and gather together for the supper of the great God”** (vs17). What a contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is a gory supper, a macabre feast of decaying flesh. An angel summonses the birds of the air to the scene of the battle to clean up the mess, and so ends the army recruited by the beast and the false prophet. Attention shifts to the ringleaders, the beast and the false prophet. Both are captured and **“These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone”** (vs 20) and the rest we are told **“were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh”** (vs 21) How do this happen so suddenly and immediately, by the sword which issues from the mouth of the

rider on the white horse. That is by the word of the command of Jesus, who called the worlds into existence by a word (Genesis 1)

Chapter 26

The Millennium and the Last Judgment

Revelation chapter 20

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;³ and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

The Saints Reign with Christ 1,000 Years

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.⁶ Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Satanic Rebellion Crushed

⁷Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. ⁹They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Great White Throne Judgment

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

We have arrived at one of the most difficult chapters to interpret in the book of Revelation. Eschatology is the field of Christian theology which concerns the study of the last things. It is the study

of Christ's future return, the resurrection, the eternal blessedness of those who are redeemed, and the eternal punishment of those who are not. There is general agreement on these rudimentary points, but as to the way and when it all happens, there is wide diversity of thought and this has been the case since the very earliest centuries of the church.

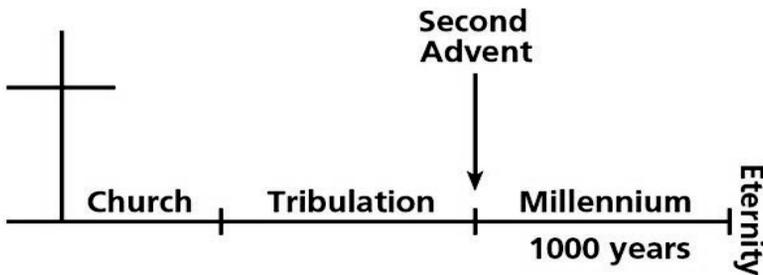
If we are to be serious Bible students, we should consider views which may not accord with ours, and indeed be prepared to change our views (or even admit we don't have a settled view) so long as such a matter does not go to the very essence of the doctrines of the faith. It is sad, that there are Christians who are not aware of different views and have slavishly followed all they have received without any proper consideration of their own. Now as to the basics of the Christian faith, these are foundational (as it were set in stone) but these matters we are about to consider are not vital for our salvation, nor indeed our sanctification. We must be dogmatic on the foundations of the faith and be prepared to battle for the truth. Here however we must be humble and look carefully at these matters, knowing that Christians have differed, and still do. Rather than consider the detail of the chapter verse by verse, may I ask you to read and re-read chapter 20 and glean its details from what follows.

First a definition, "The Millennium" refers to the period of a 1000-year reign of Christ mentioned in verses 1-4 above. The views promoted by theologians throughout history can be organised into three general systems and viewpoints, which are known as **Pre-Millennialism (historic and dispensational) Post-Millennialism and A-Millennialism**. We will endeavour to look objectively at each viewpoint.

Pre-Millennialism (Historical)

Called historical because some of the early church fathers such as Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Tertullian held this view. The view is that when Jesus returns, he will establish his kingdom upon the earth for 1000 years, which maybe be literal or symbolic, in the sense of it being a long period of time. John talks about the Martyrs in chapter 20 and says of them that they came to life “*And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*”. The verb used here means resurrection, indeed John uses the words (in relation to the Martyrs) “**first resurrection**” at the end of verse 5. Those who are resurrected first are, they say, believers, and those brought back from the dead after 1000 years are unbelievers who then face the judgment. Most historic premillennialists hold that the nation of Israel will undergo a national salvation immediately before the millennium is established, but there will be no national restoration of Israel. Thus, the nation of Israel will not have a special role or function distinct from the church. Please see picture below.

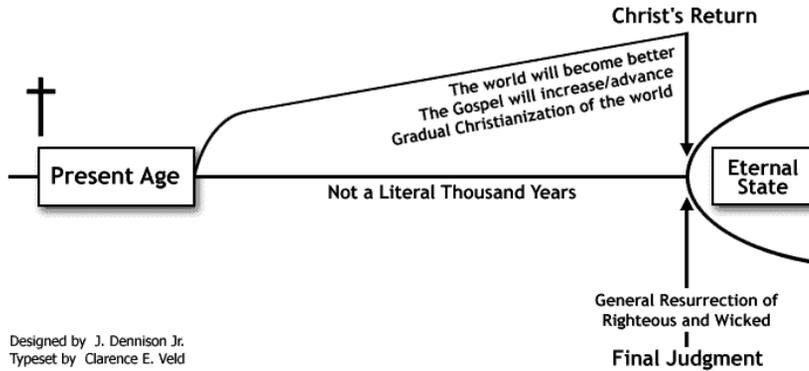
Premillennialism



Post-Millennialism

The prefix “post” meaning of course “after”. This belief which may seem strange to some, is that Christ will come after the millennium. They believe in a literal kingdom of God upon the earth (maybe not a literal 1000 years) but it will not be established by the Lord Jesus coming to earth and issuing a 1000 year reign here. The gospel, they believe, will so transform society and Christianity will dominate the world which will herald the coming of Christ and His reign on the earth. They cite texts in which believers are commissioned to tell the good news to the ends of the earth. If the world is the mission field, then God must intend to save the great majority of the world so the argument runs (See Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; and Romans 1:16). In particular people who hold this view appeal to where John sees **“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands** (Revelation 7:9) They also point to the Messianic Psalms especially Psalm 2 particularly verse 7-9 2 I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession”. A number of texts from Jesus and the apostles of course suggest the opposite (see Luke 18:8; Matthew 24; 3-31; 2 Thessalonians 2; 3-12; and Revelation 13). The actual course of history in the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st offers little encouragement that the gospel is transforming society. When Jesus comes there will be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked and a final judgment, and the eternal state ushered

in. So the second coming is post millennium, in other words the second coming is the crowning of a golden age, where things get better because of the influence of the gospel. This is not a widely held view and the biblical support is thin. Please see picture below



A-Millennialism

The prefix “a” meaning “no” that is to say a-millennialists expect no future millennial kingdom. They believe that there is no literal 1000-year kingdom of God and reign of Christ on the earth, but that the present church age in which we now live, is the millennial reign of Christ. Many throughout the history of the church have held this view, and by the time of Augustine it had become the dominant view of the church. It was the view of the Reformers including Calvin and Luther. Christ will come back to the earth, there will be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked and the final judgment. The future kingdom foretold in Daniels prophecy (Chapters 2 and 7) is a spiritual kingdom and not a literal one on the earth for 1000 years. The 1000 years stands for a long period of time when the earth has the gospel preached. This they say began with the resurrection of Jesus and will last

until the second coming. The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles are said to be synonymous with the millennial kingdom. The Martyrs, said to be resurrected, are those believers who are with Christ now (sometimes referred to as in “The intermediate state” “absent from the body present with the lord” 2 Corinthians 5:8) and the dead raised are believers and unbelievers. Satan’s binding seems to usher in this 1000-year rule, so when did that binding occur. They maintain that this is not a future event but has already occurred, and though Satan’s influence over the world seems great now, he is bound and limited in his ability to deceive the nations. The scriptures below are adduced to make this point.

- (a) Matthew 12:28-29 “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

- (b) John 12:31 “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out”.

- (c) Colossians 2:15 “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”.

- (d) Hebrews 2:14-15 “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release

those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

- (e) 1 John 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”.

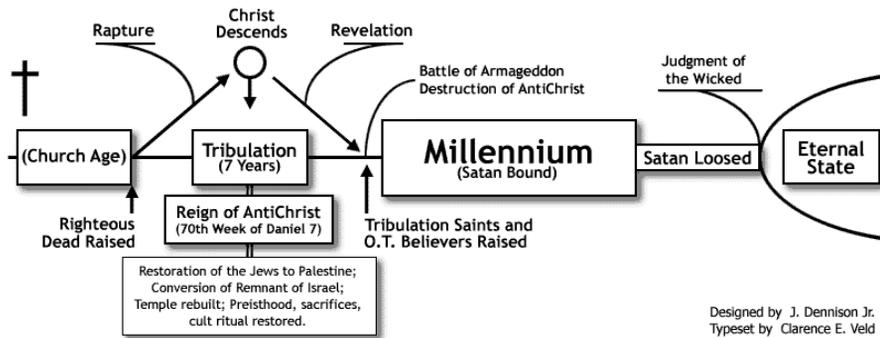
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Dispensational Premillennialism

Born in the nineteenth century, this view is that the church will be snatched to heaven (the rapture) before a coming seven-year tribulation period. We have already covered the tribulation in our study that is the activity of the antichrist and the pouring out on the earth of the wrath of God. They hold that after the rapture and the expiry of the seven-year period, Christ will return and reign on

the earth. Dispensational premillennialists put a lot more stress on national Israel than historic premillennialists. Once the church has been raptured, God will begin to work with the nation of Israel as in the days of the old covenant. The Jews will preach the gospel and many Jews and Gentiles will come to faith in Christ before He returns. God will literally fulfil all the promises he made to Israel in the Old Testament in the millennium, and the nation will reign throughout the earth. These views are generally held by who I call the “left behind” folks in particular authors such as Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey. See picture below.



It's so easy to get confused when reading Revelation 20 and perhaps there is some merit in the description (not Biblical) of being “Pan-millennialist” that is to say it will all pan out in the end.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Some years ago, I was challenged by someone (leading a home-group) with these words “God is not angry anymore, He was only angry in the Old Testament” I can only assume that the person had not read the New Testament, and certainly had not read Revelation chapter 20.

On the 8th July 1741 an American preacher named Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon entitled “Sinners in the hands of an angry God”. Now it’s perfectly true to say that God is love and merciful, full of grace, and a God who forgives, but be in no doubt, He is also an angry God. We tend to see anger as sinfully motivated, but that is never the case with God. He is justifiably angry, and His anger is always pure and holy. Jonathan Edwards, who held his sermon notes right up to his face because his eyesight was so bad, preached how God was holy and must judge sin. The sermon is a long one and you may care to look it up. Here is an extract.

“So that, thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment; the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out: and they have no interest in any Mediator, there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.

Those unbelievers who heard him were, he said, under the wrath of God. People were terrified, some gripped the back of the pews in front of them; some fell to the ground and started to weep; some held onto the pillars of the church building fearing the ground

would open up and swallow them up into hell. Some ran up the aisle to the pulpit and cried “have mercy, have mercy, have mercy”. How things have changed, there appears now to be little or no fear of God. Some who say they believe in God see Him as a kind of cuddly figure who could do them no harm.

A court scene

Here in these verses, we have a court scene. The one sitting on the Great White Throne is the judge, Jesus Christ Himself “The Father judges no man but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22) This is not Jesus meek and mild or as portrayed at Christmas as a baby in a stable. There is a lovely verse in Isaiah 42 (vs 3) which reads like this “a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax shall He not quench” If you feel like your crumbling, He won’t come and break you down and destroy you. If the very flame of your existence is about to go out, Jesus won’t extinguish you, but if you call on Him, He will fan you into a flame, give you a reason for living, give you a new heart, deal with your sin and make you His child. But let me quote you the whole verse “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth” Jesus has come to the earth once as a Saviour, but when He comes again it will be as a judge. This court scene here is different from any other court scene on the earth. There is no defence counsel, no plea of innocence from the accused, and no leniency on the part of the judge. There is no escape from this terrible and final judgment. The whole earth and heaven have fled from the face of Jesus. Verse 12 “**And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God**”. Nothing else is standing there, all creation has departed at His face, but there the dead small and great stand before God.

Now who are these people, and here I'm afraid, we must return to the pre-millennial and a-millennial views (see part 1). The pre-millennial position is that those dead include all the people who have ever lived and have not responded to Gods offer of salvation. Pre-millennialists say that believers prior to the millennium have already been judged at Jesus judgment seat and received their rewards for faithful service or suffered loss for failure to do so. Many people survive the great tribulation and enter the millennial era. They and their descendants born during the 1000 years must make a personal decision to trust Christ. Presumably, many of them do, and presumably they are included in this judgment scene. This is not a view I share. I am more comfortable with the a-millennial view that is we are now in the millennium period and everyone, believers and unbelievers alike participate in this final court session, because no interim earthly kingdom precedes the eternal state.

The Books

The collection of books contains an account of all the works of those who have ever lived. Those who have never trusted Christ will, by default, be judged and condemned by their works Jesus said in Mark 4:22 "there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light" In Matthew 25:36 Jesus said, "every idle word that men may speak, they will give account of it on the day of judgment". There appear to be degrees of punishment for these unbelievers (Matthew 11:20-24)

Another Book

This is called the Book of Life, and it's the book belonging to Jesus. The books in the previous paragraph have the verdict of death written all over them, but this book has the verdict of life. In this book is the life of Jesus, whose life bears the most intimate scrutiny. Examine every detail of this life, every act, every thought, every feeling and it's perfect and pure. Jesus lived here on earth with all the temptations of this world and all its suffering. But look in the book and you will find the names of those who have repented of their sin, believed on Him and followed Him. These once had their own books with all their sin and awfulness recorded, but as soon as they trusted Christ every page was deleted.

We used to sing a chorus as children which went like this "God has blotted them out I'm happy and glad and free, God has blotted them out I'll turn to Isaiah and see chapter forty four twenty two and three He's blotted them out and now I can shout for that means me" The word for "blotted out" in the Bible, is used in relation to papyrus. In those days they wrote on papyrus, which was made of crossed reeds pressed and then given a shiny surface rubbed and polished. You wrote with a brush and ink on the papyrus. The words "blotted out" meant to take a knife and with the blade scrape the surface of the papyrus, taking off the ink and then re-polishing so it could be used again. You could get the papyrus absolutely clean. When the Lambs book of life is opened, all records of the followers of Christ have been blotted out and the name of Jesus is inscribed there. How did this great transaction occur, this great swop, His life for mine take place, and when were the pages rendered blank in my records. Why the day I recognised my sin, my guilt, and saw that Jesus had paid my penalty and in the

sight of the judge I was declared “not guilty”. I plead with you to do likewise and recognise that Jesus is your only hope and to cry to Him for mercy and follow Him. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The Lake of fire

Some people are troubled by the notion that God would inflict eternal punishment and suggest instead that the lake of fire represents “annihilation”, that is unbelievers cease to exist, they are not conscious and suffer no pain. A slight modification of this view suggests that there is a time of conscious torment, but it’s limited in duration. After their punishment they cease to exist. Some of a more radical view suggest that God eventually pardons everyone, a view called “universalism” The Bible does not contain a great deal of information as to what hell is like and perhaps one of the most chilling accounts is given in Revelation chapter 14:9-11”**Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand,¹⁰ he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”**

There is no suggestion there of annihilation, and those who take this view contradict the plain meaning of scripture. The scriptures treat the destiny of believers and non-believers as parallel in

duration. That is believers are to enjoy the New Jerusalem forever, and unbelievers are pictured as being in the lake of fire forever. God is not to be charged for the suffering of unbelievers since they have chosen this for themselves. The Bible resounds with warnings about the reality of a final judgment “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27)

In the Salvation Army Citadel in Exeter Devon is a bench which stretches the whole width of the church. It was not meant to be sat on but kneeled at by those wanting to get right with God. In two feet high letters is written HERE BRING THY WOUNDED HEART. It is said that often the bench was wet with the tears as people cried for mercy, and it was sometimes known as the mercy seat. I implore you come to this place in your heart, and cry to God for His mercy and Grace. He will hear you and promises that no one who comes to Him in true repentance will He cast out. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37)

Chapter 27

The New Jerusalem

Revelation Chapter 21

All Things Made New

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." ⁶ And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸ But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The New Jerusalem

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.¹⁴ Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.¹⁵ And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs its length, breadth, and height are equal.¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.¹⁸ The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one

pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

The Glory of the New Jerusalem

²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour unto it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. ²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

In Revelation 20:11 John says “**the earth and the heaven**” flee from the presence of the one on the great white throne and “**no place was found for them**” The apostle Peter provides a graphic description of the end, that is the culmination of the judgements poured out on the earth, and described earlier in Revelation chapters 10-13. Peter writes “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Chapter 20 ends with the great conflict between good and evil when God triumphs over all the powers of darkness and re-establishes eternal foundations of righteousness. The victory over evil concludes with the final separation of the human race,

between those who have chosen life in Christ, and those who have chosen a life of sin without Him.

Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation mirror the first two chapters of Genesis, in that the first creation is replaced by the new creation. But this new creation is not just a restoration of the old (before sin entered) but God has made something even better. The Greek word that John uses is *kainos* which stresses a quality of newness that means unused, unprecedented, unworn, and uncommon. This old earth has suffered because of sin, and only a brand-new creation is appropriate for the redeemed. Indeed Paul personifies the creation and depicts it as longing to be free from its bondage “ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8; 20-22).

Long before John's vision here, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah foresaw new heavens and a new earth (see Isaiah 65:17 and also 66:22-23) and we have that famous passage in Isaiah chapter 11:6-9 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them.⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy

mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

No Sea

John is going to explain the nature of the new earth and what life will be like for believers. He begins with a negative “**there was no more sea**” Does the new earth have no oceans, or is this apocalyptic language describing the sea in figurative terms. In some poetic passages in the Old Testament, the sea is figurative of chaos and unrest (See Genesis 1:2; Job 16:12; Psalms 74:13, 89:9, 107:23-29). John has already spoken of the sea as the source of the dragon’s great counterfeit; the beast of Antichrist (Revelation 13)

A city from the sky

John’s attention is now drawn to an amazing site. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem descends on planet earth. Now the question arises, will believers end up in heaven or on earth. Some hold the view that they will spend eternity in heaven with God and his angels. They arrive at this conclusion primarily from words of Paul in Corinthians and Philippians. They are:

1. 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.⁴ For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened,

not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.⁵ Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.⁶ So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord”.

2. Philippians 1:23; 3:20 “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.⁹ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Some, on the other hand, think believers will spend eternity on earth. They suggest that the scriptures cited from Paul, do not refer to the eternal state but an intermediate state that gives way to an eternal reign with Jesus on the new earth, either at the second coming of Christ (a-millennialism) or after the millennium (pre and postmillennialism). This is a view I prefer and is in keeping with Pauls assertion in 1 Corinthians 15 that God intends to raise up believers with new physical bodies which would seem strange if this was for an existence in heaven.

A bride

John saw the city “**prepared as a bride adorned for her husband**”. Those original readers of the book of Revelation would have understood this description. The Old Testament compares Israel to the bride of the Lord, and the New Testament presents the

spiritual relationship between the Lord and His redeemed people in such terms (1 Corinthians 11:2) The most notable instance is in Pauls passage about Christian marriage in Ephesians 5:25-32 where the church is likened to the bride of Christ. The word adorned in Greek is the word from which we get the word cosmetics. John would have envisioned a Jewish wedding in which the adorning of the bride was very costly and elaborate. Isaiah depicts the Lords bride in similar terms “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Paul speaks of the church as the bride of Jesus in these words “ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27)

God's city

This is Gods city, so different from any cities that have gone before. Cain built a city and following the flood the descendants of Noah built Babel. These early attempts to create community were followed by endless successions of “great” cities. Nineveh, Athens (the so-called great cradle of democracy) and Rome, through which John depicts mystery Babylon the great whore. Today there are many more, but all have failed, and will fail to build a truly great society. The Bible refers to another city, one that God is building and the book of Hebrews describes it like this “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who

are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24). Paul reminds his Gentile converts in Galatia that they belong to “the Jerusalem above that is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26) and again in Philippians 3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” Paul views Jerusalem as a heavenly reality to which people belong, even though it hasn’t yet descended to earth.

God moves in

In this new world order God is continuously and intimately present. This has not happened since God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. *“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (vs 3). In his gospel John writes “and the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us and we beheld His glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) The Greek word translated “dwelt” in John 1:14 is the same Greek word that is translated “dwell” in Revelation 21:3. The literal rendering of the Greek word would be “tabernacled”. For John’s original readers, the connection to the Old Testament Tabernacle erected in Sinai and this new temple is unmistakable.

Glorious negatives

The new era will begin with God wiping away all tears from His beloved people. Whatever the cause of the tears, God will minister

comfort to His people, and sorrow and mourning shall cease forever.

No death. There will be no more death, which for many is the ultimate human tragedy. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3:20 “All go to one place; all are from the dust and all return to dust again”. But that’s not the end of the story, says John, death will be no more.

No sorrow or crying. Only God knows the whole array of human tragedy, grief, rejection, disappointment, suffering and persecution this world has experienced. Only He knows the enormity of tears shed during the dark days of human history. Solomon talks of these in Ecclesiastes 4:1 “Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter—On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter”

No more pain the word John uses here for pain is typically used to refer to hard exhausting work that’s saps all strength, the kind of toil the people of Israel suffered during their bondage in Egypt. But John may also mean physical pain no longer exists. Pain now in our physical bodies is a warning sign, but this would no longer seem to be an issue with immortal bodies.

A fountain of water

In John’s gospel Jesus tells a Samaritan woman he can give her “living water” (John 4:10). He says to her in verse 14 “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” The moment when Jesus uses

this symbol of water, occurred during the festival of Booths in Jerusalem (John 7; 1-43). This feast included a seven day ritual in which the priest carried a golden pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple. This was to remind the people of the supply of water when the people of Israel wandered through the desert. On the last day of the festival Jesus cried out “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7; 37-38). This living water is the symbol of eternal life and this is what John is referring to in Revelation 21:6

An Inheritance

John says, “**He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son**” (vs 7) All that has been described, the end of all evil and the presence of all that is good, and belonging to the family of God is promised to these. Those who are not part of this inheritance says John shall have their part in the lake of fire.

A virtual Tour

John is treated to a tour of the New Jerusalem by an angel, and though the description conveys spiritual realities we must remember that symbolism and imagery abound, as does the book of Revelation generally. The New Jerusalem is described as “**the bride, the Lamb’s wife**”. Contrast this description with Babylon “**the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**” (17:5) John is whisked off to a high mountain and from there he watches the holy city descend from heaven, and provides a detailed description. His first impression of the city is its glory, its

sheer radiance, which overwhelms the senses. John resorts to precious gems and jewels in order to convey what he sees.

The city is surrounded by a huge wall built on twelve foundations and entered by twelve gates. The gates are named after each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The foundations are named after the twelve Apostles. Does this not emphasize the continuity and the unity of the people of God, Jews and Gentiles alike? In the book of Exodus twelve pillars are set up at the foot of Mount Sinai representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In the wilderness the Temple formed the centre of the camp. Around it, in a specific order, are the twelve tribes, three on each side (Numbers 13-17). Surely this reinforces the certain fact that the Old Testament people of God are a vital part of the New Jerusalem. Those who put their trust in God will be there.

The twelve foundations are named in honour of the twelve Apostles appointed, as they were, the guardians of the gospel. Indeed Paul writes in Ephesians 2:20-21 "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Siege warfare often involved undermining the foundations of walls, so builders put great effort in constructing walls on solid bedrock. Praise God for the solid foundations God has left us with and will stand forever.

Dimensions and shape

The city is a huge cube, its dimensions **twelve thousand furlongs** (1,500 miles) in length width and breadth. The walls are **One hundred and forty-four cubits** (approximately 216 feet) thick. The cube figures prominently in Biblical accounts.

1. The Holy of Holies of the tabernacle was a cube about 15 feet in each direction (Exodus 26)
2. In Solomon's Temple the Holy of Holies was also a cube (30 feet in each direction)
3. Ezekiel's vision of a New Temple, the Holy of Holies was 34 feet in each direction.

But here the whole city appears in the shape of a cube. God dwells in the whole place of perfection with all His people.

Building materials

The wall is made of Jasper and the city itself is composed of pure gold. Each of the twelve foundations were adorned with twelve different precious stones.

1. **Jaspar**
2. **Sapphire**
3. **Chalcedony**
4. **Emerald**
5. **Sardonyx**
6. **Sardius**
7. **Chrysolite**
8. **Beryl**
9. **Topaz**
10. **Chrysoprase,**
11. **Jacinth**

12. Amethyst.

Now for some fascinating facts that have only come to light in our generation. It has been discovered that gems can be classified as either Anisotropic or Isotropic. Only recently have scientists discovered cross polarized light which can be used to identify whether a gem is anisotropic or isotropic. When viewed in cross polarized light (akin to pure light), anisotropic stones produce a colourful array-reflecting all the colours of the rainbow, whereas isotropic stones lose all their colour and appear black. In Revelation 21 the twelve gems (mentioned above) are all anisotropic, they all show colourful patterns under pure light. Have a look at them below.



Jasper



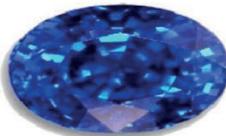
Emerald



Chrysolite



Chrysoprasus



Sapphire



Sardonyx



Beryl



Jacinth



Chalcedony



Sardius



Topaz



Amethyst

Of the twenty-eight stones normally regarded as gemstones, only sixteen are anisotropic. You will have noticed that precious stones, such as diamonds, garnets and rubies are not included because, it turns out, they are isotropic and when pure light passes through them there is no beauty in them. Only God knew these things, and only He could have inspired these wonderful scriptures.

See below the effect of pure light on those twelve stones mentioned in Revelation 21.



The Twelve stones of the foundations seem modelled after the breastplate worn by the high priest of Israel (see Exodus 28: 15-20) The New Jerusalem is a priestly city, and all the people of God are

priests, precisely what Jesus intended for the fellowship of the lamb. **“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (Revelation 1:4-6)

What’s missing?

The New Jerusalem is defined as much by what isn’t there as by what is. Revelation 21:22-22:5 details five items, or groups of items, that are missing. When you add these to the two John has already mentioned, you arrive at that figure of seven. The city is the epitome of perfection.

1. No sea (21:1)
2. No death, mourning, crying or pain (21:4)
3. No Temple (21:2)
4. No need of Sun or Moon (21:23)
5. No night (21:25)
6. Nothing unclean (21:27)
7. No curse (22:3)

No Temple

The first Temple was built by Solomon, and it stood from about 970 BC until it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC. The second Temple was dedicated in 517BC and enlarged and enhanced by Herod the Great beginning in 20BC. The Romans

destroyed the second Temple in 70AD, near the end of the Jewish revolt against Rome, only some 20 years before John wrote Revelation. In Jewish literature of this period, prayers for a new Temple appear frequently. Revelation includes numerous references to a heavenly temple (7:15, 11:19, 14: 15, 15:5-8, 16:1, 16:17) and I guess it was unexpected that the New Jerusalem did not have one. However, John's explanation makes perfect sense. There is no Temple building because all the building stood for in the past is now realised by the very presence of God **"the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"** (21:22)

No Sun or moon

The glory of God and the lamb are a perpetual source of light. How wonderful and beyond our imagination. **"Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** (Romans 8:30) **"⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.** (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Finally

"And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light". A description of the origins of the people who make up the New Jerusalem. They are no longer Jew nor Gentile, but they have been saved from every kindred, tribe and tongue to partake of this unspeakable glory. This bride is a huge international city of people who love God, living in His light, life and love.
HALLELUJAH

Chapter 28

Coming home to the garden

Revelation Chapter 22

The River of Life

22 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

The Time Is Near

6 Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." 8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of

your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.” 10 And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.”

Jesus Testifies to the Churches

12 “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”14 Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.16 “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

A Warning

18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take

away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

I Am Coming Quickly

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen

This is like going back to a better Garden of Eden, the banishment is over and the cherubim no longer guard the entrance to the garden with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24). We are introduced to a crystal-clear river with life giving properties, its banks lined with 12 kind of fruits dispensing healing for the nations. But the single most important feature is God who has made it all possible. The redeemed are worshiping God and no others, for they are the only ones there. There is no more night and no more darkness.

The River of life

No human need is more urgently needed than water, and surely this river is a symbol of spiritual life. The source of the river, the source of life, is right in the centre of the city the very throne of God Himself. He alone is the source of true life, He said "I am the way the truth and the life". The origin of this picture lies in the Old Testament. In the book of Genesis, we read in chapter 2:10 "Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads" In Ezekiel 47:1-12 we read about a river that springs from beneath the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. It flows eastward, and it increases rapidly in volume and depth as it courses its way from the Temple courtyard towards the Dead Sea.

After the river comes from the Temple and flows 150 feet, it's just ankle deep. Another 150 feet its knee deep. By the time it's gone a further 150 feet, its waist deep, and finally after another 150 feet it's so deep it could not be crossed. This is symbolic and speaks of Gods power to cleanse from the pollution of sin, affecting not only individuals but the whole universe. In Ezekiel's vision the water transforms the desert into an oasis, and the Dead Sea is converted into a sweet water lake teeming with life and lined with trees along its shore. The abundance of fruit trees is described by Ezekiel in Chapter 47:12 "Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

The Tree of Life

John's description of the garden changes Ezekiel's many trees with fruit, into one tree having 12 kinds of fruits, one for each month of the year: no non-productive months. In the Garden of Eden there were two most prominent trees. One provided the knowledge of good and evil, its fruit off limits and not to be eaten. The other, the tree of life became inaccessible after sin entered. To eat of this would mean living forever as the enemy of God, like Satan and his angels. To prevent this Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden and its entrance was sealed. Redemption is necessary, and this has come about by the sacrificial death of the Lamb. But the garden is open again and all have free access to the tree of life. God resumes His daily walks with His beloved man "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads....and they shall reign forever and ever" (Vs 4). The effects of the fall will be

reversed, and the curses spoken over creation will be lifted forever. Night will have passed away, eternal day will come, and God will share His being with His beloved man.

Promising to return

John reminds the faithful that the promises Jesus made He will keep. He will return and reward everyone's work, and it won't be long in coming. All that is in the Scriptures is true and trustworthy and points to this time. The prophets were certain, as were the Psalmists, and the apostles and all who testified of these things. John in verse 7 quotes Jesus as saying "I am coming quickly" yet more than 2000 years have passed, and He has not yet come. However, the Old Testament prophets spoke of the End Times Day of The Lord, and also describe it as imminent and impending. Isaiah speaking in the name of God says, "For My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed" (Isaiah 56:1) and many similar passages make the same point. The New Testament likewise talks about the imminence of the return of Christ. (See Romans 13:12; James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18). Both Old and New Testaments view the Day of The Lord as imminent and we must see the perspective here. The Psalmists says, "For a thousand years in Gods sight are like yesterday when it is past" (Psalm 90:4). About 2000 years elapsed after God promised Abraham that he would have as many descendants as the stars in the sky, and sand on the seashore, before Jesus came to earth and the church began. The Apostle Paul describes those who believe in Jesus as Abrahams spiritual children (Romans 4; 1-25).

Worship only God

Overwhelmed John falls down to worship at the feet of the angelic messenger and is again reprimanded (see Revelation 19:10). Regardless of why John did this, there is a lesson that God alone is to be worshipped, not angels nor indeed anyone nor anything else in creation.

Leaving the scroll unsealed

The angel instructs John not to seal the scroll, but to let its contents be open for inspection because they were immediately relevant in John's day and will continue to be relevant until Jesus comes again. For those reading this who have not repented of sin and trusted Christ, I implore you to reflect on what has been written. The time is near and your choice will govern your destiny. Those who have chosen Christ will live in this glorious place forever, but those who have refused Him will live forever in darkness and misery. You are either for or against The Lamb Jesus and be sure God dispenses perfect justice.

The Judge is coming

Jesus says ““And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”¹⁴ Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.” (Vs 12-15) Everyone will be treated with absolute fairness and justice, with each person receiving exactly what his or her work merits. This may at first sight seem contrary to the gospel message that salvation is by grace through faith not

works (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, genuine faith produces good works (Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 5:6). Jesus the judge is the Alpha and the Omega the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, and express the eternity that only God possesses. From everlasting to everlasting, He knows what is right and wrong just and unjust.

Jesus has the last word.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. (Vs 16) Jesus signs off on the revelation given to John by using two titles.

The Son of David

He descends from David, the shepherd boy, son of Jesse, slayer of Goliath, King of Israel. In both Matthew and Luke is a genealogy showing Jesus's lineage from the House of David (Matthew 1:1-18; Luke 3; 23-38). There are a number of Old Testament references which relate to this title of Jesus. (See 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16 Isaiah 11:1-2, 10 and 55:3) The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah and the Psalmists join in the prophetic chorus. Its Christmas as I write this and am reminded of Isaiah 9; 6-7 “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this”. Paul confirms this when he writes to the Romans in chapter 1:13 “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to

the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

The bright and morning star

John returns to the one who first appeared in Jesus' message to the church in Thyatira. There Christ promised they would be given the "morning star". This may refer to the Old Testament prophecy in Numbers 23-24 where the prophet Balaam utters four oracles about the future of Israel and its relationship to its surrounding countries. The fourth oracle includes the following passage "I see him but not now, I behold him but not near...a star shall come out of Jacob and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17) In its context, the reference is to David, and among the church fathers, this scripture was interpreted as a reference to Jesus as the promised Messiah. The promise to Thyatira to those who keep the faith is the promise of Jesus Himself.

Closing invitations from Jesus

Jesus appears to be the one speaking "And the Spirit and the Bride say come" (Vs 17). The Holy Spirit and the church say "come". Both the Holy Spirit and the bride are eager to bring biblical history to its grand consummation. Jesus urges those who read his prophecy to embrace its message, and join in the call to come. This is an offer of salvation to all and again I implore you to heed the invitation now, this very moment, before it's too late. Jesus invites all who thirst to "come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely". What does this mean "come and drink"? Listen to the words of Jesus in John 4:13-14 "Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the

water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life". God invites you to enter into an everlasting relationship with Him and receive His very life which is everlasting. It's the same message Jesus expresses when he says this in Matthew 11:28-30 "*come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*".

Come NOW and get right with God, confess your sin and receive Him as Lord and saviour. Follow Him, come what may, and you will have everlasting life and live in the New Jerusalem with all those who have so received Him.

Warning don't tamper

18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Vs 18-19). John refers to the whole book as "prophecy". Covenant documents, such as wills, marriage documents and national treaties, carried weighty warnings and sanctions about tampering. God warns against additions and subtractions to the Sinai covenant (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 and see Proverbs 30:5-6)

Final word from Jesus

For the third time in this chapter Jesus promises “I am coming soon” (22:7, 22; 12, 22; 20). However, this time there is a small but significant addition the word “surely”. This translates the Greek word “*nai*” which indicates a solemn declaration, Jesus is really coming again, make no mistake about that. John, with great enthusiasm agrees and says AMEN COME LORD JESUS.

Is this the end of the story?

We have completed our study; God has conquered Satan and every evil power. Satan is proved a liar, and God is vindicated and glorified. He has demonstrated to all that He is love, and light, Holy and just. God’s people are living in His new paradise, fulfilling and enjoying the destiny God created for them. They are forgiven, saved, recreated in His image. A man, Christ Jesus the Son of God rules the earth and shares that rule with His people. But this is only the end of history as we know it. Let me end with a quote from C.S Lewis at the end of the Narnia series.

“But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before”.