

1. Apocalyptic Imagery

A. Study the cartoons on the following pages. Note the imagery, observing how creatively humans communicate in the normal course of conversation.

1. Various types of symbolic language:

a. Simile – “I feel like I’ve been hit over the head with a hammer!” “*They are like children sitting in the marketplace ...*” (Lk 7:32). Find another Biblical simile: _____.

b. Metaphor – “You’re an angel!” “*They are spots in your love feasts ... they are clouds without water ... late autumn trees without fruit ...*” (Jude 12). Find another Biblical metaphor: _____.

c. Metonymy – Using one word in place of another. “My favorite Italian dish is spaghetti.” “*They have Moses and the prophets ...*” (i.e., the *writings* of Moses and the prophets, the Scriptures – Lk 16:29).

d. Synecdoche – Using part for the whole, or vice versa. “What a beautiful set of wheels!” “*But no man can tame the tongue ...*” (the tongue is only one organ of speech but stands for speech as a whole – Jas 3:8).

e. Hyperbole – Exaggeration to make a point. “I laughed so hard I thought I was going to pass out!” “*I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven*” (Mt 18:22). Find another Biblical hyperbole: _____.

2. Symbolic language emphasizes, increases vividness, arrests the attention, expresses strong emotion, impresses upon the memory. Mere prose communicates thoughts and ideas, but symbolism embellishes those thoughts for effect. As humans communicate this way with each other, so God communicates with us symbolically.

B. But in Revelation we meet up with *symbolism on steroids*; i.e., apocalyptic language. This is the primary reason for its difficulty. It is not biographical like the gospels, conversational like 2 Corinthians, historical like Acts or polemical like Romans. Its apocalyptic style is like that of Isaiah, Zechariah, Ezekiel and the latter half of Daniel. Such highly symbolic and figurative language is designed to inspire courage and fidelity in a time of crisis.

C. Apocalyptic literature is not a logical, progressive argument which attempts to sway the intellect by reasoned analysis. Instead, it is a “photo-album,” a picture-book with extreme imagery aimed at stirring the emotions and comforting those who are threatened.

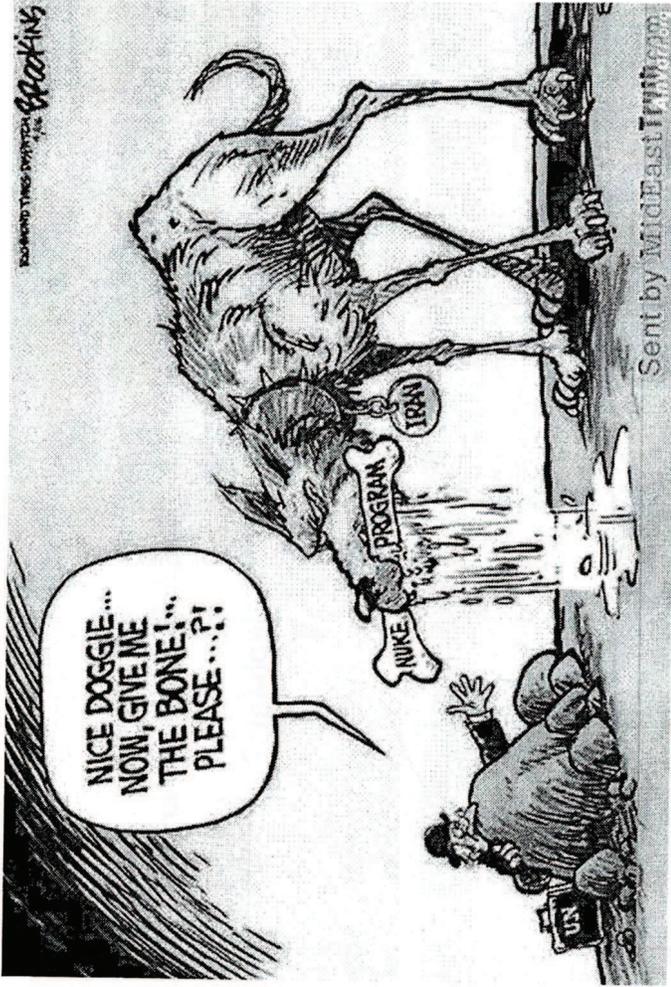
D. Accordingly, Revelation is filled with pictorial richness: dragons, serpents, beasts, angels, horses, rainbows, thrones, altars, fire, hail, earthquakes, floods, darkened suns, bloody moons, plagues, precious metals and gems, cities, deserts, seas, lambs, lions, bears, eagles, scorpions, locusts, trumpets, harps, choirs, numbers (3, 4, 7, 12, 666, 144,000, 1000 years, 42 months, 200 million horsemen, etc.), swords, bows, battles, crowns, chains, marriage, birth, death, resurrections, judgments, colors – images designed to convey ideas.

2. Some Keys to Interpreting the Imagery of Revelation

- A. One key is considering how similar imagery is used in the Old Testament. If we can understand the imagery and its fulfillment historically, we will be closer to the real meaning of John's symbolic language. Homer Hailey observed that there are 260-400 allusions to the OT in Revelation. Ferrell Jenkins asserted, "The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. This book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets ..." (*The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p 22).
- B. Another key is to look at the big picture. We can get so bogged down in details (that may not have specific meaning to the overall scene) that we become overwhelmed and frustrated. Try to understand the overall image that is being conveyed.
- C. Finally, Revelation does not seem to flow in a strict chronological fashion. It makes more sense that the main story is being told from different angles; i.e., the defeat of persecuting forces is described by various images, and the triumph of the people of God is contrasted by other images.

3. The Overall Message

- A. I believe the overall message of John's Revelation is: In spite of how things look from an earthly perspective, God's people and their stand for righteousness will always be victorious and the enemies of God will be vanquished.
- B. This does not mean God's people won't suffer, or that triumph will come quickly. But at the end of the day the rule of Christ and the church still stand – and where is Rome??
- C. A word of exhortation: Don't get discouraged! Revelation is a difficult book to understand. It takes years of studying Revelation several times through in order to become comfortable with the book. A modest goal for this study is to simply work toward a better understanding than when you began. Be patient, understand what you can, and be satisfied with whatever progress you make.



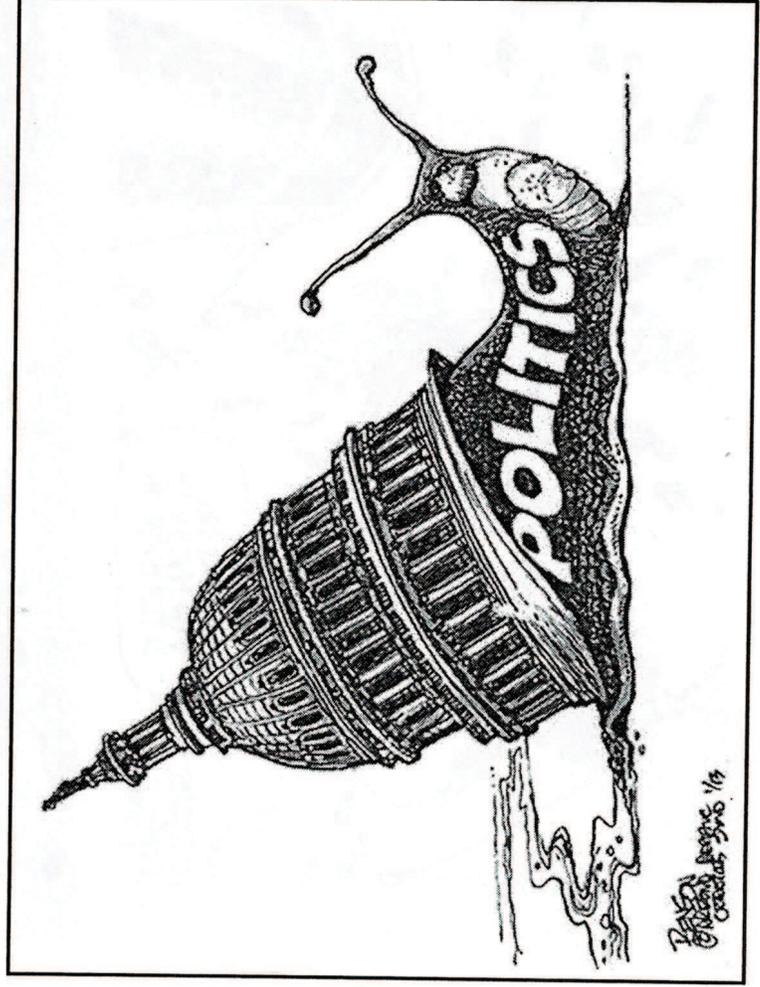
1. Who is depicted by the dog (this is a layout)?
2. Who is the man in the black hat? What does the cartoon suggest about his attitude toward the dog?
3. Why is the dog holding the bone? Where did it come from?
4. What might be difficult to decipher by readers of this cartoon in centuries to come?



1. What is the setting of this cartoon?
2. Who is the man on the right?
3. Who is laying in the floor? How do you know?
4. What is the significance of the footprints?
5. Do you think the terms "scan" and "pat down" might be obscure in another 1,000 years?



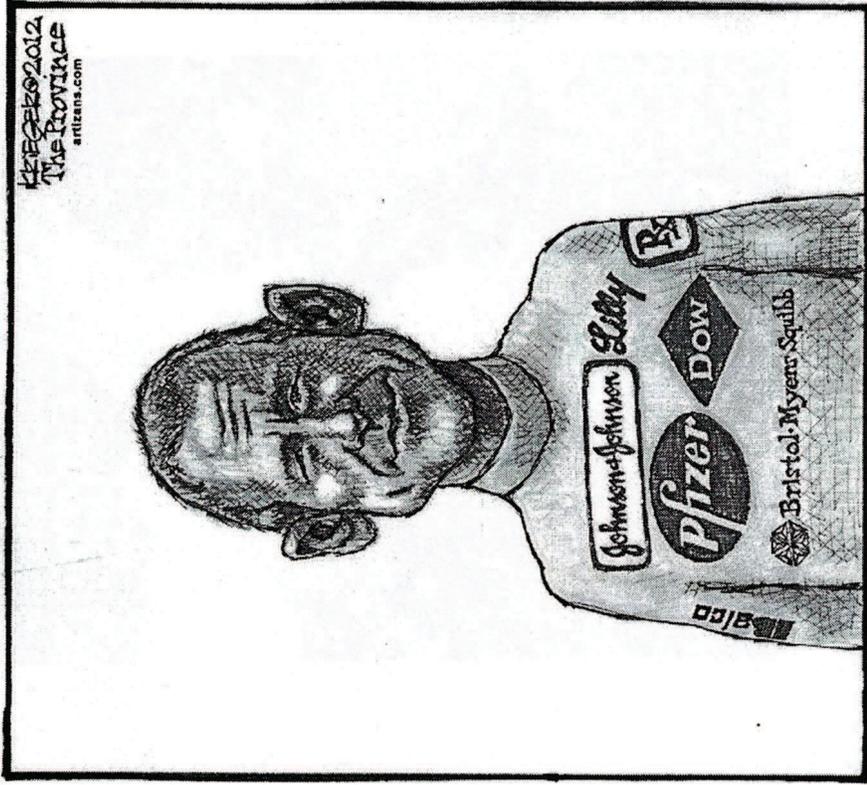
1. Who is the man in the black suit? How do you know?
2. Why is he bigger than the herd of elephants?
3. Who do the elephants represent?
4. Is there statement realistic, or is there irony involved?



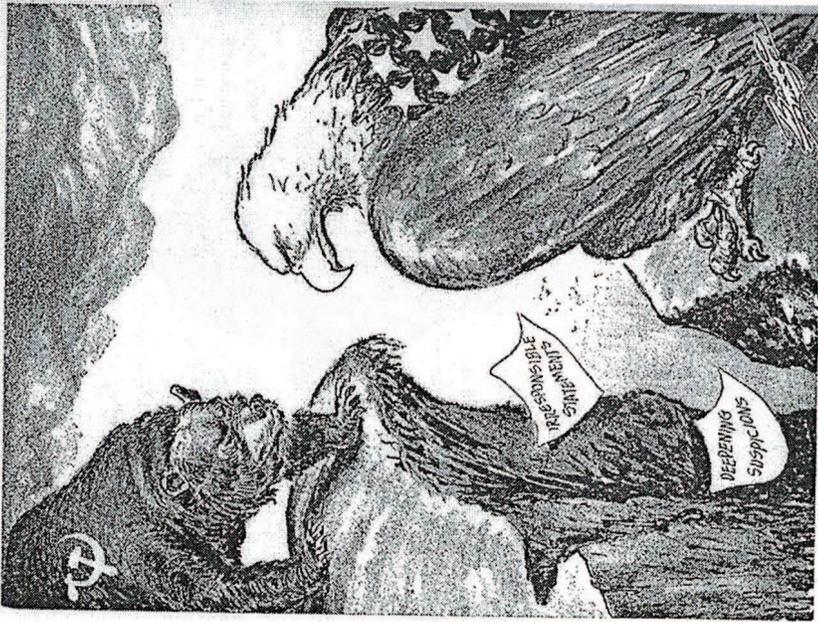
1. What is the "shell"? What does it represent – people or a structure?
2. What is the main characteristic of the animal displayed?
3. What, then, is the overall message of the cartoon? Is it complimentary?



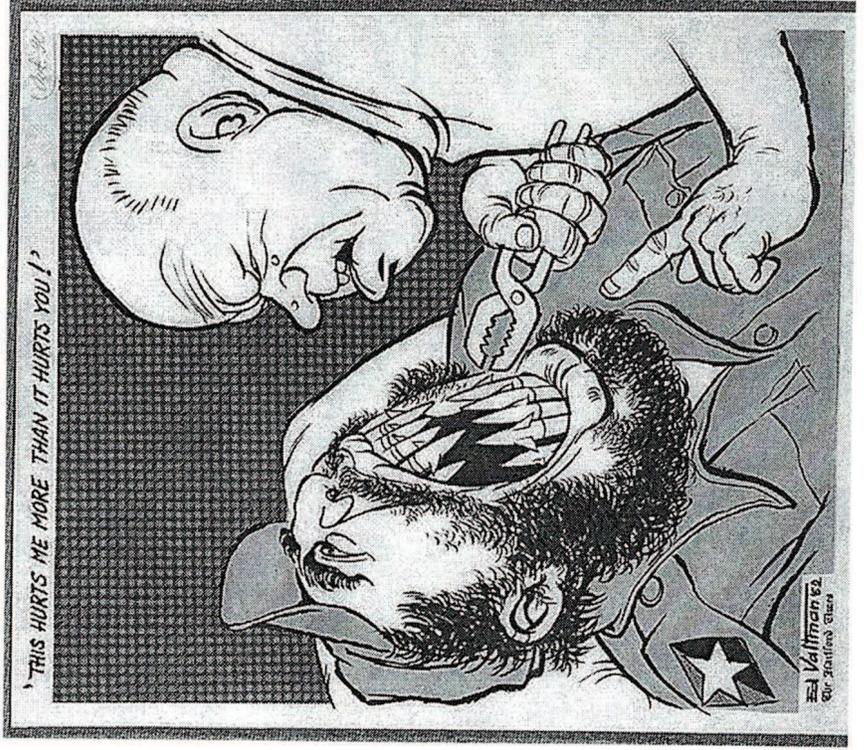
1. Why are a shark and a dolphin talking to each other? Is this symbolic or real?
2. What are the medallions around their "necks"?
3. What is the significance of the interlocking rings at the top?



1. Who is depicted in this picture?
2. In the original cartoon, the man is pictured in a yellow shirt. Is this significant?
3. What are the labels on his shirt? What is their meaning?



1. Who is depicted by the bear? The eagle?
2. Is the cartoon complimentary or critical?
3. What is significant about the atmosphere?
4. What is the attitude of the animals?



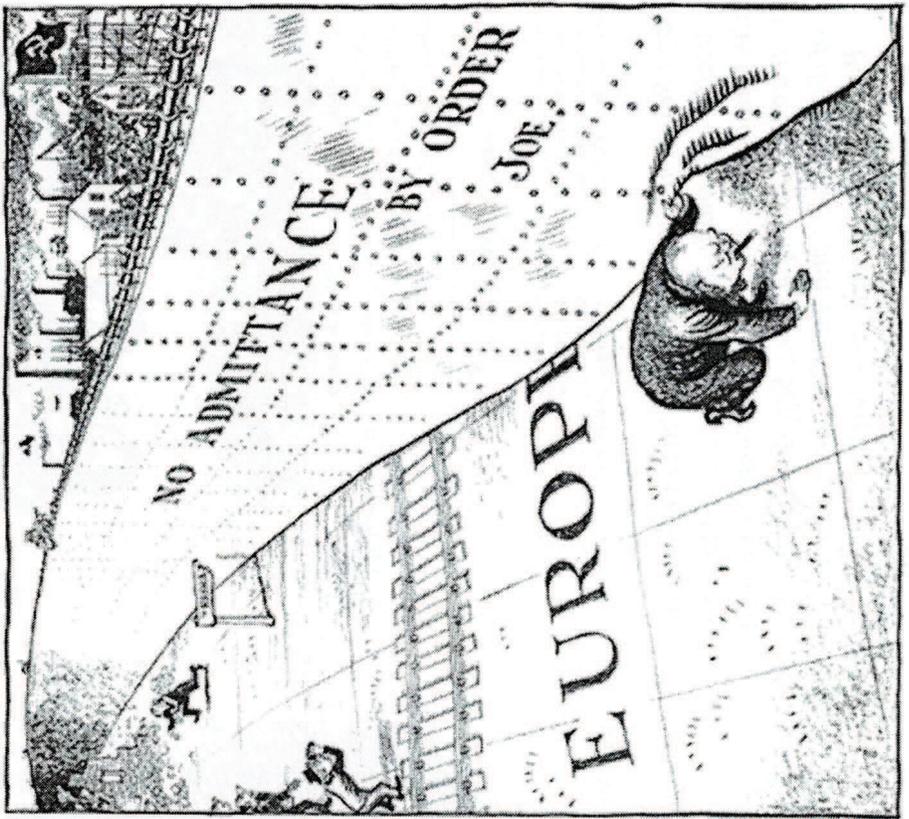
1. Who is the bald man? The man in the cap?
2. What kind of "teeth" does the patient have?
3. What do the pliers signify?
4. Are there features of the cartoon that aren't part of the message?



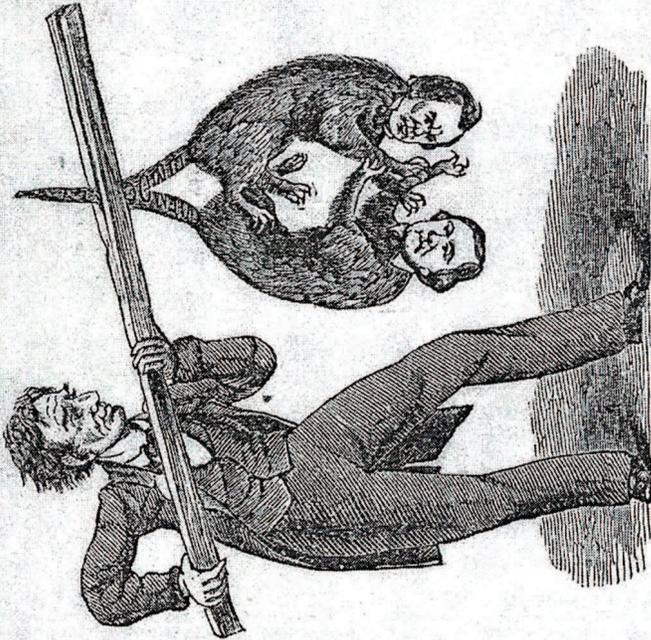
Just Wait Until the Little Feller Grows up

1. Who is "Joe"?
2. What does the wall represent?
3. What is the power behind the wall?
4. Who is the man peeping under the wall?

1. Who is depicted by the "three-headed monster" on the right?
2. Who is the baby on the left?
3. Contrast the weapons being used by each.
4. What is the significance of the book at the bottom?



OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY.—No. 5.

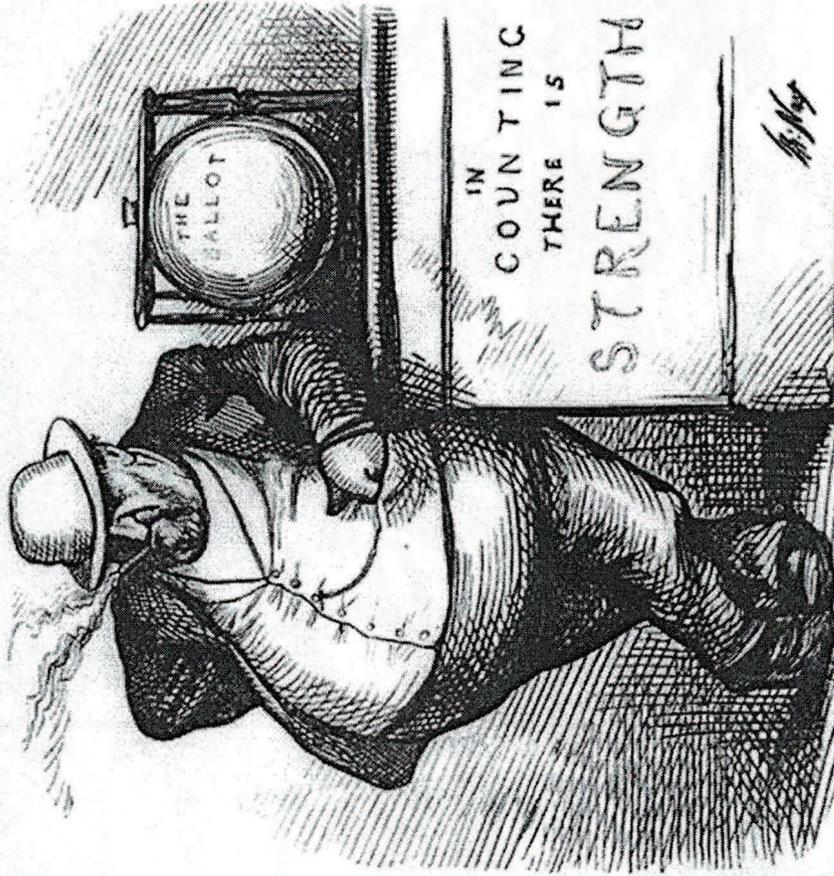


THE SPLIT-TAIL DEMOCRACY.
 OLD ABE.—Here's a rail specimen of the Split-tail Democracy,
 DOUGLAS.—"We are all Democrats."
 BRECKINRIDGE.—"So we are."

RAIL LYRICS.—No. 5.
 For "The Rail Splitter."

The deed is done, their day is o'er,
 Two possessors fought at Baltimore;
 Now let them scratch, and let them wall,
 Old Abram has them "to a reel."
 We'll let them fight, and let them bble,
 And quarrel for the home;
 The maxim says, at such a time—
 "The honest get their own." T. RAIL, Esq.

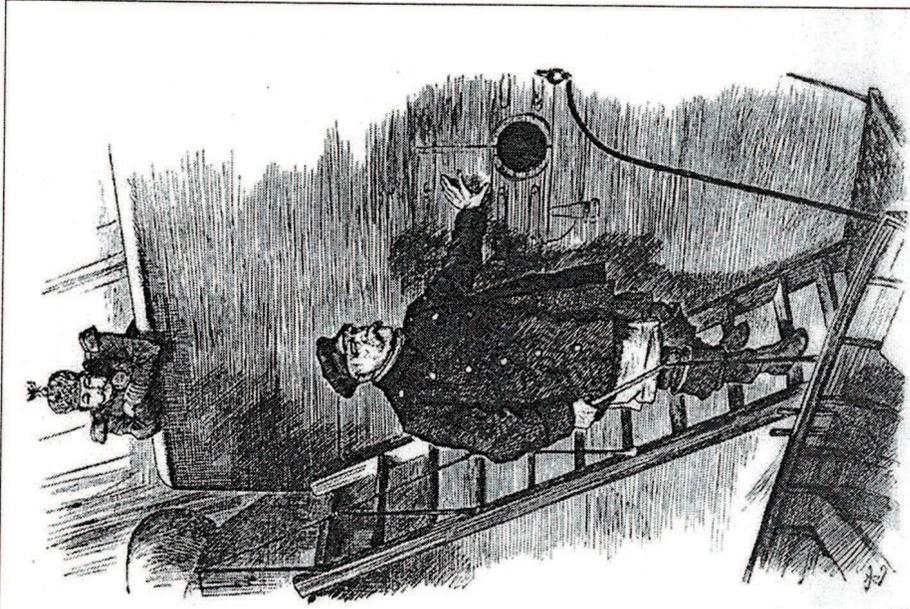
In this Chicago Rail Splitter cartoon, Republican Abraham Lincoln has used a trap made of a rail to capture the twin possums of the Democratic Party: the presidential nominees of its Northern and Southern factions, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois (right) and Vice President John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky (left).



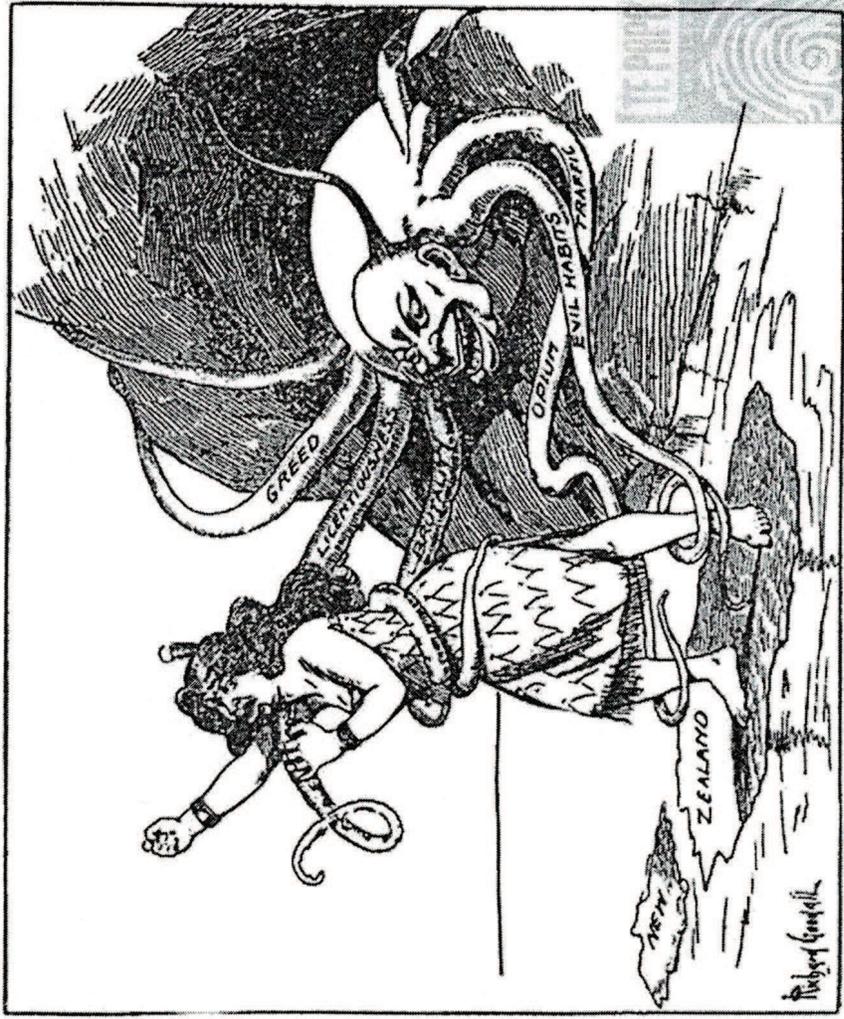
"THAT'S WHAT'S THE MATTER."

BOSS TWEED. "As long as I count the Votes, what are you going to do about it? say?"

Thomas Nast's depiction of "Boss Tweed," notorious in the mid-1800s for political corruption in New York City.



The dismissal of Prince Otto von Bismarck as Chancellor of the German Empire by Kaiser Wilhelm II in a political cartoon likening the event to an old sailor stepping down as captain of his ship of state.



THE YELLOW PERIL.

A 1907 cartoon opposing Chinese immigration into New Zealand.

1. The Recipients of the Revelation: The Seven Churches of Asia

- A. See the map for the location of Asia and the seven cities where the churches are located.
- B. John addresses the Revelation “*to the seven churches which are in Asia*” (Rev 1:4). Since numbers in Revelation do not have true numeric value, we may conclude that these are not the only churches in the province of Asia (we also know of churches in Troas, Colosse and Hierapolis). Rather, these churches represent the totality of God’s people who will be facing conditions similar to what these churches will undergo.
 - 1. It is likely that many of these churches began during Paul’s three-year labor in Ephesus (Ac 19:10; 20:31).
 - 2. Jesus expresses in the short initial messages to the churches (chapters 2-3) that He knows them intimately – their achievements, failures, suffering, etc. One of the main comforts of the book is that, whatever is happening to us, Jesus is aware of it.
- C. These Christians, and others in the Roman world, will be undergoing severe persecutions for refusing to give divine honors to a man. The fidelity of God’s people to Him will put their lives in jeopardy, but the Revelation assures them, and us, of God’s ultimate victory.

2. The Author

- A. There has been nearly unanimous historical agreement that the author is the apostle John.
- B. He writes from exile on the island of Patmos. Again, references abound among early Christian writers indicating that John was so exiled during the reign of Domitian.

3. Various Interpretive Schemes of Revelation

- A. (Robert Harkrider has an excellent summation of these various interpretations in his commentary: *Truth Commentaries – Revelation*, pp. 66-94 [introduction]).
 - 1. Historical-Background – This view holds the main antagonist to be the Roman Empire. Revelation tells of the ultimate defeat of Rome (and by extension any civil persecuting force used by Satan) for attacking the people of God. This interpretation considers that John was told the revelations were shortly to (or begin to) occur.
 - 2. Continuous Historical – This view sees the Revelation to address events happening in successive eras of the Christian future, culminating in the defeat of the Catholic Church and the revival of pure Christianity. This may be appealing, but it is very subjective in its application of the imagery. Also, it doesn’t explain why events so far distant would be relevant to the original readers.

3. Historical and Preterist – This view is that Revelation foretells the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It considers the persecution to be that of Nero in the mid-60s rather than Domitian in the 90s.
4. Futurist (or Premillennial) – This view places Revelation in our own future, and proponents apply the symbols of Revelation to past and current political/economic events. The fundamental weakness of this doctrine is that it is founded upon divine *failure*: that Jesus was rejected by the Jews and failed to accomplish the mission for which He came. The superstructure of the doctrine is likewise shoddy as passages and prophecies are haphazardly interpreted. Errors have been exposed through past decades as the symbolism which reflected the daily headlines was proven to be false. Sadly, however, many are still drawn to discredited premillennial ideas.

B. The approach I am taking resembles the historical-background. I believe Rome is the persecuting force, for the language describing the main antagonist is far too sweeping to be Judaism. Further, widespread death will result from Christians resisting the enemy; this did not happen with opposition from the Jews or Nero’s persecution. Many considerations, in my view, favor the “later date” (AD 95-96) over the “early date” (AD 70).

1. All interpreters must endeavor to be fair with the symbols and not begin with a conclusion already in mind. Readers can easily misuse the figurative language of Revelation, so care must be taken to draw from the book only what is warranted.
2. The book ends with a dire warning against anyone who would play “fast and loose” with what the Lord has revealed herein (Rev 22:18-19).

4. List of First Century Roman Emperors

Augustus – 27 BC-AD 14	Otho – January 69-April 69
Tiberius – AD 14-37	Vitellius – April 69-December 69
Caligula – AD 37-41	Vespasian – December 69-June 79
Claudius – AD 41-54	Titus – AD 79-81
Nero – AD 54-68	Domitian – AD 81-96
Galba – June 68-January 69	

5. Persecution

- A. Nero was the first to target Christians for persecution, but his was not a widespread policy. Rather, he needed a scapegoat for the devastating fire in Rome that he, himself, set. Christians were defenseless and non-threatening, and people thought them strange because of their aloofness from the debauchery and meaningless idolatry of the day.
- B. Under Domitian and other emperors, men who craved worship as a god, Christians were cruelly persecuted for refusing divine homage reserved only for God. This refusal was seen as treason to the state and punishable by death (a similar experience to that faced by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar).

1. Introduction/Greeting – 1:1-8

A. 1:1-3 – Preface

1. The first word in Revelation is *apokalupsis* – apocalypse – which means a revealing or uncovering. We may think of Revelation as a “hidden” book, but its design was to reveal to the readers the true nature of things; i.e., that God was in control and that His cause would be successful according to the principles He imposes upon man.
2. The importance of Revelation is indicated by the agents involved in its transmission. It originated with God, who gave it to Jesus, who sent His angel, who then “signified” (to express by signs, symbols) the message to an apostle, who then sent it to the seven churches of Asia.
3. There is an urgency to this prophecy which rules out a far-distant, millennial fulfillment: “must shortly take place” (1:1); “the time is near” (1:3). These things were vital to the well-being of the churches of Asia (and others), and those who would read, hear and keep the things written would be blessed.

B. Greetings – 1:4-8

1. John greets the seven churches conveying blessings from the Father, the Holy Spirit (seven Spirits before His throne; cf. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and Jesus. Seven is a symbolic number emphasizing perfection. In Revelation there are seven churches, lampstands, stars, seals, angels, trumpets, thunders, heads, crowns, bowls, mountains and kings.
2. The power of the Emperor and the persecutions he would unleash might make it appear that Caesar holds the upper hand. But John reminds his readers that Jesus, too, died by Roman hands but was raised to become “the ruler over all the kings of the earth” (1:5 – Note the progression: faithful witness, resurrected, ruler). Caesar is not the be-all and end-all, but Jesus is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” Caesars would come and go, but Jesus is, was, and is to come.
3. Not only has Jesus triumphed, He “loved us” (we who are hated by the world) and “washed us from our sins by His own blood.” Death is not to be feared to the point of abandoning faith, for John reminds these brethren that not only did Jesus die, but God brought a great blessing out of the shedding of His blood. Not only cleansing but status in God’s kingdom has been wrought by one who died on a Roman cross.
4. “Behold, He is coming ...” (1:4). This, in apocalyptic imagery, is not “final judgment” (i.e., the end of time) but a vindication of a righteous cause. See a similar event in 11:11-12. “Clouds” are used figuratively of the judgment of God: Mt 24:30; 26:64; Rev 14:14-16.

5. The great question of Revelation is “Who rules?” Does Caesar rule as Satan’s agent? After all, Christians are being put to death. No, the time is near for Jesus to exercise His dominion over the oppressors of His people. Time for repentance has been and is currently being granted but it will shortly come to an end. Jesus will bring an end to Rome while His kingdom/church stands triumphantly.

2. The Vision of Jesus to John – 1:9-20

A. John’s exile – 1:9 – Harkrider cites Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, III.18.1) who notes that John had been exiled by Domitian to Patmos in AD 95. He also notes that Clement of Alexandria and Victorinus speak of John’s release upon Domitian’s death.

1. John claims to be “in the kingdom,” although the millennialists who base their false ideas on Revelation deny its present existence.
2. John heard a voice and turned to see the speaker. He was not prepared for what he saw.

B. There is a notable absence of any personal appeal by Jesus to his most beloved earthly friend. Jesus is “all business.” John sees a symbolic representation of Jesus standing among His people (seven lampstands = seven churches). The imagery combines to present a picture of heavenly glory, power, and victory. This was not the One whom John felt comfortable reclining with at a meal; instead, he “fell at His feet as dead” (v 17).

C. Some outstanding features of the image of Christ:

1. Glory – His head/hair were “white like wool, as white as snow” (1:14); His countenance was like the sun (1:16).
2. Power – “His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters” (1:15). We may use the term “feet of clay” (from Nebuchadnezzar’s image) to describe someone’s weakness; “cold feet” describe cowardice. Jesus’ feet were powerful, hardened by smelting, able to trample all enemies.
3. Rule – His dress (1:13) and the sword protruding from his mouth (1:16) suggest royalty or kingly status (some commentators draw out the idea of priesthood from the garments). The sword in the place of a tongue seems to indicate the power of His word; He commands and it is done.

D. Jesus eases John’s anxiety and, for the third time already, declares Himself to be the First and the Last (1:8, 11, 17). Death did not hold dominion over Him, and the suggestion is that it will not hold dominion over His people. He is the “firstborn” from the dead; those “who pierced Him,” though they thought themselves victorious over Him, will yet see Him in His glory. Christians who are suffering persecution should not despair; death does not mean defeat. Consider Christ in His glory. Not only is He alive, but He is coming to vindicate His people.

1. Introduction to the “Mini-epistles”

- A. William Hendriksen suggests the following general pattern to the epistles (*More Than Conquerors*, 59-60): 1) Salutation/address; 2) Christ’s self-designation; 3) Commendation; 4) Condemnation; 5) Warning/threat; 6) Exhortation; 7) Promise.
- B. The mini-epistles and the symbolism to follow may be summarized thusly: Do not be deceived by appearance. The things which are about to transpire are according to God’s plan and under His control. Victory over your enemies is assured and you have been given the power to overcome (“overcome” is used 28 times in the NT, 24 times by John and 17 of those in Revelation). No matter what happens, you must remain faithful to God; otherwise you will forfeit your soul.

2. To the Church at Ephesus: “Be As You Once Were”

- A. Background: More is known about the Ephesian church over a longer period than any other church of the first century.
1. Early in their history they had a love for truth:
 - a. Some who knew only John’s baptism accepted further teaching – Ac 19:1-7.
 - b. Others abandoned witchcraft and burned books of magic – Ac 19:18-19.
 - c. The church endured a city-wide uprising over the threat to idol industry – Ac 19:23ff.
 2. Later they were warned via Paul’s letter to Timothy about abandoning their ideals:
 - a. Shipwreck of faith, as in case of Hymenaeus and Alexander – 1:18-20.
 - b. A return to “doctrines of demons” (which they repudiated at conversion) – 4:1-6.
 - c. Rejection of familial love and care – 5:8.
 - d. Straying from faith by falling into materialism – 6:6-10.
- B. “I know ...” – 2:2. Jesus says “I know” to all seven churches. As He stands “in the midst of the lampstands” He knows all the inner workings of His people.
- C. Commendation – 2:2-3. There is still much to be commended in Ephesus:
1. The Ephesians were still active: the Lord commends them for “your works, your labor” (2:2) “and have labored for My name’s sake” (2:3). One manifestation of this work was

that “you have tested those who say they are apostles and dare not, and have found them liars” (2:2). Evil is relentless, always pressing for an advantage. It seems as though they had taken Paul’s warnings to heart about the future encroachment of false teaching.

2. The Lord also praises them for their endurance and persistence. He knew their “patience ... and you have persevered ... and have not become weary.” Sometimes good people can tire from the struggle to resist evil, but this has not happened to the Ephesians.
3. They also “hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” – 2:6. Nothing more of this group is known from NT sources. “Several traditions exist and numerous theories have been suggested regarding their origin and doctrines, but these have not been established factually. The Nicolaitans were probably a sect of the Gnostics, but history is silent as to their actual origin, peculiar doctrines, and ultimate fate after the Revelation. We do know that they flourished at Ephesus and Pergamum” (Hailey, 123-124).
 - a. Note the distinction between hating actions and hating the people who engage in them. “Hate” is not too strong a word for the Lord as He describes what the reaction of righteousness is toward evil.
 - b. Note also that intolerance is praised. In our culture, “intolerant” has become a buzzword, loaded with negative connotation. But there are things God’s people must remain opposed to regardless of society’s approval and celebration.

D. Condemnation and warning – 2:4-5. “You have left your first love.” What does this mean?

1. About thirty years earlier Paul had emphasized the importance of love to the Ephesians:
 - a. “Rooted and grounded” in love – Eph 3:17-19. Love at core of their being, drawing from the inexhaustible supply of Christ’s love for us.
 - b. “Bearing with one another in love” – Eph 4:1-2.
 - c. Speaking truth in love → grow up in Christ, edify body – Eph 4:15-16.
 - d. “Walk in love” – Eph 5:1-2. True followers of God/dear children emulate Christ.
2. In some significant way, the Ephesians had lost the deeper motivation for what they were doing, the inner component from which all else flows. The Christian life is not merely an attempt to mechanically “do the right things.” The “right things” must be done from a heart of faith, from deep devotion, from proper respect for God, His truth and our fellow man. If we compromise that core faith and love, we stand in jeopardy.

E. “Perhaps this loss of an early fiery devotion can be accounted for by the fact that the congregation was now in the second or third generation of its existence. This is always a dangerous period in the life of a church ... the youthful fire of discovery and the enthusiasm of a glorious anticipation of future hopes too often begin to diminish” (Hailey 122).

1. To the Church at Smyrna – “Do Not Fear What You Are About to Suffer” – 2:8-11

- A. “Smyrna was one of the oldest allies of Rome, and as early as 195 B.C. a shrine to the goddess of Rome was built. In recognition of her long, established loyalty, Rome approved of Smyrna in A.D. 26 as the site for the building of a temple in honor of Tiberius ... Quite naturally ... Smyrna became a center of emperor worship” (Harkrider 30).
1. During the reign of Domitian, citizens were required to burn incense to him to show political loyalty. The Jews succumbed to this pressure; Christians did not.
 2. Jews delighted in using the Christians’ scruples against them, and for their viciousness and hypocrisy they are labeled a “synagogue of Satan” (2:9). In another 50 years they will assist Smyrna officials in the martyring of Polycarp.
- B. Jesus’ reminder that He is “the First and the Last” (2:8) is an encouragement to the saints in Smyrna to keep things in perspective. The emperor is not first, and Smyrna is not the first (or most prominent) city in Asia, though it competed with Ephesus for the title. Jesus was to be first and foremost in the disciples’ minds, and they were not to “demote” Him by burning incense to Domitian – even if they did so with mental reservation.
- C. “The devil is about to throw some of you into prison” – 2:10. Persecutions are to increase.
1. “Do not fear ...” – This would certainly be a natural reaction to the threat against one’s life or income. History indicates that a certificate was issued to those who burned incense to Caesar. Those who refused would be branded a traitor.
 2. “You may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days” – By most accounts ten days is a figurative representation of a temporary, limited time-frame that will eventually find closure. “Ten days of suffering and suspense might seem an eternity while they lasted, yet in the retrospect they would be but a moment ... The trial might be prolonged, but it had a limit known to God” (Swete 32).
 3. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” – This may be a play upon a geographical feature of Smyrna. The acropolis on nearby Mt. Pagas resembled a crown sitting upon the peak. The real crown that ought to captivate God’s people is the celebratory crown to be given to the faithful at the judgment – the “crown of life.”
 4. “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” – 2:11. “He who overcomes” is a phrase found in all the mini-epistles. “Second death” is found later in Revelation in the highly figurative section; it refers to the ultimate triumph by God over His enemies. Though the saints in Smyrna will be persecuted and some may die for their fidelity to Christ, they have nothing to fear from the Lord when He unleashes the fury of His righteous indignation. It is not the death of the body we must fear (cf. Mt 10:28).

2. To the Church At Pergamos – “You Hold Fast to My Name” – 2:12-17

A. Pergamos was the political capital of Asia; it had been bequeathed to Rome upon the death of King Attalus III in 133 BC. The city was adorned by many beautiful state buildings and had the largest library outside of Alexandria (parchment got its name from “Pergamos”).

1. For these reasons, as well as the pagan religion of the city, Jesus notes that His disciples “dwell where Satan’s throne is” (2:13). Persecution had already claimed one of them: “Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”
2. Yet the Lord commends them for holding fast to His name.

B. But all is not well among the brethren:

1. The church has advocates of the “doctrine of Balaam” – 2:14. This figurative reference to the OT prophet (cf. Num 22-24; 31:16) indicates that some in Pergamos had been persuaded to compromise with the pagan influences around them. A spirit of compromise is always a danger to disciples, especially when evil is aggressive and threatening.
2. Unlike Ephesus, which resisted the Nicolaitans, some in Pergamos adopted their views.
3. Call to repentance – 2:16. Jesus identified himself to Pergamos as “He who has the sharp two-edged sword,” and now He warns that their failure to repent will result in His opposition with the “sword of My mouth.” A sword represents power and authority, and in his vision John had seen a sharp sword protruding from Jesus’ mouth (1:16). Again, it is Jesus we must respect and honor, not the emperor of Rome (or any other human authority), for in the end His words will bring all into judgment.

C. “To him who overcomes” is repeated in all the mini-epistles. In a word, the message of Revelation is “overcome.” It is a book of persecution, spiritual struggle, conflicting powers and life and death decisions. Our faith must overcome all foes, and God will bring us to victory if we commit ourselves fully to Him. The Lord promises ...

1. Hidden manna – Manna here stands for whatever is needed to sustain a person. As God had miraculously supplied manna for Israel during their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness, even so God will still supply His people. It is “hidden” in the sense that through the channels of providence God will provide everything needed to overcome – even though His people may not be spared the sentence of physical death.
2. A white stone – This apparently refers to the practice of signifying guilt or innocence; a black stone indicated guilt, a white stone acquittal.
3. A new name written on the stone – The idea of new name or identity permeates Christian teaching (cf. Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:24; etc.). Putting both of these ideas together seems to indicate that God will exonerate those who have been transformed by the gospel into the image of His Son. Such faith and transformation is personal and spiritual.

1. To the Church at Thyatira – “All the Churches Shall Know that I Am He” – 2:18-29

- A. Various commentators note that Thyatira was a city of trade guilds (like a modern labor union). Membership in these guilds would involve some measure of participation in idolatry, feasts and offerings to the god(dess) of the particular trade. If this is accurate, then it seems that these guilds were the source of compromise of many saints in Thyatira.
- B. Commendation – 2:19. Unlike Ephesus, Thyatira continued to keep its love alive and grow in its spiritual works. But the Lord’s commendation is short; His concerns are lengthy.
- C. Criticism – 2:20-23. Again, we have an OT symbolic reference to the notorious Queen Jezebel. It seems the Lord refers to a particular influential woman in the congregation who has encouraged compromise. She is a self-styled prophetess who has deceived saints into adopting various tenets of idolatry, including sexual immorality.
1. The Lord has been patient: *“I gave her time to repent ... and she did not repent.”*
 2. Threat: *“I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation ... and I will kill her children with death.”* What is the nature of these judgments? Are they literal? Perhaps, but in the “flavor” of the book it seems more likely that the Lord would abandon Jezebel and her adherents to the consequences of their actions (which may involve physical death in some way). Without ongoing revelation, we have no way of knowing the true nature of what befalls a person. If something unexpected and tragic occurs, or if someone succumbs to the ravage of disease to which all of us are subject, we cannot discern the cause without a declaration from God (i.e., was it a temporal judgment, or was it the “time and chance” which befalls all in time?).
 3. *“And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.”* This hearkens back to Jesus’ self-identification to Thyatira: *“says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire”* (2:18). It would be tempting to give in to the pressures of the guilds or the worship of Caesar, but Christians must fear and respect a higher authority.
- D. Assurances – 2:24-29.
1. Not all have “known the depths of Satan.” They have not succumbed to the wiles of Jezebel. Jesus promises to “put on you no other burden.” However, they must hold fast.
 2. To the one who overcomes “and keeps My works until the end,” Jesus will grant a share in His rule over the nations. The OT citation is Ps 2:8-9 which speaks of Messianic rule. This is a greatly misunderstood concept today, for many frame it in a literal, earthly context (just as the Jews did in Jesus’ day). Jesus reigns now; Christians share in that rule being in union with Him. We are citizens in His kingdom. This does not give us political dominion, nor does it exempt us from suffering and hardship. But it does assure us

of the Lord's sympathetic care, all provisions of spiritual need, the wherewithal to negotiate this relatively short phase of earthly existence with the prospect of eternal life and glorification in heaven. This sort of reference is found several times in the more symbolic sections of Revelation (cf. 11:15-18; 12:10-11; 19:15-16).

3. The "morning star" may be a reference to Venus as it precedes the rising sun at certain times of the year. When it does, it signals that night is almost over and the welcome return of the sun is shortly to occur. Again, these are all encouraging images to those under great pressure for nothing more than honoring their Creator and Savior.

2. To the Church at Sardis – "You Have a Name that You Are Alive ..." – 3:1-6

A. Historians describe Sardis as a city perched on a nearly vertical cliff face. Nearly impregnable, the city became complacent on two different occasions and overcome by its enemies. It was a city given to vice and lethargy; its location discouraged commerce and general productivity. It was a stronghold during war, but in peace almost irrelevant to the region.

1. This complacency bled over into the church, as the Lord styles it as "dead." From an outside human vantage point, it had the appearance of life, but the Lord knew better.
2. "Remember ... how you have received and heard" suggests a past time of enthusiasm and passion for spiritual things, but this has faded (cf. Ephesus, 2:5).
3. The Lord draws on their history again: "Be watchful" (3:2). Both times Sardis was taken the enemy sneaked up through a narrow cleft in the rock. "*Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief...*" (cf. Mt 24:43; 2 Pet 3:10).

B. "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die" suggests the faintest flicker of life (3:2), but even this is about to burn out.

1. There are yet "a few names" in Sardis who have remained pure and faithful (3:4). Thus the Lord differentiates between a corporate identity and individual saints; the faithful are not guilty merely by association. "It is comforting to learn that in a church of spiritual corpses the Lord sees and knows the congregation as individuals and is mindful of each as a personal entity" (Hailey 146). "Though these letters are written to churches, notice that the Lord observes us one by one ... (some) were standing for righteousness even though the Lord describes the church as a unit as being dead spiritually. Saints work together in local congregations, but in the final day of judgment the Lord will reward everyone individually" (Harkrider 49-50).
2. Walking with the Lord in white robes (3:4-5) may suggest the well-known Roman triumphs (parades) in which the victorious generals would be lavished with honor and praise (cf. 7:9, 13-14; 19:14). The "Book of life" is a recurring theme in the Bible, and it pictures God's knowledge of the righteous as names in a ledger (cf. Ph 4:3; Ex 32:32-33). For American churches in the late 20th/early 21st century, complacency has probably been our biggest enemy. The letter to Sardis may be our own wake-up call.

The Revelation

Lesson 7 – Messages to Philadelphia and Laodicea

1. To the Church at Philadelphia – “I Have Set Before You an Open Door” – 3:7-13

- A. This message is similar to the one to Smyrna in that neither contains criticism. Jesus identifies Himself in clear Messianic terms: *“He who is holy ... true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts ...’”* (3:7). Revelation always portrays Jesus as in control; retaining true authority. The “key of David” referred to Eliakim in an immediate sense (Is 22:22), but the true power of David would be reconstituted and universally realized in “David’s Lord,” Jesus (cf. Lk 1:32-33; Ac 2:29-36; 15:15-17).
- B. Jesus notes the limited resources of the church: *“you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name”* (3:8).
1. Jesus promises to open a door of opportunity to them. Historians note that Philadelphia was founded by King Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamos. “The city was founded primarily to spread the Greek civilization and culture eastward and was therefore from its beginning a ‘missionary’ center” (Hailey 148). Jesus’ promise may reflect this city-history; the “door” may be broadened influence in some undefined way.
 2. Jesus also promises vindication before the Jews who seem to be the major challenge to these saints (3:9). This idea of vindication before enemies is found throughout Revelation. No matter how dismal things appear, Jesus is near and ready to defend His saints.
- C. Jesus also promises to “keep” them from the hour of trial and testing to come. This likely refers to what commences with Domitian: periodic emperors who insist on divine recognition and who punish and execute those who refuse to comply. The phrase “those who dwell on the earth” will be used throughout Revelation of the unregenerate.
1. “I come quickly” (3:11) is in keeping with the tone of immediacy in Revelation. He urges them to “hold fast” and keep a tight grip on their prize – their crown.
 2. The picture in 3:12 is of ownership and incorporation into God’s residence. A similar figure is in Is 49:16 where the people are inscribed on the palms of God’s hands. Tattoos, so commonplace in our culture now, usually portray people and concepts of deep significance, simply because they are permanent markings. So the Lord will inscribe the ownership markings of heaven upon those who “overcome.”

2. To the Church at Laodicea – “You are Lukewarm” – 3:14-22

- A. Perhaps the Laodicean church resembles the American situation even more than Sardis. The picture of this church is one of wealth, peace, self-satisfaction – no great challenges, enemies or needs. But instead of strength, this has resulted in indifference: *“You are neither cold nor hot ... I will spew you out of My mouth”* (3:15-16). We tend to long for comfort, a lack of stress in our lives. But this often leads to a flat, lifeless plodding.

1. Laodicea is blind to its true state: *“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”* (3:17).
 - a. *“When the city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60, its independent and self-sufficient people refused help from Rome, rebuilding with their own resources”* (Hailey 156). One can easily imagine this civic “bootstrap-pulling” attitude to seep into the thinking of Christians. Many Americans especially have been conditioned to see themselves as self-contained, independent, adequately supplied. They find it hard to open up and admit weakness and need.
 - b. The Scriptures have the power to reveal the hearts of all, but it takes a profound honesty and desire to conform to God’s will in order to see ourselves as we really are.
2. Just as Jesus was offering to the Jews what they really needed, but they rejected Him because they wanted something else, even so He counsels the Laodiceans to obtain from him true gold refined in the fire, white garments to cover their nakedness and eye salve to help them see (3:18). These three metaphors all may come from the environs of Laodicea, but Jesus stresses a spiritual meaning:
 - a. True faith is *“more precious than gold ... though it is tested by fire”* (1 Pet 1:7).
 - b. A relationship with Christ – and the blood which redeems us from sin – is likened to *“put(ing) on Christ”* (Gal 3:27). Laodicea was known for producing a luxurious black wool, and Jesus plays off this by telling them they need *“white garments.”*
 - c. Spiritual blindness is fatal because it disallows repentance and growth (cf. 2 Pet 1:9; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Jn 2:11; etc.). Again, Laodicea was known for producing a medicinal eye salve called Phrygian powder. Jesus plays off this by suggesting that it is blindness of the heart that they most need to worry about.
- B. *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”* (3:19; cf. Heb 12:6ff). The Lord is intent on one thing: nurturing and molding the faith of His people so that they are saved in the end.
 1. Thus, *“I stand at the door and knock”* (3:20). In so many ways God is trying to gain entrance into the thoughts of all men: those who yet don’t know Him, and those who have known Him but lost sight of His importance in their lives.
 2. *“If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* We can certainly sense the excitement and glory of being invited to a state dinner or hobnobbing with the elite of human society. Yet the One who *“sat down with My Father on His throne”* (3:21) is at the door of our hearts seeking acceptance and fellowship. Yet the door of so many hearts of men remains shut to the Lord.
- C. These “attention-getters” will now be followed by frightening and yet comforting images of coming tribulation as spiritual powers in heavenly places fight for supremacy on earth.

1. A Vision of God and His Throne – 4:1-5

- A. Remember that Revelation presents ideas and principles in picturesque form. Descriptions are not intended to convey what something looks like but rather an essential truth about the subject (i.e., the description of Jesus in 1:12ff).
1. Thus the imagery in ch 4 is not an attempt to describe what heaven looks like but is a symbolic picture of God's sovereign rule. In order for the Asian Christians to properly evaluate and understand their circumstances they must begin with the proposition that God is the supreme Ruler and all things are under His control.
 2. In forthcoming chapters, heaven (where God's throne is) will dictate the flow of events in the clash between God's kingdom and the Roman Empire (cf. 8:1ff; 11:15ff; 14:1ff; 15:1ff; 19:11ff; etc.). In the Revelation we are allowed to see in symbolic form the inner workings of God's power and purpose.
 3. "As one reads Revelation let him imagine himself seated in a great theater on Patmos watching a pageant of truth and error in deadly conflict, with God directing and Christ leading the forces of truth and right while the devil champions the cause of falsehood and sin. As scene follows scene, the reader must not become bogged down in efforts to interpret and apply stage settings and incidentals to the point of missing the overall theme ... of the book ... To the literalistic mind, lacking the power of imagination, Revelation will forever be a sealed book; to the speculative and visionary mind the book will provide fuel to inflame far-fetched assumptions and conjectures which totally miss the truth. But to the mind prepared by the rest of the Bible for reality in picture and action, impressions of truth will be made that give strength for victory in every conflict of life" (Hailey 164-165).
- B. Symbols: a door; a voice (like a trumpet); a throne; someone sitting on the throne (with the appearance of gems); a rainbow (like an emerald); 24 thrones surrounding the main throne; 24 elders on the thrones dressed in white robes with gold crowns; lightning accompanied by thunder and voices; seven lamps burning (representing the seven Spirits of God).
1. What does the trumpet-voice invite John to do?
 2. It is interesting that God, the one on the throne (4:9-11), is described by jewels. While in the normal scheme of things God prohibits any likeness of Himself by a created thing, we must keep in mind apocalyptic imagery. This is not a description of what God "looks like" but a description of His glory and majesty. The "emerald rainbow" may be there for "window-dressing," or it may bring to mind the atmospheric rainbow that is a sign of God's promise and trustworthiness.
 3. The lightning, thunder and voices bring to mind the terrifying manifestation of God at

Mt. Sinai. The people were so afraid that they asked through Moses that God not speak to them so directly anymore.

4. The fire/seven Spirits seem to point to the penetrating awareness of God; He illuminates even the hearts of men so that He knows our secret thoughts (cf. 5:6). He certainly knows what is going on in the inner sanctum of Roman government.

C. Paul had a similar revelation of heaven in a vision – 2 Cor 12:1-4. Paul says that what he saw was “not lawful for a man to utter,” but it was apparently so grand that it carried the risk of causing pride (12:7). We might conjecture that Paul’s revelation of heavenly glory was a counterpart to John’s: Paul’s was individual; John’s to the whole church.

2. Declarations of God’s Glory – 4:6-11

A. The word “throne” is found 17 times in chs 4-5. Whatever the meaning of each specific detail, the central message is the absolute rule of God over creation. The vision of the throne is filled with noise (thunder, voices, praise) and activity (the eternal worship of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders).

1. John sees a “sea of glass” before the throne (4:6). This may have one of a couple of meanings: the “sea” was the large laver of water before the temple which was used in washing the offerings brought to Jehovah. It would thus represent the purity needed to approach God’s throne. Sea may also refer to the bodies of water near Israel, such as the Red Sea or the Mediterranean, which made for natural borders. This figure would highlight God’s transcendence, isolated from the approach of the common man.

2. Hailey says the living creatures “either represent spiritual forces of God used to carry out His divine purposes, or are a special order of heavenly beings, probably the highest and closest to the throne, who serve God’s majestic will. The latter view is preferred” (171).

3. The living creatures extol God for His holiness and eternal existence.

B. The twenty-four elders/thrones – These were introduced in 4:4, and they now worship God taking their cue from the living creatures – 4:9-11.

1. Since these elders are dressed in white robes and are adorned with victory crowns, they seem to represent the people of God throughout the ages. “Elders” may signify those of mankind who have sufficiently matured to recognize the greatness of God.

2. The number 24 may encompass those of Israel (12 tribes) and those of the church (12 apostles). Or it may just represent the full number of God’s people (“12” thus indicating a completeness – 12 tribes, spies, apostles, legions of angels, etc.) – doubled to stress the idea of totality. Their thrones surrounding the great throne of God portrays joint rule; i.e., the idea of participating in the reign of God as His kingdom citizens (cf. Rev 2:26-27; 5:10; Lk 22:29-30). They praise God for His creative power; all things – including Rome – exist under His permissive awareness.

1. The Lion Has Prevailed – 5:1-7

- A. A scroll no one can unseal – 5:1-4. While the setting is still the same – heaven – the focus shifts first to a scroll and then to one who can open it.
1. Imagery: The scroll is in God’s right hand; it is written on both sides; it is sealed with seven seals. A mighty angel issues a call for one to open the scroll, but no one can do so.
 2. Whatever the scroll represents, it seems of vital importance as John “wept much” at the prospect of the scroll remaining sealed.
- B. The lion/lamb – 5:5-7. John is comforted by one of the elders who directs his attention to “the Lion of the tribe of Judah (who) has prevailed to open the scroll.” The imagery in these verses is laden with spiritual significance.
1. Lion of the tribe of Judah – Jacob’s ancient prophecy likened Judah to a lion and predicted that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Gn 49:9-10; cf. Heb 7:14). Root of David – Later prophecy specified that David’s family line would produce a king who would rule forever (2 Sam 7:11-14; Ps 89:3-4; Is 11:1-10).
 2. Prevailed to open the scroll – The NT speaks of the “mystery” that God was unfolding through the ages of human history, a redemptive plan that gradually took shape through human characters such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David and the whole Israelite nation of whom they were a part. But often their role was an unwitting one; that is, they didn’t see the broader picture of what God was doing and didn’t understand their specific place in it. But one part of the scheme *couldn’t* be fulfilled by man: the sacrifice for sin and consequent universal rule. This required an *incarnation*, a coming of God into the world to do for man what man could not do for himself.
 3. A slain Lamb – When John looks for the lion mentioned by the elder, he sees not a lion but a Lamb, “as though it had been slain.” But the slain lamb was *standing*, and standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures – at the very center of heavenly glory and power. Jesus had described Himself to John as “He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (1:18). The imagery of a lamb in the scriptures conveys the idea of sacrifice; the prophet John had introduced Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).
 4. Seven horns and seven eyes (seven Spirits) – Jesus is described with the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience. “Horn” is a common OT figure for the strength of a nation or a man (Dt 33:17; 2 Chr 18:10), and “eyes” signify God’s awareness of all things on the earth (cf. Rev 1:4). The vision brings together the divine persons, the Father (on the throne), the Son/Lamb (sacrifice, unfolding the scroll) and the Holy Spirit (God’s presence and knowledge throughout all creation). But the focus is on the Lamb.

2. Worthy Is the Lamb – 5:8-14

- A. The fact that the scroll is sealed, that there is need to open it and reveal what is within, and that the Lamb takes the scroll and opens the seals (ch 6) indicate that the divine purposes of God have not reached a final state of completion. Nebuchadnezzar's prophecy, interpreted by Daniel, foretold of the collapse of the fourth empire, which has not yet occurred if that empire is Rome. In fact, it seems that Rome is flourishing at the expense of the church.
1. The message these Christians needed to hear was that their Lord was alive and more powerful than Caesar. As they were dying for His name, they needed assurance that it was not because He was powerless to help.
 2. The vision indicates that all is unfolding according to a specific plan which is designed to glorify the Father and the Son and their kingdom in the end.
- B. The golden bowls of incense/prayers – 5:8. Revelation sometimes portrays God's people as being present with Him and sometimes, from an earthly point of view, praying to Him. As the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders bow down with bowls of incense, "which are the prayers of the saints." Prayer is heard in God's throne room.
- C. The "new song" – 5:9-10. Praise is given to the Lamb as being worthy to open the scroll "for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood."
1. The redemption is universal: "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The NT stresses the universal nature of the gospel: there is *one* body to which all men and women from all nations are added upon their submission to Christ (Eph 2:14-17).
 2. "Kings and priests to our God" – How could a Roman slave be understood as a "king" and be "reigning" on the earth? It is obviously not a rule in a political/military sense. Rather, being in the kingdom/family of the eternal Creator gives one victory over sin, power over ignorance, hope in physical death, etc. It is a spiritual reign where truly no earthly or demonic force can destroy the well-being of the soul (Rom 8:31-39).
- D. A swelling chorus of praise to God and the Lamb – 5:11-14.
1. At this declaration John now sees innumerable multitudes of angels, along with the elders and the living creatures, all expressing a seven-fold praise to the Lamb – 5:11-12.
 2. Then the whole of creation joins in equal praise to the Father (repeatedly called "Him who sits on the throne," emphasizing who possesses true rule) and the Lamb – 5:13.
 3. The living creatures concur – "Amen!" – and the elders worship the eternal God – 5:14. Again, how encouraging would these images be to faithful saints undergoing severe persecution. The needed affirmation that God was in control, that He was aware of the tragic events, that His plan was not yet complete. The Lamb would open the scroll and unleash the judgments of God upon the arrogant, persecuting Roman Empire.

1. The First Three Seals – 6:1-6

Remember, our logical, Western thinking wants to see Revelation as a linear timeline of the demise of Rome. Instead, it is a gradual view of a broad mosaic. While there may be something of a progression, it is not a strict chronology that can be supported by historical events. To try to make Revelation fit history is futile, for many commentators who attempt it hopelessly contradict each other.

A. The first seal – 6:1-2. The white horse of the conqueror.

1. One of the four living creatures invites John to “come and see.” Throughout Revelation various sources communicate with John: Jesus (1:10ff); a trumpet-voice (4:1); one of the 24 elders (5:5; 7:13); a voice from heaven (10:4, 8); an angel (10:9-11; 11:1); a bowl angel (17:1ff; 21:9ff). Thus the Revelation is occasionally interactive.
2. The first seal reveals the image of a conquering warrior atop a white horse. McGuigan notes: White “occurs 16 times and at no time, in the other 15, does it **not** carry with it moral overtones. The color has moral significance. **It is never used in the book of anything evil.** We have white garments of the elders and saints; a white stone belonging to the saints; a white throne on which God sits; white horses on which the saints ride; a white horse on which Jesus sits and then we have the white horse of this passage. Now, in light of how the book uses the color, what do you think of the rider on the white horse?” (96). Certainly, the image appears to portray Jesus. If so, note the juxtaposition of the Lamb both opening the seal and executing what is written in the scroll.

B. The second seal – 6:3-4. The red horse of bloodshed.

1. The second living creature now appeals to John. The second seal/horse is fiery red, and “it was granted” to the rider to take peace from the earth. Historically, one of the judgments of God upon nations was the raising up of enemies to attack and even overthrow them. The Roman Empire would suffer from many battles and invasions on its vast frontiers and even internally.
2. Horses are also used in other apocalyptic writings to indicate God’s hand in the world (cf. Zech 1:8-11; 6:1-8). In modern times one might envision Japan’s surrender on the deck of the U.S.S. Missouri or a victorious general riding into a liberated city on a tank.

C. The third seal – 6:5-6. The black horse of famine.

1. The third living creature shows John a black horse and a rider holding scales. A voice from the midst of the four creatures indicates a shortage of wheat and barley but oil and wine are not affected. Ezekiel 4:10-16 pictures the prophet weighing out his food to symbolize the Babylonian captivity. See also the siege of Israel by Syria – 2 Kgs 6:24ff.

2. The shortage is not yet severe, for oil and wine are available. This is just the beginning of judgments against the enemies of God.

2. Seals Four, Five and Six – 6:7-17

A. The fourth seal – 6:7-8. The pale horse of Death and Hades.

1. The fourth living creature turns John's attention to the pale horse, ridden by Death with Hades trailing behind. Again, "power was given"; i.e., this is under the control of the Lamb who is executing what is written in the scroll, not merely reading it.
2. This is a combination of all the horses. Sword, famine and wild animals are all vivid OT figures of how God brings judgments on wicked nations or individuals. He often spoke of being eaten by animals (cf. Jezebel, 2 Kgs 9:36-37; Baasha, 1 Kgs 16:3-4; Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 14:11). Famine, pestilence and sword are common themes – Ezk 14:12-23. Note that only ¼ of the population is affected. How many lesser judgments did God bring upon Israel before pouring out His full wrath in annihilation and exile?

B. The fifth seal – 6:9-11. The martyrs' cry for vengeance.

1. This seal explains the purpose of the previous seals. The clear image is religious persecution, and the souls of the martyrs are crying for God to step in and avenge their deaths by punishing the wicked.
2. They are not rebuked for their sentiments; rather, they are given white robes (God rewards them and cares for them, martyrdom notwithstanding) and told that Rome's domination has not reached full peak. Human and divine schedules often do not mesh. "It is not always spite which calls for the wicked to 'get what they deserve.' Of Alexander ... who had done Paul much evil, the apostle said, 'The Lord reward him according to his works.' Paul wanted God to settle with Alexander, but there was no spite involved" (McGuiggan 101).

C. The sixth seal – 6:12-17. Who is able to stand?

1. This is a classic apocalyptic passage: it is highly figurative, and it is not the *final* judgment but a *this-world judgment* of God against the enemies of His people. Earthquake, darkened sun, a blood-red moon, stars falling to earth – these are poetic descriptions of upheaval, change in world-order. Cf. Is 13:10, 13; 34:1-4; Mic 1:3-4; Joel 2:30-32 [which Peter applies to Pentecost].
2. When "the great day of His wrath has come" (6:17), the powerful and cruel and arrogant will be seeking for a place to hide (Is 2:19-21). The wicked often use God's patience as justification to keep doing evil; they do not sense their accountability. But history shows that God's patience is not infinite, and His judgment will come when He is ready.
3. The question, "Who is able to stand?" (6:17) prepares us for the scene in chapter 7.

1. The Sealing of God's Servants – 7:1-8

A. The symbolic images of Revelation will alternate between the judgments of God upon His enemies and the glorification of His people. As chapter six closed with the wrath of the Lamb being unleashed, the question was asked: “*And who is able to stand?*” (6:17). Chapter seven now answers that question.

B. The delay of judgment – 7:1-3a.

1. Four angels/corners/winds – The number four, even in English, has reference to physical or earthly things. We also speak of the “four corners of the earth” or something being “scattered into the four winds.” These four angels are “granted to harm the earth and the sea” (7:2); but they delay judgment for a time: “that the wind should not blow” (7:1); “do not harm the earth ... till ...” (7:3).
2. A significant key to understanding Revelation is the term “earth” (or things associated with the earth, like “sea” or “those who dwell on the earth”). Such terms refer to the unsaved, those in opposition to God. The “kings of the earth” (6:15) are political/civil forces that so often exist in rebellion to God's nature and will. The winds blowing on the earth/sea/trees would be the punishment of God that would affect the unregenerate.

C. The sealing of the faithful – 7:3b-8.

1. There is a clear precedent to this sealing in Ezk 9. In that passage God's judgments are to fall upon Jerusalem but not until a “man” “put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it” (9:4). The six agents of divine destruction were told “do not come near anyone on whom is the mark” (9:6).
2. Jesus promised to the faithful to “write on him the name of My God ... the city ... and ... My new name” (Rev 3:12). In a similar scene to come 144,000 are standing on Mt. Zion with the Lamb “having His Father's name written on their foreheads” (14:1). So the seal or name indicates ownership or identification which exempts from judgment.
3. The 144,000 have been the cause of much speculation. Remember that numbers in Revelation are symbolic. 144,000 is not a literal, finite number even as 70x7 (Mt 18:22) is not literal. 12x12x1000 merely means *everyone*; all of God's true people will be cared for. No one will fall through the cracks and experience undeserved wrath. This is not exemption from suffering, for the Lord has warned the seven churches of suffering to come. But *suffering* does not necessarily mean *punishment*.
4. The “tribes of the children of Israel” is also a figurative designation indicating covenant people. It may suggest believers from a Jewish background, or it may refer to all the saved using Jewish imagery. “The Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) is a reference to saints; i.e.,

“Israel” now takes on a spiritual definition. Premillennial attempts to make these real, fleshly Jews or an elite class of saints of heavenly privilege are completely off base.

2. The Triumphant Saints – 7:9-17

- A. The scene shifts from the sealing to the outcome of the sealing. God’s people are before His throne, worshiping and being cared for by Him. We must guard against “literalizing” what is merely a word-picture. This is not a “post-judgment, heavenly worship scene.” Rather, it is a picture of blissful fellowship with God despite the torture and blasphemy to come in the looming battle between heavenly and demonic forces.
- B. A “feast of tabernacles” scene – 7:9-12.
1. John now sees “a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.” This could represent saints of a Gentile background in distinction from Jewish saints, but more likely it pictures all the saved in a different figure than 7:4-8. God had said that He would make Abraham “a father of many nations” and would “multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore” (Gn 17:5; 22:17). This finds its fulfillment in the redeemed people of all nations (cf. Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29).
 2. Most equate the scene to the Feast of Tabernacles: “the most joyous of all Jewish festivals ... (it) occurred in the fall ... after the harvest had been gathered ... It followed the annual atonement when sacrifice had been made for sins ... On the first day ... the people were to take the branches of palm trees and ... ‘rejoice before Jehovah’ (Lev. 23:40)” (Hailey 207). Note that these are “standing,” answering the question of 6:17.
 3. This host of saints are “before the throne,” now appearing with the angels, elders and living creatures. They are loudly praising God and the Lamb for their salvation.
- C. “Who are these?” – 7:13-17. Once again John is made interactive with the vision, but he wisely defers his answer to the elder who is inquiring of him.
1. Come out of the great tribulation/white robes – 7:14. These are saints who will come through the terrible struggle with faith intact. This is victory portrayed as heavenly bliss.
 2. Dwelling with God – 7:15. Note the throne/temple/dwelling connection. The church is “the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 2 Cor 6:16).
 3. Shepherded by the Lamb – 7:16-17. No hunger/thirst/heat/tears are all terms that in other places describe fellowship with God in the era of the Messiah (cf. Is 25:6-8; 65:13-19). “Living fountains” are promised in Jn 4:14. Once again, these images describe spiritual fellowship, a relationship with God wherein all spiritual blessings are available no matter what opposing forces of evil may say or do. Heaven is obviously the outcome of this relationship, but this is not necessarily the main focus of the image. The focus is the *victory and success of God’s cause and people*. God will win; Rome will lose.

The Revelation

Lesson 12 – The Seventh Seal and Four Trumpets

1. The Seventh Seal – 8:1-6

- A. The opening of the seventh seal blends into the sounding of the seven trumpets. After the delay for the sealing of the saints, “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”
1. This stands in contrast to the noisy images that have been thus far heard: voices, thunders, songs, cries of vengeance, shouting multitudes, etc.
 2. Silence is mentioned in Hab 2:20 in reference to the power and majesty of God. Hailey notes, “A half hour is ordinarily a short period of time, but it seems long when one is waiting. The impressive pause focuses attention on heaven’s interest as all wait in breathless suspense and expectation for what is to follow” (215).
- B. Seven angels are given seven trumpets, but before they act another angel appears with a golden censer at the golden altar before the throne – 8:2-3. Two main events occur:
1. The angel offers incense/prayers of “all the saints” on the altar. Bible history reveals a God who hears and responds to the prayers of His people.
 2. The angel puts fire from the altar in his censer and then throws it to the earth. The noises, thundering, lightning and earthquake that follow are ominous indicators of God’s judgment in response to the prayers of the saints. Hailey notes, “These judgments cannot be localized or made to fit into any specific time and event; they are God’s judgments against the wicked in answer to the prayers of His people” (217).

2. The First Four Trumpets – 8:7-13

- A. Trumpets in the OT had a variety of functions. They called people to alarm, to war, to assembly, etc. Hailey says the trumpets “symbolize partial judgments upon the wicked, serving as warnings of greater judgments to come” (218).
1. Trumpet #1 – 8:7. Hail, fire and blood are reminiscent of the Egyptian plagues. Again, in Revelation “earth” indicates the unregenerate: “Seems to indicate suffering and destruction among the earth-dwellers, the world of the unregenerate in which the seat of world powers operate” (Hailey 219). “A third” indicates significant effect but not total destruction, even as the plagues afflicted Egypt fraction by fraction.
 2. Trumpet #2 – 8:8-9. One third of the sea, including ships and marine life, is now affected. This is caused by “something like a great mountain burning with fire” is cast into the sea. “Mountain” often in the OT refers to kingdoms, whose capital cities were often established on fortified high places (cf. Jer 51:25). So the idea may be that of the overthrow of civil power. McGuiggan thinks the image is of the ruin of commercial activity on the Mediterranean (a similar picture will be seen later in Revelation).

3. Trumpet #3 – 8:10-11. When the third angel sounds John sees a great, burning star falling from heaven. Like the other judgments the earth is affected, this time rivers and springs. The star is named “Wormwood” and made the fresh water supplies bitter or toxic (many men died). Wormwood is used in the OT as a reference to a bitter plant of some sort (Dt 29:18; Jer 9:15). McGuiggan suggests that the star merely indicates that all of creation is at God’s disposal to punish His enemies. Hailey leans in the direction that this refers to world leaders who fall from their power and prominence and consequently do great damage to society in the process (King Saul, for example, or Herod the Great). There is OT precedent to referring to kings as stars (Is 14:12-17).

4. Trumpet #4 – 8:12. The heavens are now affected as one third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened. Heavenly bodies provide light and beauty to the creation, so metaphorically they represent well-being, joy and blessing. Conversely, their darkening suggest judgment and destruction. Many human songs and poetry use these very images to express either love and happiness or misfortune and misery. (“Ain’t no sunshine when she’s gone; only darkness everyday”; “Don’t let the sun go down on me”; etc.)
 - a. As Jeremiah contemplates the coming destruction of Jerusalem, he laments that the heavens have no light (Jer 4:23). In judgment against Egypt God says “When I will put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land” (Ezk 32:6-8).

 - b. Hailey goes a step further and says, “It seems that the darkness in John’s vision indicates a lack of understanding and insight on the part of those who direct human affairs ... Before total darkness engulfs any society, God sounds a trumpet warning to that society. He sends minor judgments which mark the beginning of the society’s destruction unless repentance turns the course of its destiny. These four trumpets call for the reformation, not the destruction of mankind” (223).

- B. Three woes announced – 8:13. The final three trumpets correspond to three woes pronounced by “an angel (eagle – NIV, ESV, NAS) flying through the midst of heaven.” These woes are issued “to the inhabitants of the earth.” As we have noted, “earth” refers to the unregenerate or non-Christians. The further woes suggest increasing intensity as mankind refuses to respond to God’s punitive judgments.

1. The Fifth Trumpet/First Woe – 9:1-12

- A. A whole new scene is introduced – the bottomless pit. From this pit comes a frightening locust invasion that brings torment and misery, so much so that men “will desire to die, and death will flee from them” (9:6).
1. John sees “a star fallen from heaven to earth” who is a being “given the key to the bottomless pit.” It seems warranted to identify him with the king/angel of the bottomless pit, “whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek ... Apollyon” (9:11).
 2. This being opens the pit, and smoke belches forth darkening the sun and the air (9:2).
- B. Mixed with the smoke is an army of locusts, bizarre in appearance, and sent “upon the earth.” These locusts do not eat vegetation; instead, they afflict “only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4). Some descriptions:
1. They are not allowed to kill but to inflict torment as the sting of a scorpion (9:5, 10). This is for a period of five months.
 2. The shape of the locusts was “like horses prepared for battle” (9:7). They had breast-plates like iron (9:9); teeth like lions (9:8); and the sound of their wings was like the rumble of battle-chariots (9:9).
 3. They had the hair of women (9:8) but the faces of men (9:7). They wore “crowns of something like gold” (9:7). Their tails had stingers like a scorpion (9:10).
 4. This army of locusts had as their king the fallen star, Apollyon, or Destroyer.
- C. What is likened to darkness, affects only the “unsealed” or unsaved, brings great misery though with the appearance of success or fulfillment (crown “like gold”) and originates in the lower regions or abyss? (Where did Legion not want to be cast by Jesus – Lk 8:31?)
1. The most likely answer is sin and the moral degradation that follows it. The star/king/angel who commands the locust army seems to represent Satan (we will see him more clearly addressed in later visions). Paul identifies Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), the “god of this age” who blinds the minds of the unbelieving to the light of the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 4:4).
 2. One of God’s judgments against rebellious, self-willed people is to give them up to the full consequences of their sinfulness. “Sin is ... accompanied by deception and mental or spiritual torment from which man cannot escape by his own will or power. Sin carries with it the poisonous venom of moral decay and ultimate perdition, and Satan is the father and king of it all” (Hailey 233). “What is the Christian to learn from all this?”

That the decadence he saw all around him was part of the punishment of God on the oppressor” (McGuiggan 132).

2. The Sixth Trumpet/Second Woe – 9:13-21

- A. The severity of the trumpet blasts has escalated until now one third of mankind will be killed (9:15). The main players here are “four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (9:14). But as the vision unfolds the four angels become an army of horsemen two hundred million strong (9:16).
1. What transpires results from “a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God” (9:13). This is same altar of prayer seen in 8:3-4. So, again, God reassures persecuted Christians that their prayers are heard and answered.
 2. The Euphrates long stood as a symbol of war as empires beyond the river, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, crossed the Euphrates to war against Israel. The angels which had been “prepared for the hour and day and month and year” are released (9:15). Such suggests that God has a specific purpose in mind and things happen on His schedule.
- B. Whatever the specifics – the colorful breastplates, the heads like lions, the fire, smoke and brimstone out of their mouths – the horses/horsemen seem designed to strike terror in the hearts of men. A similar description of dread and fear is found in Joel 2:1-17 as God warns Israel of coming invasion if they will not repent.
1. The horsemen are brutally effective as destructive power emanates from both the horses’ mouths and tails (9:19). A third of mankind is killed “by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone” (9:18), a destruction reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah, except that there was utter destruction on those cities with the exception of Lot and his two daughters.
 2. The effect God is hoping for however – repentance – is not realized (9:20-21). God hoped they would reexamine their practices of idolatry, immorality, witchcraft and crime against each other. But as was seen in various Old Testament episodes, the more God punishes, the harder some people become.
- C. Note Hailey’s summary to this point: “Up to this point in Revelation, Rome and the empire have not been specifically introduced. The visions have been general, dealing with principles that set forth God’s care for His chosen saints throughout history and His assurance of judgment against the rebellious and sinful world. God has been revealing that wickedness is self-destructive” (233).
- D. McGuiggan offers this: “What have we seen then in chapter 9? We have seen two of the instruments of punishment used by the Lord. Internal corruption and external invasion. These have been used against the oppressor – those who have not the name of the Father written on their foreheads. They were used against him to call him to repentance, but they didn’t accomplish that task. How are they to be stopped? That’d be the question in the minds of the awe-stricken saints” (137).

1. Context: Where We Are in Revelation

- A. Jesus has given specific messages to the seven churches of Asia, preparing them for a time of great persecution and tribulation very near to unfold (chs 2-3).
- B. A throne-scene in heaven gives assurance of God’s glory and power and the plans that are presently being executed by the Lion/Lamb (the opening of the scroll – chs 4-5).
- C. The opening of the first six seals reveals judgments on the earth and the plea of martyrs for the avenging of their deaths. There was a delay between the sixth and seventh seals in which God’s faithful people are identified and pictured in victorious bliss (chs 6-7).
- D. The seventh seal was a prelude to the blowing of seven trumpets of severe judgment. Six of those trumpets have sounded, and there is now another pause before the seventh trumpet (chs 8-9). The blowing of the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets also correspond to three woes in which unbelievers begin to suffer the severe effects of God’s judgmental wrath.
- E. Summaries from two authors:
 - 1. “This section (10:1-11:13) gives assurance that the witnessing of truth is not silenced during the trumpet soundings, but continues victoriously. This passage also introduces and prefaces John’s future prophecy of nations that would persecute the saints and of their ultimate defeat by the victorious Christ (chaps. 12-20). Then follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet which reveals the total victory of God’s cause over the world” (Hailey 241).
 - 2. “Chapters 8 and 9 depicted the warning judgments on the oppressor. Though they were only warnings, they were severe. The oppressor should have repented, but didn’t. He only hardens his heart further and blasphemes. In this he reminds us of Pharaoh. Such steadfast wickedness is a fearful thing to witness – it produces fear in the timid. There is nothing as awe-inspiring as to see incarnate hatred and spite clawing for victory, even though it knows it’s a loser. The saints need assurance in the face of this undying malice” (McGuiggan 139).

2. A Mighty Angel – 10:1-7

- A. John has seen a variety of angels actively involved in the events unfolding, but he now sees an angel of unique stature.
 - 1. He is a “mighty angel” whose characteristics resemble divinity – 10:1, 3. Cloud, rainbow, sun, pillars of fire, voice of a lion, seven thunders – these show his connection with the power and purposes of God. Further, the angel stands upon land and sea (10:2, 5, 8), indicating perhaps the wide scope of the judgments to come.

2. The angel holds a little book (which is open) in his hand. When the angel cried loudly, as the roar of a lion, “seven thunders uttered their voices” (10:3). Thunder is often associated with the presence and power of God, and John prepares to write what he heard. However, he is forbidden to do this, similar to when Paul was prevented from revealing what he saw in his heavenly visions (2 Cor 12:4). God does not reveal everything to man (Dt 29:29), and we can take comfort in God’s unknown reserves of power and purpose in the midst of inexplicable events.
3. The angel then lifts his hand and swears by the eternal Creator “that there should be delay no longer” (10:6). Specifically, he points to the sounding of the seventh trumpet when “the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets” (10:7). Hailey notes: “The Old Testament prophets never dealt with specific events beyond the coming redemption, the permanent establishment of the spiritual kingdom, the termination of the Jewish theocracy, the persecution of the saints, and the destruction of the fourth world empire” (246).

B. In this declaration we have the introduction to the rest of Revelation. The “mightiness” of the angel is indicative of all OT prophecy coming to pass in the victory of the church over the Roman Empire. They will overcome, not through a military struggle, but by the vindication of God, Himself, in response to the persecution and prayer of His people.

2. Eating the Book – 10:8-11

- A. John is instructed to take the open book from the angel and eat it. But he is warned: the book will be initially sweet but turn bitter in his stomach.
1. This is reminiscent of Ezekiel who was likewise told to eat a scroll (Ezk 2:6-3:15). The meaning is in 3:10: “Receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you ...”. Further, Ezekiel is admonished to “speak to them ... ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear, or whether they refuse” (3:11).
 2. The bitterness of Ezekiel’s words was because “Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me ... (they) are impudent and hard-hearted” (3:7). But John’s words are bitter because “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Rev 10:11). That is, there will be widespread suffering to come upon many because of the wickedness of Rome. Its pollution has affected the whole world, and the unwillingness to repent will bring judgments upon a broad segment of humanity.
- B. The “sweetness” of the book that John eats is two-fold:
1. What God declares is always good and right, even when punishment is involved. For the faithful, it is an opportunity to grow and improve. For the disobedient, it is the rendering of justice due. God and righteousness are vindicated.
 2. While God’s people will be taken care of, there will still be pain and suffering to endure. This can be overcome if the saints keep their confidence in God’s love and power.

The Revelation

Lesson 15 – The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet

1. The Two Witnesses – 11:1-14

- A. The two witnesses under God's care – 11:1-6. This scene involving the two witnesses is full of OT imagery. It depicts both the persecution and success of God's people.
1. John is again made a participant in the Revelation by a voice which commands him to measure the temple, altar and worshipers (11:1). This is reminiscent of Ezekiel 40ff where an idealized temple and city are likewise measured. The overall point seems to be that what is measured is protected by God and under His watchful care.
 2. But in John's case, the temple is equated with the holy city (11:2) which will be trodden down by the Gentiles for 42 months. We also note that there is an outer court which is given to the Gentiles. The most consistent explanation of these figures is that they represent coming persecution which God allows the church to undergo. Some will have their faith destroyed by the fire of suffering (unmeasured outer court), but the persecution will be temporary (42 months = 1,260 days = significant but temporary period of trial).
 3. The two witnesses/olive trees/lampstands (11:3-4) suggest the church's mission to preach the gospel and attest to God's existence and salvation. The olive trees and lampstands call to mind the image of Zech 4 which portrays Joshua and Zerubbabel as leaders who will accomplish the rebuilding of the temple. "Clothed in sackcloth" indicates that there is great suffering, but they continue to preach during the time of persecution. Further, fire proceeds from them upon their persecutors (11:5), which calls to mind those who attempted to take Elijah by force in 2 Kgs 1:9-18. A second allusion to Elijah is in 11:6 which refers to the drought brought upon Israel in his ministry, and yet another reference to Moses in 11:6b suggests the Egyptian plagues. The message is that even though God's people will suffer, their purpose will not be defeated.
- B. The two witnesses lie dead in the street – 11:7-10. "Now when they finish their testimony" is key, for it is assured that nothing will stop them from accomplishing their purpose.
1. But in a reversal of fortune, the witnesses are killed by a beast "that ascends out of the bottomless pit" (11:7). We have previously only seen an angel/king who released the locust army out of the pit. This beast will be further described in later chapters.
 2. Their bodies lie unburied "in the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (11:8). This is not a geographical reference but an image describing the opposition of the wicked of the world. "Those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations" = "those who dwell on the earth" (11:9-10). These rejoice over the slain witnesses "because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth" (11:10). The picture: the gospel exposes the evil of unregenerate men, and they resent such exposure and vent their anger upon those who would "judge" them. The bodies lie in the street 3½ days, a short and incomplete time but agonizing nonetheless.

- C. The witnesses resurrected – 11:11-14. This also is figurative, and we search in vain for some literal historical fulfillment of these events. Resurrection is a figure of triumph or success; only God is sufficient to bring life from the dead. “The breath of God entered them, and they stood on their feet” (11:11; cf. Ezk 37:1-14), and “they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them” (11:12). Contrast the two “ascensions”: the beast out of the pit who makes war against God’s witnesses, and the witnesses who ascend to heaven in victory and vindication.
1. “In the same hour” there is an earthquake that destroys one-tenth of the city and 7,000 inhabitants of the wicked population. “The rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” does not suggest true repentance and conversion but begrudging acknowledgment. This reminds of Elijah’s victory on Mt. Carmel and the cry of the people, “The Lord, He is God,” but they are not truly penitent.
 2. “The second woe is past” – 11:14.

2. Renewed Proclamation of the Kingdom – 11:15-19

- A. The various scenes of the Revelation shift back and forth between the Lord’s judgment on enemies and the glorification of His people. This is not a “final judgment” image but a scene in heaven that showcases God’s vindication of His people.
- B. “Loud voices” proclaim the supremacy of God’s kingdom and His eternal reign (11:15). This does not suggest the establishment of the kingdom, for this occurred well before the present events (cf. Rev 1:9; 2:26-27; Col 1:13). Rather, it is a reaffirmation of the kingdom borne out by the subduing of rival kingdoms who would destroy God’s rule and citizenry.
- C. John again sees the 24 elders falling down before God and worshiping Him. Their words of praise summarize what is happening in the Revelation.
1. Note the progression: God exercises His divine rule (11:17); He is opposed by unbelievers; His wrath is come against enemies and they are judged; prophets and saints are rewarded. This is a scene that plays out over and over throughout history and will continue to do so until all is resolved eternally at the final coming of the Lord.
 2. These “lesser judgments” throughout time merely anticipate what will occur once and for all at the judgment when *all evil is eternally punished* and God and His faithful people will be glorified.
- D. The last image is that of the ark of the covenant in the temple in heaven and attendant earth-shaking displays of divine power (11:19). It may be hard for people at peace (us) to appreciate the impact of these images, but if the day ever comes (and it seems to be drawing closer to those in modern society) that we are persecuted for our faith they will mean much more to us.

The Revelation

Lesson 16 – The Woman, the Child and the Dragon

1. The Ruler Takes His Throne – 12:1-6

- A. This chapter presents images of spiritual conflict; the images encapsulate the whole scope of warfare between forces of righteousness and those of wickedness. There is also a fairly clear allusion to the prophecy of Gn 3:15 concerning the woman, her seed and the serpent.
1. The woman: clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and a “garland” (Gk. stephanos, a wreath of victory) of twelve stars. She is in labor.
 2. The dragon: great, fiery red, seven heads/ten horns/seven “diadems” (crown of royalty, rule). The dragon is waiting for the woman to give birth so that he can devour the baby.
 3. The child: the baby is born and then ascends to the throne of God to rule all nations. The woman/mother flees to the wilderness where she is protected for 1,260 days.
- B. These are not necessarily specific events but tell the story of God’s providence of salvation to men. There was nothing Satan could do to prevent God’s plans; things unfolded according to God’s power and His loving plan to save sinful men.
1. The woman seems to represent the aggregate of God’s faithful people down through the ages. There was always a remnant of the truly faithful in patriarchal and Mosaic times, and this thread of faith kept the promise of Gn 3:15 – and the other prophecies which were to come afterward – alive.
 2. Satan, the murderer and liar from the beginning (Jn 8:44), the ruler of this world and the god of this age (Jn 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4), has worked diligently through deceit, temptation and violence to destroy all goodness and prevent the Redeemer from being born. But he failed, and the child eventually ascended to the throne of God where He assumed rule of all nations.
 3. Bible history is full of instances where God’s faithful people have sought refuge in the wilderness or in flight: Moses, Israel, Elijah, David – even Jesus. As we have seen before, the 3½ years or 1,260 days refers to a time of limited persecution.

2. Satan Is Cast to the Earth – 12:7-12

- A. This passage can be easily misconstrued, but we must always reinforce the context and imagery of Revelation. This is not some heavenly war of the distant past that explains the origin of the devil. It is a “verbal painting” which portrays Satan’s sphere of activity and the ongoing conflict between good and evil.
1. The “war” seems to refer to the inability of Satan to dethrone the child-ruler. Satan couldn’t stop Jesus’ birth; he couldn’t defeat Jesus during his fleshly sojourn; and he

certainly can't mount any type of assault against His heavenly rule. This is pictured as a battle fought and won against Satan by Michael and an angelic host.

2. The enthronement of Jesus means the redemption and victory of His people. "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come ... 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" (12:10-11). Victory does not come without a struggle, and some of the faithful die in loyalty to God.

B. Two opposite effects: "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, for he knows that he has a short time" (12:12). Here is our dichotomy in Revelation: God's people are victors and rejoice; those of "the earth" – the unredeemed – are defeated and great misery and suffering will befall them.

3. Ongoing Persecution by the Dragon – 12:13-17

A. The "woman" now would be the remnant which is faithful to Christ, and Satan's wrath is taken out on them. "Wings of an eagle" symbolize God's protection and escape from harm (Ex 19:4; Dt 32:11-12; Is 40:31). The span of "time, times and half a time" is commensurate with 1,260 days, 3½ years, 3½ days, which we have seen before. It is not insignificant, but it is ineffective opposition which will not accomplish its objective of destroying the cause of righteousness. The saints are nourished in the wilderness.

B. Failing outright violence, the serpent "spewed water out of his mouth like a flood ... that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood" (12:15).

1. "But the earth helped the woman, and ... opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood" (12:16). What does this represent?

2. Satan's primary weapon against God's people is deception, leading to enticement to sin. Paul feared for the Corinthians: "Lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11:4). He further warns of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ ..." (2 Cor 11:12-15).

3. Whether deceit is in the form of doctrinal aberration, lusting for sinful pleasure, worldly ambition or some other ungodly thoughts and actions, Satan is trying to sweep us from true devotion to God. The world, however, drinks in the flood in its thirst for self-gratification. This actually helps the saint, for through them he should see the end result of drinking the fouled waters from the abyss.

C. The dragon turns to "the rest of her offspring" in a rage in order to war against them. No specific event is in view. It is an explanation to suffering Christians why they are enduring such evil. It is heavenly perspective on earthly suffering. Satan cannot defeat God outright, so he tries to defeat the people of God on earth. God will see that the faithful endure.

1. The Beast Out of the Sea – 13:1-10

- A. This chapter amplifies the war of the dragon against the offspring of the woman, “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (12:17). Two beasts are described, the first of which gives authority to the second.
1. The dragon is standing on the seashore (see NIV, NASB, ESV, etc.), and he seems to be calling forth a great beast from the sea. Note that “the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (13:2), so he is not merely observing the beast arising but *causing him to arise*. Citing Dan 7:2ff Hailey observes: “From the prophets use of the word, it seems clear that the sea symbolizes the human societies or nations with their stormy upheavals, out of which the empires of earth arise” (283).
 2. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel saw beasts that represented a succession of four world empires, the fourth being the Romans. The beast from the sea seems to be a composite of all the others: leopard/bear/lion. Swift/powerful/ferocious ... the dragon has raised a formidable enemy against the saints. On its seven heads it wore a blasphemous name (13:1). In other words, the civil power which God intended for the good of mankind has become a corrupt agent of the dragon, contemptuous of all things related to God.
- B. One of the heads is healed from a mortal wound – 13:3. Many and contradictory are the interpretations of this image as commentators try to tie it to a literal event or person. This is not necessary, however, if we remember that Revelation is less concerned with specific details and more focused on painting general pictures. The only explanation needed is that the beast is resilient; it survives many threats to its existence – as did Rome – and lasts longer than reason would suggest (and longer than the saints would have liked).
- C. The unbelieving world is in awe of the beast and the dragon – 13:3-4. The beast’s main trait is blasphemy – 13:5-6. Roman emperors – not all of them, and not all the time – looked upon themselves as gods. Some, like Domitian, insisted upon being worshiped as deity, and the refusal to do so was treated as disloyalty. “He was given” (13:5) and “it was granted to him” (13:7); “authority was given to him” (13:7) point to higher forces using the beast as a tool. Again, saints need a broader perspective on why they were being persecuted for their faithfulness to God.
1. He has temporary power over the saints – 13:5. Forty two months is the same as time, times and half a time, 3½ years and 1,260 days. “It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.” This is reminiscent of the partial success we saw earlier: the two witnesses lying dead in the street (ch 11).
 2. The beast is worshiped by “all who dwell on the earth” – 13:8. They are described as “whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth.” This clearly identifies the “earth-dwellers.”

2. The Beast from the Land – 13:11-18

A. Next there arises an ally of the first beast: “he exercises the 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, whose deadly would was healed” (13:12).

1. This land-beast is different in appearance, though: “he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (13:11). Further, he “performs great signs ... and he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs” (13:13-14).
2. His influence is powerful, “telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” – 13:14. He directed that those who “would not worship the image of the beast” be slain – 13:15. “Later references to him as ‘the false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) indicate that this beast represents some aspect of false religion, one of the devil’s means of deceiving and seducing people” (Hailey 292).
3. “To the people of John’s day, this beast represented paganism, or the sacerdotal system of paganism, in one of its most repulsive forms – emperor worship. The Caesar cult is indicated by his relation to the sea-beast in the verses that follow” (ibid 293).

B. Coercion is indicated in 13:16-17 as “no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This tactic is not as blatant as outright attack by an enemy soldier; rather, the “lamb” made demands that may have sounded reasonable to the world but couldn’t be obeyed by the Christian. One can only imagine the pressure which bore upon saints to “cross their fingers” and burn a pinch of incense to the emperor in order to save their child or keep their business license.

C. Another major point of contention in Revelation centers on 13:18: “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.” Again, to literalize and try to assign an alphabetic meaning to the numbers, or to concoct an obscure numeric message is hopeless – and unnecessary.

1. As we have noted, numbers do not carry numeric value in Revelation; they suggest a principle of some kind.
2. If seven is a number of completeness or perfection, then six falls short of that. The beast is of human origin, wisdom, goals, tactics: “the number of a man.” The beast is doomed to failure, for its origin is not in God, its objectives are anti-God. It may appear to have a measure of success, but this is only temporary.
3. Fertile imaginations and Hollywood fiction have made this number the “mark of the beast,” the tattoo of the Antichrist, etc. It is not that fanciful. It merely denotes “near perfection but ultimate failure.” Rome is the best, most powerful weapon that could have been possibly unleashed against the church, but it failed in the end. So will every future endeavor of man that tries to destroy the work of God.

The Revelation

Lesson 18 – The Winepress of the Wrath of God

1. The Lamb, the Redeemed and the New Song – 14:1-5

- A. Chapters 11-13 set forth persecution against the saints: the temple being trodden down; two witnesses slain; the dragon raging against the woman, her Child and the rest of her offspring; two beasts, agents of the dragon and allies of each other, making war with the saints and overcoming them. We should be seeing by now that there is not a strict chronological pattern here but different depictions of persecution and protection of God's people.
- B. The scene shifts back in 14:1-5 to the well-being of the "redeemed from the earth" – 14:3. There is a strong resemblance here to ch 7. Four elements are presented in 14:1:
1. The Lamb – The one on whose account martyrs are dying (who Himself has been slain).
 2. Mt. Zion – The literal hill in the OT where David established his throne. This becomes a symbol of God's presence among His people via the rule of the Messiah (Ps 2:6; 110:2, 5-6). The law would go forth from Zion (Is 2:2ff), and those ransomed would "come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads" (Is 35:10).
 3. 144,000 – We saw this group in ch 7 sealed against the wrath of the Lamb. They were further pictured in white robes with palm branches and praising God and the Lamb.
 - a. They were "not defiled with women, for they are virgins" (14:4). Figuratively, this indicates purity and fidelity to God as idolatry is often portrayed as adultery.
 - b. They "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" – even to death if necessary (2:10).
 - c. "In their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault" (14:5). Compare this with what came out of the mouths of the sea beast and his followers (13:5-6, 15).
 4. The Lamb's Father – His name is written on the foreheads of the saints (cf. 7:3).
- C. The 144,000 are learning "a new song" (5:9ff); no one could learn it but them. This seems to be a song of praise and thanks for the salvation given to them.

2. The Three Angels and Their Proclamations – 14:6-13

- A. Angel #1 – 14:6-7. This angel preaches "the everlasting gospel" and urges the unsaved to worship and glorify God. There is urgency: "for the hour of His judgment has come."
- B. Angel #2 – 14:8. "Babylon is fallen." The world of unbelievers has already been called Sodom/Egypt/Jerusalem (11:8). Babylon is now used and harkens back to an OT prototype. Babylon became the figure of all kingdoms of men that arrogantly opposed God and persecuted His people. This Babylon will be described in more detail later.

- C. Angel #3 – 14:9-11. Here is a stern warning to all who worship the beast or receive his mark. He may incur the favor of men, but he will be made to “drink of the wine of the wrath of God.” Further, “he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels ... and the Lamb” (cf. 11:9). Unlike the two witnesses who were resurrected, “the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night” (14:10). As in the case of the rich man and Lazarus, the earthly/eternal fortunes are completely reversed.
- D. “Here is the patience of the saints” – 14:12 (cf. 6:11; 13:10; Lk 21:19). Sometimes the matter is out of our hands, and all we can do is be faithful and wait for God to act.
- E. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” – 14:13 (cf. Ps 116:15). This contrasts how God assesses things as opposed to how man assesses them. Death is rest from labor; a martyr’s death is an example of faithfulness to those who follow.

3. The Harvest Is Ripe – 14:14-20

- A. In an agricultural society, reaping or harvesting was vitally important and took on symbolic meaning. Jesus uses this very figure to describe the final judgment (Mt 13:36-43). But Revelation is dealing with then-current persecuting forces, namely Rome. In 14:14-16:
 - 1. John sees on a white cloud “One like the Son of Man” (cf. 1:13) wearing a golden crown (cf. 6:2) and holding a sharp sickle. This is Jesus again pictured as vindicator.
 - 2. Angel #4 – Cries “Thrust in Your sickle and reap ... for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” We might wonder why such instruction is given to the Lord by an angel, but such an announcement seems to signify that the Father is the architect of what is unfolding; Jesus reigns with and for God in a delegated capacity (cf. 1 Cor 15:27).
- B. Angel #5 – 14:17. Like the previous angel he comes out of the heavenly temple and has a sickle in his hand. The term temple was used previously in two senses: 1) the body of the redeemed (11:1ff – measured and protected); and 2) the inner sanctum of heaven where God dwells (11:19; cf. 15:5, 8). The emphasis here seems to be on the angels coming directly from the throne of God; it is God’s judgment against His foes.
- C. Angel #6 – 14:18-20. This angel, from the temple altar, “had power over fire” and directed the previous angel to “gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe” (cf. Joel 3:13; Is 63:1-6).
 - 1. The harvest of grapes is thrown into “the great winepress of the wrath of God.”
 - 2. The grapes are trampled “outside the city”; i.e., away from fellowship with God and His saints. The extent of the punishment is stated in hyperbole: “blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs” (about 200 miles, far surpassing the entire extent of Palestine). This highlights the greatness of those opposed to God’s kingdom, and the completeness of judgment against them.

The Revelation

Lesson 19 – Preparing for the Seven Last Plagues

1. The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb – 15:1-4

- A. The Revelation has reached a crucial point, indicated in 15:1: “seven angels, having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.”
1. Previous judgments were a warning and call to repentance, indicating that God’s way is not to “surprise” man with hasty judgments but to give ample opportunity to turn from sin. From here to the end of Revelation we are given many different views of the coming destruction of Rome. “This indicates a characteristic of apocalyptic writings, showing various scenes and conditions from different points of view” (Hailey 318).
 2. John sees “another sign in heaven, great and marvelous” (cf. 12:1, 3). He introduces the vision, but he pauses before returning to the seven angels in 15:5ff.
- B. The victorious saints – 15:2-4.
1. Once again in yet another symbolic picture, saints are portrayed as victorious and in God’s presence (cf. similar scenes in 7:9-17; 11:15-19; 14:1-5). The image now employed is that they are “standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.” John saw a sea of glass before the throne of God earlier (4:6). This time the sea is “mingled with fire.” Suggestions of what this sea is about, but “standing” on a sea is unnatural, indicative of the power of God. The fire may represent the persecution the saints have endured. If so, it is a picture of victory and praise to the One who gave them the victory.
 2. Again, there is singing. The song of Moses is clear reference to Ex 15 which praised God for His deliverance from the Egyptian army. The song of Moses highlights:
 - a. Praise for God’s salvation – Ex 15:2.
 - b. Awe of God’s power over the Egyptians – 15:3-10.
 - c. Separation between God’s saints (Israel) and enemies – 15:11-13.
 - d. Fear of the neighboring nations at God’s mightiness – 15:14-16.
 - e. The establishment of God’s sanctuary – 15:17.
 3. History is filled with such victories when the odds were against the saints. But it is the Lamb that marshals this victory. In His power “all nations shall come and worship before You.” “God’s righteous ways which are set forth in the law and in Christ, His verdicts which are announced, and judgments which are executed, will be vindicated in history” (Hailey 322).

2. The Sending Out of the Angels – 15:5-16:1

- A. John now sees that the inner sanctum (Holy of Holies) of the tabernacle is open (15:5-7). He specifically notes it is the “tabernacle of the testimony,” referring to the law of Moses contained in the ark. This symbolically points to the certainty of God’s words and His vindication of them: from this tabernacle the seven angels with the seven last plagues come.
1. They are “clothed in pure bright linen” with golden bands around their chests (cf. 1:13). Not much can be added but that their attire suggests purity and purpose of God.
 2. One of the living creatures gives the angels their bowls of wrath. Little specific explanation of various activities is given in Revelation. We have previously seen the living creatures continually praising God (4:8), offering the prayers of the saints (5:8), singing a new song (5:9-10), calling forth the first four horsemen of the seals (6:1-8). They are obviously in close concert with God and exist in His immediate proximity.
- B. The temple is now filled with smoke “from the glory of God,” prohibiting further activities “till the seven plagues ... were completed” (15:8; cf. Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10ff). The image is a fullness of divine presence that makes all else stop until God’s purpose is done.

3. The First Three Bowls – 16:2-7

- A. Bowl #1 – 16:2. “Upon the earth” and sores “upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image” delineate those under God’s wrath. A distinction is made between saints and enemies of God as in the Egyptian plagues. This doesn’t mean, however, that no Christians will be harmed in the demise of Rome. However, what may befall them will not be the wrath of God; His favor will still be with them no matter what they suffer.
- B. Bowl #2 – 16:3. The sea is now turned to blood, but note that “every living creature in the sea died.” This is in contrast to 8:8-9 where 1/3 was affected in the second trumpet. Clearly there is an increase in the effect; this is not a warning but an all-out punishment.
- C. Bowl #3 – 16:4-7. Now the rivers and springs become blood as well (cf. 8:10-11). Two voices proclaim the justice of God’s punishment against His enemies.
1. The angel of the waters – Proclaims God’s righteousness and eternity. God’s wrath is justified based on what the beasts and people of the earth have done to His saints: “For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets” (16:6). As we see throughout the OT, God’s servants will not always be spared treacherous treatment, but their blood will be avenged when God is ready to do so.
 2. Another voice from the altar – “True and righteous are Your judgments.” Let us reiterate the difference between personal vengeance and the desire for God to vindicate Himself and His people. God’s judgment against evil is *justified*, and God’s people are justified to desire it and pray for it. They are *not justified* to seek vengeance themselves.

1. The Fourth Bowl – 16:8-9

- A. Though we sometimes struggle with Revelation's imagery, one principle helps guide us: "In John's visions God is simply carrying out what He had proposed and done all along" (Hailey 331). This is why we can so often turn to the OT and find similar language and prophecies concerning God's enemies of old (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, etc.).
- B. After bringing ruin upon earth, sea, rivers and springs in the first three bowls, the sun is now magnified to "scorch men with fire." Ps 97:3, 7 speaks of the fire of God's judgment burning up His enemies, especially those who worship idols.
- C. The result: "They blasphemed the name of God ... and they did not repent and give Him glory." Wars, plagues and natural disasters can humble men and encourage them to seek Someone more powerful than they. But in most cases men just harden themselves further.

2. The Fifth Bowl – 16:10-11

- A. This bowl is poured "on the throne of the beast." Earlier we saw great men trying to hide from the Lamb's wrath (6:15-16), but there is no place to hide. God's punishment can reach into the fortified, guarded palaces of those in power.
 - 1. The judgment is darkness (cf. 8:12) but so pronounced that those loyal to the beast "gnawed their tongues because of the pain."
 - 2. If the darkness is ignorance, the vacuum of wisdom and sense that inevitably accompanies a rejection of God's truth, then the image is of a total breakdown of sound policy that would improve society. In times of unprincipled indulgence, wise men are often shunted aside and leaders are appointed who give the people what they want. And when they get it, misery follows.
- B. Again, blasphemy and a failure to repent and seek God results from His punitive hand.

3. The Sixth Bowl – 16:12-16

- A. Much – falsely – has been made of the "battle of Armageddon." But in reality the great battle isn't even described, only the outcome (ch 19). Actually, it is more accurate to describe it as "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (16:14), for the confrontation is merely the outpouring of ultimate wrath upon the enemies of God and His people.
- B. The Euphrates is dried up – 16:12. As we have seen before (9:14), the Euphrates is figurative for a protective border, and the crossing or overflow of it suggests the approach of enemies. Hailey takes the "kings of the east" to be "forces gathered together as enemies of God's cause" (333) while McGuiggan sees them as "on their way to the battle of Arma-

geddon to face the foes on the beast's side" (228). Either way, the enemies of God will be annihilated.

C. The unclean spirits – 16:13-14. John sees unclean spirits from the mouths of the dragon, the (sea) beast and the (land) false prophet. John had previously seen the serpent/dragon spew floodwaters out of his mouth in an attempt to drown the woman (12:15), but the waters were swallowed by the earth. It was noted that the unbelieving swallow up Satan's lies and impurities and inadvertently protect the people of God.

1. The symbol of frogs only has one Biblical precedent – that of the second plague against the Egyptians, and there may be no other symbolism here except that connection. Beyond this, guesses are just that ... guesses.
2. The spirits of demons perform signs which entice the enemy forces to gather to the battle. In later chapters Rome will be identified as the prime enemy, but other vassal nations and kings take their lead from Rome and jointly persecute the church.

D. The impending battle – 16:15-16.

1. "I am coming as a thief" would cause knowledgeable readers to immediately think of Christ (3:3; Lk 12:39ff; 1 Th 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10). There is a strong sense of inevitability now, and those who watch and remain pure will be blessed in the coming battle.
2. Armageddon, literally Mount Megiddo, is yet another OT reference. Megiddo was a famous field of battle to the southeast of Mt. Carmel, where Deborah and Barak defeated Jabin and Sisera, where Gideon defeated the Midianites, where Saul and Jonathan were killed and where Ahaziah and Joram were killed by Jehu. Sadly, it is also the site where Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho who was marching through the land to help the Assyrians against Babylon. The battle about to unfold in this figurative Mount of Megiddo would surpass all the others as Jesus vindicates His saints.

4. The Seventh Bowl – 16:17-21

A. This bowl is poured out into the air, which may refer to the realm of Satan's dominion (Eph 2:2), but it could also mean "universal" as air is present with and surrounds all creation.

1. "It is done" ties back to 14:8: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen that great city" (cf. 21:6). After an outpouring of natural calamity (16:18), the great city of Babylon is divided into three parts, and all the cities of the nations fall. Similar language in Ezekiel (5:2ff) refers to Jerusalem's fall. A methodical dismantling and destruction is the idea.
2. Fleeing islands and disappearing mountains (16:20) are characteristic of apocalyptic language (6:14; Ezk 26:18). The whole face of the earth (politically and socially) will be reconstructed by such upheavals brought upon sinful man by the justice of God.

B. As a final measure, enormous hailstones batter the still-blaspheming rebels (16:21).

1. The Imagery – 17:1-6

Summary introduction: “Satan has three approaches by which he seeks to destroy the work and people of God: (1) Political or brute force, symbolized by the beast out of the sea; (2) false religion, whether paganism or perverted revealed religion – apostates who hold and teach false doctrines – symbolized by the beast out of the earth; and (3) the world of lust, all that appeals to the flesh or mind (Eph. 2:3; 1 John 2:15-17), represented by the harlot. Against these three the early church waged relentless war; and against these the saint of today must stand immovable and uncompromising” (Hailey 342).

A. John is approached by one of the seven “bowl” angels and is given a “front row seat” for the events that follow (cf. 21:9 where John is given a different perspective).

1. Judgment is coming to “the great harlot who sits on many waters” – 17:1. The angel clearly identifies the waters as “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” – 17:15.
2. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with this harlot, and inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication – 17:2.

B. John is then carried “in the Spirit” (likely a vision) to the wilderness. This is not like the wilderness where the woman was protected and provided for by God (12:6, 14). This wilderness seems to be one devoid of God’s presence or providence.

1. A “woman” (harlot – 17:5) is sitting on a scarlet beast. The beast is “full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (17:3). This is the beast of 13:1ff, a great empire raised up by the dragon to war against God’s people. The center of the great empire of John’s day was the city of Rome, a city that represented the worst of man’s ungodly, self-centered, polluted mindset. “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” – 17:18. For me, it is hard to get anything other than Rome out of that description.
2. She is portrayed with the enticements of harlotry: arrayed in purple and scarlet; adorned with gold/gems/pearls; bearing a cup of abomination and filthiness of fornication – 17:4. Her forehead was inscribed with her character: mystery; Babylon the great; mother of harlots and abominations. The city of Rome rode on the back of a powerful, sweeping empire comprised of subjugated nations. Her powerful army and cruel retribution brought the nations into subservience, but many stayed under Rome’s control because of what they could get out of cooperation with her. Vassal kings could tap into Rome’s wealth, power and supply of endless fleshly gratifications. And so the imagery of harlotry is a fitting description of the relationship between Rome and her allies: “partners in crime, vice and persecution,” vassals selling out the principles of justice and decency in order to retain the favors of the harlot who supplies their pleasures.

3. Hailey summarizes: “As the beast out of the sea was a synthesis of the three great beasts before it, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Macedonia ... so this harlot is a combination of the characteristics of the harlots of old: the conquest, rapine, and cruelty of Nineveh; the commerce of Tyre; the pleasures of Babylon; and the religious whoredom of Jerusalem. Truly, Rome was an adequate symbol of all that had gone before her” (344).
- C. Further, the harlot is “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6). The picture is horrible and pathetic: Rome’s subjects are drunk – dispossessed of their senses – with her “fornication” (trading loyalty for her pleasures). The harlot is intoxicated with absolute power and its ability to demand every form of self-gratification, including self-ascribed deity. They would kill all who defied her, and Christians could not do otherwise. How crafty was the adversary! Christians were model citizens; any kingdom of men should be glad to have an entire population of them. But emperors were enticed to believe they were gods and demanded from Christians what they would not give – and they wrongly believed such resistance was a sign of rebellion and disloyalty.

2. The Meaning – 17:7-18

- A. The angel sees the “shock” on John and he inquires as to why he marvels at the sight. He then gives an explanation – one which has sparked centuries of debate and disagreement.
- B. The beast and the seven kings – 17:8-11.
 1. The beast – Was, is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit, and will go to perdition. The unbelieving world will marvel at the beast – 17:8. The abyss or bottomless pit represents demonic activity, and by Satan’s (i.e., the dragon’s) influence and urging the “seas” caused the beast to rise up (13:1ff). From a spiritual perspective, the Roman Empire’s main reason for existing was an instrument of persecution against the saints or offspring of the woman. Historically, Rome did not always push this agenda. Different emperors such as Nero, Domitian and others that followed engaged in state persecution to various degrees, and others did not do so at all. So, the beast was/is not in the sense of its persecuting nature.
 2. The seven kings – These are distinguished from the ten horns/kings in 17:12. Attempts to specify certain Roman emperors end up in contradictions and inconsistencies, and they also suddenly switch from a figurative treatment of these images to a literal one. Another example of this is when commentators literalize 17:9: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” Nearly all will refer to the “seven hills of Rome,” a description mentioned by numerous historical writers. And while I believe Rome is in view, why the need to suddenly literalize? “Seven” and “ten” have carried symbolic meaning throughout this book; why change now?
 3. The two descriptions in 17:10-11 are similar: both the kings and the beast have seen their better days; their end is approaching but is not here yet. Persecutions will continue sporadically until the Lamb completely vanquishes the enemy. If John’s immediate warning concerns Domitian’s reign and persecutions, he will “go to perdition” and so

will all who follow in his steps. This is what Christians then needed to know: Rome will continue for a while yet, and severe persecutions will come and go, but all these efforts will eventually lead to ruin and the overthrow of ungodliness by the Lamb.

- C. The ten horns/kings – 17:12-17. (Who-)whatever these are they appear to first be allied with and then cannibalize the harlot. Keep in mind the description of the fourth kingdom as revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. The feet and legs of the statue were mixed with iron and clay; i.e., there was no adhesion, no true unity or integral strength in the image. While this was true of most culturally mixed empires, it appears to be a particular weakness of Rome, leading to its downfall.
1. These kings “have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” – 17:12. Rome could not maintain control of all their territory without vassal kings, such as the Herods. While they were not strictly part of the central Roman political system, and though they didn’t have independent rule, they were crucial to the overall success of “the beast.” They ruled by Rome’s permission and delegation.
 2. The vassal kings “give their power and authority to the beast” – 17:13. This does not mean that they have inherent authority; rather, the power they wield in their own culture and realm is put at the beast’s disposal. They are of “one mind”; the whole works through the sum of its parts, but the parts are not a sound, integrated unit.
 3. “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (cf. 16:14). The network of vassals and even their subordinates (like Felix, Festus, the Philippian magistrates, etc.) will join in the persecution of God’s people, but only to curry and retain favor with Rome. They will prostitute themselves with the harlot, and this will bring the wrath of the Lamb against them.
 4. The picture of this conglomerate kingdom is in 17:16: The harlot sits on the waters (various ethnic/political regions of the Western world); the waters are also the beast, which is the epitome of all that is morally worldly and wicked. The world is against the humble and peaceful – the saints. And without using carnal weaponry, that seemingly overmatched kingdom will win in the end.
 5. For reasons not explained, the ten horns/kings now turn on the harlot and rend her to pieces, “for God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose” – 17:16-17. This is typical of many OT situations where God brought confusion, animosity and rebellion into the hearts of His enemies resulting in their destruction (Jud 7:22; 1 Sam 14:20; 2 Chr 20:23). God is able not only to manipulate physical creation for His purposes; He can motivate men to achieve His aims even when they do not intend to do so (without violating their free will; cf. Cyrus’ decree as a positive example).
 6. “Until the words of God are fulfilled” (17:17) indicate who is in ultimate control. It is not Rome; it is not the emperor; it is not the provincial rulers. It is “the King of kings and Lord of lords.” How crucial to remember this when the blood of saints is being shed and the civil powers gloat in their cruelty!

1. Babylon Is Fallen; God Has Remembered Her Iniquities – 18:1-8

- A. A powerful, glorious angel is now dispatched from heaven to proclaim the downfall of Babylon – 18:1-2. Again, this was first declared in 14:8, but the visions of John since then have documented various elements of that coming fall. This chapter emphasizes the shock and grief of the world – those who have committed fornication with the harlot, who have “become rich through the abundance of her luxury” (18:3) – who now lament the source of their own wealth.
1. The image of a once-great city being reclaimed by nature and overrun with beasts and vermin is rooted in the OT (Is 13:19-22; 14:22-23). This would have been as hard to foresee as Americans picturing New York or Chicago or San Francisco in total desolation, “ghost-towns” with tumbleweeds, banging shutters and coyotes prowling the dusty streets. But the day would come when Rome would no longer rule the world.
 2. God’s people are warned to remain separate from Babylon, “lest you share in her sins, and ... receive of her plagues” – 18:4 (cf. 2 Cor 6:17-7:1). Christians who maintain their faith in and loyalty to God have nothing to fear when judgment falls on the heathen.
 3. The punishment against Babylon is, in essence, reaping what she had sown – 18:5-7. When men gain power and luxuriate themselves in greed and violence, they begin to think they are above all accountability: “I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow” – 18:7; cf. Is 47:7ff. Sin is deceitful, blinding. It blocks out compassion, justice, the inevitability of death, the reality of a creator-judge who will bring all thoughts and actions to account. Men blunder along in a stupor of pleasure, greed, ambition and viciousness, “therefore her plagues will come in one day ... for strong is the Lord God who judges her” – 18:8.
 4. **Special Note:** For those who believe that Revelation is written in symbolic “code” so that the Romans will not understand the true nature of the message, I would assert that the Romans were a lot smarter than they are given credit for. This language would not have been that difficult to decipher, and are we so naïve to think that they couldn’t investigate the meaning of the book via torture, informants, scholars for hire, etc.? This section is quite clear in its overall message even if some details are uncertain.

2. The Merchants Bewail the Loss of Their Markets – 18:9-20

- A. The image here is of allies looking on from afar, watching their beloved harlot-city going up in flames. They are weeping, not for the tragedy of human loss or the wickedness that brought the judgment; instead, they weep for themselves, for they see their own lives turned upside down by the collapse of Roman rule – and with it commerce, law, protection, stability and all cultural elements that make for economic prosperity.

1. It may seem contradictory that the very kings who hated the harlot (17:16) now “weep and lament for her” (18:9). But this is not surprising, and the same thing would happen today if America were to fall. We are hated by the world, but the world richly prospers because of our markets and governance, etc. They “prostitute” themselves with us to get what they want, and if that were taken away they would lament *for themselves, not us*.
 2. The “one day” of judgment and downfall (18:8) becomes “one hour” in 18:10, 17, 19. It is sudden, or so it seems. God gives ample warning, and we have seen various lesser judgments designed to bring the wicked to repentance, but all to no avail. The seeming suddenness is due to the blindness of sin. Often, sinners cannot see the nature of their own actions or the consequences that are just around the corner. When disaster comes, it seems sudden.
- B. The merchants mourn “for no one buys their merchandise anymore” (18:11). A detailed listing of exotic products follows (18:12-16). Any history of the Roman Empire will document the extravagance, the waste, the total disregard for human and animal life in order to gratify their appetites. Their hunger for luxury was the engine of commerce. This imagery reflects the judgment against Tyre in Ezk 26:1-28:19.
1. The merchants “stand at a distance for fear of her torment” (18:15). At the end of the day, self-preservation outweighed any loyalty to Rome, and though they wept at the rising smoke, they refused to help (not that it would have done any good).
 2. The sailors also “stood at a distance” and cried, “What is like this great city? ... Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth” (18:18-19). It is their own business, their own wealth, going up in flames.

3. Babylon Shall Not Be Found Anymore – 18:21-24

- A. The downfall of Babylon is now pictured by a mighty angel casting a millstone into the sea: “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down ...” – 18:21.
- B. The imagery that follows is characteristic of OT prophecy: music silenced; craftsmen idled; food preparation stopped; light darkened; weddings halted. In other words, the daily activities of life grind to a halt. See similar ideas in Is 24:7-13; Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10.
- C. In this total destruction of Babylon/Rome, the kingdom of God and its citizenry are vindicated. Truly, it is the kingdom of God that shall never be destroyed. “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!” – 18:20. The prayers of the martyrs under the altar are being answered in God’s own time: “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth” – 18:24.

1. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb – 19:1-10

- A. This chapter continues the theme of the defeat of God's enemies, but the scene shifts to praise unto God for His great victory.
1. John hears "a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven" – 19:1. Throughout Revelation heaven has always been the source of glorification to God, the issuance of His judgments and the success of His cause. This multitude praises God for His salvation, glory, honor and power. He is also praised for His judgment against the great harlot: "He has avenged on her the blood of His servants" (19:2).
 2. A further "alleluia" (praise to Jehovah) follows: "And her smoke rises up forever and ever!" (19:3). The harlot idealizes all the corruption, greed and lust of Rome. Whereas the kings and merchants lamented her demise, heaven itself rejoices because her judgment was just.
- B. The 24 elders and four living creatures join in with their praise (19:4), and another voice from the throne calls upon all servants to do likewise (19:5). The multitudes again cry out in joy, "For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (19:6).
1. Then is announced, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, "for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (19:7). The analogy of the church to a bride has been previously used to describe saints (Eph 5:23-27; 2 Cor 11:2), which itself reflects God's relationship with Israel (Hos 2; Is 50:1; Ezk 16). McGuiggan notes that the feast of tabernacles was portrayed in ch 7 while ch 19 is a wedding feast.
 2. The bride is "ready"; "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" – 19:8. Note the different raiment of the harlot and the bride. Faithfulness to God despite the cost leads to a far different outcome than a life of blasphemy and worldly indulgence.
- C. John is so overcome by the scene that he falls at the feet of the one speaking. He rebukes John as a "fellow servant" and directs him to give homage to God – 19:10.
1. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" directs our attention to the entire focus of God's revelation. In this specific context, the voice seems to be emphasizing that all the focus of what is being revealed to John is Jesus. John should direct his worship and reverence to Him, not the source of the voice or anything else. The suffering is for Jesus; the victory will be by Jesus.
 2. This is the tenth time Jesus has been referred to in the book by name, and Jesus is always portrayed as powerful, glorified and victorious. This contradicts the idea that the book is "code" to hide the true meaning from enemies.

2. The Grisly Feast of the Doomed – 19:11-21

A. To amplify the foregoing observation about Jesus and prophecy, John now sees a vision of a victorious horseman-warrior who can be none other than Jesus – 19:11-16.

1. A white horse – White is always associated with purity or heavenly blessing/approval.
2. He was called “Faithful and True” (1:5; 3:14).
3. Judges and makes war in righteousness – Over and over the Scriptures declare that when God judges and punishes, it is justified. He has the right to hold individuals and nations accountable, as He is now doing to Rome.
4. Eyes like fire, many crowns on His head, a name that only He knows – Penetrating knowledge, absolute power (and thus victory) and a personal identity that only He knows to the fullest.
5. A robe dipped in blood; called “the Word of God” – The blood here is that of judgment, not redemption. John has seen rivers of blood flowing from the great winepress of judgment (14:14-20), and Is 63:1-6 speaks of the blood of God’s enemies staining His robes. In 19:15 He “treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” The Word of God is the embodiment of God’s laws and judgments – Jesus Christ.
6. The armies of heaven, also in clean, white fine linen, follow Him.
7. A sword protrudes from His mouth; “with it He should strike the nations.” “And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.” Again, how difficult would it be for the Romans to figure out who is under consideration and what is claimed for Him?

B. An angel “standing in the sun” now cries for all the birds of heaven to “come and gather together for the supper of the great God” – 19:17-21. This, however, is a different feast from the one mentioned previously (19:9).

1. This is not a banquet but a battlefield strewn with the bodies of small and great. Verses 18 and 21 connect: the kings, captains, mighty warriors, free and slave – all the constituent parts of society who opposed God’s people – are food for the birds.
2. Verses 19-20 address the aggregate: “the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet ... These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” The subject of final judgment at the end of time is not in view (note the different fates of the enemies: eaten by birds; cast into the lake of fire). It is tempting at the end of Revelation to deviate from the context and imagery of *limited* judgment and leap through time to the end of all things. While there are no doubt eternal *implications* to what befalls God’s people and their enemies, Revelation focuses specifically on the earthly situation (remember “shortly come to pass”). Being cast into a lake of fire is a graphic image of total destruction. God’s enemies get God’s wrath; God’s people get God’s blessing.

The Revelation

Lesson 24 – The Demise of Satan and Judgment of the Dead

1. The Binding of Satan – 20:1-3

Special Note: Almost all commentators who take a conservative view of Revelation deviate at this point from their own principles of exegesis. They emphasize through the book the immediate context of Revelation – that the fate of Rome is under consideration. But the imagery of chapter 20 drives them to depart from this and bring in the final judgment. I believe this is inconsistent and unnecessarily turns the book from its true purpose. My explanation will try to follow a consistent explanation of the figurative language of the visions. (I will draw heavily from McGuiggan’s commentary as I believe he best captures the meaning of the imagery.)

- A. The imagery portrays a **complete defeat** of the dragon, the Devil/Satan, relative to how he had been operative through the book; i.e., through the harlot, the beast and the false prophet. Their demise was described in the last chapter, but Satan is now dealt with.
- B. An angel from heaven binds the dragon with a great chain; he opens the pit and casts Satan in “and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more.”
 - 1. This description is not a limitation or curtailing or minimizing of Satan’s power ... it is *total defeat*.
 - 2. This is the meaning of “bound him for a thousand years,” which does not refer to a period of time but a *condition*. Figurative speech involving the number 1,000 stresses completeness, wholeness. Relative to Rome, Satan is completely defeated. This will be illustrated in an earthly sense when the day comes that Rome is gone and Christians are still worshiping, teaching and converting the lost.
 - 3. “But after these things he must be released for a little while.” After Rome passes on, there will be other agencies or tools of Satan by which he will attempt to destroy God’s people. But they will prove ineffective also. The “little while” reflects the same idea as previous figures of 42 months/1,260 days/time, times and half a time (11:2-3, 11; 12:6, 14) and 3½ days (11:11). The idea is brief and ineffective persecution during which God’s purposes via His people are not thwarted.
- C. Premillennialists, who do not honor the figurative language of Revelation, wind up with an exotic mixture of literal, figurative and current event images that completely distort the context and constantly need updating as their explanations and predictions fail.
 - 1. Even good Bible students will depart from previous principles of exegesis to suggest a coming time of Satan’s “release” where great floods of wickedness will overflow the earth. We must try to remain true to the nature of apocalyptic language: it is truth in picture form, truth that particularly addresses the struggles of early Christians.
 - 2. All that is noted here about the future pertains to Satan’s activity through Rome. Does

the defeat of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet suggest that Satan will be no longer active on the earth? No, he will still be active but not through Rome, and that activity will be just as impotent as was Rome to destroy the kingdom.

2. The First Resurrection – 20:4-6

- A. In contrast to the thousand years (utter defeat) of Satan’s efforts via Rome, martyrs in the cause of Christ “lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (20:4). Their reign is portrayed as sitting on thrones of judgment. Whereas civil authorities on thrones of Roman power had committed many saints to martyrdom, now the tables are turned.
- B. “This is the first resurrection” – 20:5b. McGuiggan suggests that 20:5a is parenthetical; it is almost a footnote saying that while the saints lived and reigned for 1,000 years (complete victory), the “rest of the dead” (i.e., the ungodly) *remained dead* (complete defeat).
- C. To whom does the first resurrection apply? “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection ... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (20:6). So, the first resurrection refers figuratively to the success of a cause, not a point on a timeline of events. First resurrection = victory of martyred saints.

3. Gog and Magog Defeated – 20:7-10

- A. A further truth is mentioned almost in passing; it is not part of Rome’s fall per se but anticipates the further activities of Satan in consequence of his defeat through Rome. As noted above, the concern undoubtedly will arise: Will the kingdom survive the onslaught of Rome only to be later defeated by an even stronger power? This part of the revelation answers that: “No. Rome was the best chance Satan had to destroy the kingdom. He failed, but he will not quit trying. Every other future effort will be likewise overthrown.”
- B. Ezekiel 37-39 provides the backdrop for this imagery.
 - 1. The condition of Israel is described as a valley full of dried bones (ch 37). They have been decimated by slaughter, deportation and fragmentation. But a national restoration is pictured as “a resurrection” – just as in Rev 20.
 - 2. Next Ezekiel sees a vast, international army coming against “a land of unwalled villages ... a peaceful people, who dwell safely ... having neither bars nor gates” (Ezk 38:10-12). “You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land ... I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O God, before their eyes” (38:16). Gog and Magog are a figure of any prospective enemy of God’s people. No matter the size, weaponry, funds, military genius or other earthly advantage, God will still defend His people and overcome their (and His) enemy.
 - 3. Finally, “My fury will show in My face ... and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground” (38:18, 20). Ezekiel continues to describe

the downfall of Gog much in the same way that Revelation describes the downfall of Rome. This supports the view that Revelation is not “new” language but reflects the way God has always described such events.

- C. Like previous descriptions of God’s victory over His enemies, brevity and restraint are the order of the day: “And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them” (20:9). No dramatic, epic battle scenes like Hollywood specializes in. This vast army from the four corners of the earth, outnumbering and surrounding the saints, is defeated in twelve words (in English).

4. The Judgment Scene – 20:11-15

- A. Again, the urge is to see this as the *final* judgment, but I do not believe that is in the scope of John’s revelation. Note for instance, this judgment concerns “the dead” (referred to four times). This designation in Revelation always refers to the unsaved. While God’s people are martyred, they are always pictured as spiritually alive and in heavenly bliss. Also, compare a similar judgment scene in Daniel 12:1-3.

1. 20:5 said parenthetically, “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” Now they are “standing before God” in a second resurrection, though not specifically so-called. Remember, the “first resurrection” is that of martyred saints who are living and reigning for 1,000 years.
2. The books and the Book of Life – 20:12. The dead are judged “according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Their works condemned them for they had blasphemed and murdered the people of God (11:7-10; 13:7; 16:5-6; 17:6). Their names were definitely not in the Book of Life (20:15).

- B. There is no place for the dead to hide: the sea and Death and Hades surrender the dead so they can be judged and cast into the lake of fire (20:15). Then Death and Hades are also cast into the lake of fire; “this is the second death” (20:14).

1. **Remember**, Revelation is a book of symbols, and we must ask, “What does the symbol mean?” The same is true here. What is the message of the judgment scene?
2. “Note once more, that the lake of fire is only a ‘second’ death with reference to those who died in the Roman conflict on Rome’s side. The beasts are thrown in alive – so are the Devil and death and Hades” (McGuigan 288).
3. While there may be a *foreshadowing* of final judgment, the images here don’t fit what we know of final judgment elsewhere in the NT. For example, the righteous have been alive long before (1,000 years) these wicked are judged. That does not square with John 5:28-29. Attempts to literalize what is obviously figurative end in contradiction. Dead/raised/judged/cast into the lake of fire signifies total defeat of all Roman allies who supported the empire’s effort to destroy the everlasting kingdom of God.

Overview

I agree with McGuiggan's assessment of chapter 21: it is not a description of heaven but of the triumphant church. He says,

“The Church has come through a major crisis. She had defeated her enemy (thanks to her Lord), and there follows in these two chapters a description of the triumphant and vindicated Family of God. He will talk about her ‘newness.’ He will speak about the ‘newness’ of her environment. He will talk of her beauty and purity. He will speak of her stability and strength. He will speak of her importance and her testimony. He will speak of her holiness.

“And each of these things he will set forth in different figures. For example, her new environment will be spoken of as a ‘new heaven and earth.’ He will speak of her beauty in the terms of an unbelievably precious city with golden streets and jeweled walls. He will speak of her purity and dedication to him under the figure of a bride. He will talk of her stability and strength under the figure of her ‘four-squaredness’ and her incredible walls of height and thickness. He will speak of her importance and testimony in terms of the light she, as a city, gives to the nations around” (292).

Many have taken for granted that the scene now shifts to heaven, and many of our songs of heaven borrow from this imagery, reinforcing the notion. But it seems more consistent to stay with the context and contrast the church's victory with the defeat of the dragon, beasts and harlot in chapters 18-19.

1. The Holy City; a Bride Adorned for Her Husband – 21:1-8

A. New heaven/earth/sea – 21:1. In 20:11 “the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.” That heaven and earth were the world of corruption, blasphemy and persecution that so tormented God's people. Now that has changed, not at the final judgment but at the demise of Rome.

1. See passages like Is 34:1-17 (destruction of Edom) and Nahum 1:1-14 (judgment upon Nineveh) where punishment of a rebellious, ungodly people is described as dismantling of the world (“mountains shall be melted with their blood”; “all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down”; “it shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever”; “rebukes the sea and makes it dry”; “dries up all the rivers”; “the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, the world and all who dwell in it”). This is judgment.
2. But what is victory, blessing, success of God's cause? A “new heavens and a new earth” (cf. Is 51:16; 65:17-19; 66:22). Isaiah anticipates a coming time when Judaism will be superseded by a spiritual kingdom. The law, land, worship, priesthood, rituals – all will change under Christ. And so it will be when the saints are freed from persecution.

- B. The holy city, New Jerusalem – 21:2. The church was already described as a holy city (11:2). As people, not a “place,” the city is “prepared as a bride,” (21:2); God dwells with His “people” (21:3); tears, sorrow, death and crying will be no more (21:4).
1. “Coming down out of heaven” – The holy city is not heaven but “*comes down out of heaven*” (21:2). Remember, in Revelation things “in” heaven, “from” heaven or otherwise associated with heaven are related to God, salvation, purity, victory, etc. (as opposed to things from the earth, abyss, sea, etc.).
 2. “Prepared as a bride” – This imagery was in 19:7-9 where the wife of the Lamb has made herself ready, “arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright.” These are victorious saints who maintained their faith in the crucible of persecution. Their fidelity to Christ has made them fit as a bride for her husband (contrast the vulgar harlot atop the beast).
- C. The tabernacle of God is with men – 21:3. This idea of God dwelling among men in close fellowship is abundant in the NT (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16-18; Eph 2:19-22; etc.). The way by which this is done – the development of a redeemed, purified people – will never be undone by evil forces. God will vindicate His people and continue to dwell with them.
- D. Again, it is easy to transfer the images of 21:4 to a heavenly context, and it is true that in the immediate presence of God all things threatening, hurtful and injurious will be gone. But that is not the immediate message of Revelation.
1. Is 65:19 anticipates a Messianic future: “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” The imagery of happiness and safety is common in describing Messianic fellowship to come.
 2. “The former things have passed away” in context is not referring to the physical creation; rather, it is the circumstances that gave rise to persecution and death of the saints. “No more death” is not a reference to 1 Cor 15:26; instead, it refers to what “death” has been in Revelation: persecution and martyrdom by a malevolent force. *That* death is no more, for God has destroyed the source of it – “Babylon.”
- E. “It is done!” harkens back to 16:17 with the seventh bowl being poured out – 21:6. “I am the Alpha and the Omega” refers to the completed purpose of the Lord (and though it has not been mentioned again, the seventh seal has been removed from the scroll and all has been accomplished). The purpose for allowing persecution, the purpose for letting Rome reach its blasphemous and bloody zenith, has been realized and brought to an end.
- F. A contrast: he who overcomes shall inherit all as God’s son (21:7), but those who succumb to the ungodliness of the world, represented by the harlot and the beasts, “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:8). Again, honoring the context, this is not a general statement of final judgment but the fate that befell the beast and false prophet (19:20), the devil (20:10), Death and Hades (20:14) and anyone not found in the Book of Life (20:15). At one time it looked like the cowardly, abominable, murderers were winning, but they have been defeated in the end.

2. The Glorious City – 21:9-21

A. The church was described in chapter 11 as a building – a temple. It was not portrayed as a glorious structure there; rather, it was measured and protected by God but allowed to be trampled under the feet of unbelievers. Here the picture is completely different.

1. Note first that the angel shows John “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” – 21:9. In any imagery, it is hard to get “heaven,” or a place out of this. “Wife” suggests what it always has in Revelation – *people*, God’s faithful people.
2. As in the opening verses of the chapter, John is shown “the great city, the holy Jerusalem.” What is described are God’s people in the form of a glorious city, those in whom God dwells. Is 60:14 speaks this way: “Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”

B. Images of the city:

1. Light: Illuminated by the glory of God – 21:11. This is likened to a clear jewel, jasper.
2. Security: “Great and high wall with twelve gates – 21:12-14. Twelve gates provide ample access, but even so it is secure as an angel guards each gate. Each of the gates is a pearl (21:21), giving rise to the euphemism of heaven as “the pearly gates.”
3. The gates had the names of the twelve tribes on them – 21:13. The three gates on each side is reminiscent of three tribes which camped on each side of the tabernacle.
4. The wall had twelve foundations which were inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles. Further, the wall was made of jasper (21:18), and the foundations of the wall were gems as seen in 21:19-20. This further identifies the city as people; the composite of God’s faithful ones through the ages who have all been vindicated by this great victory over Satan and his allies.
5. Measurement: The angel held a gold reed to measure the extent of the city – 21:15-17. By any standard, the city is massive; a cube with each side measuring 12,000 furlongs or stadia (1,500 miles). Literally, such a structure would cover all Europe and reach far into space. What does the imagery suggest? Invincibility, dominance, overwhelming capacity. City-states of history, particularly Babylon, were glorious creations of man. The mention of Babylon conjured up power, ingenuity, glamor, wealth, etc. The mention of Rome was probably many things: raw, indulgent power; wealth; self-will; extravagance, etc. But God’s city – His people – excels anything man can imagine. Glorious, rich, victorious, permanent, awe-inspiring – the Lord’s church is all this, and more.

[Note: We will cover 21:22-27 in the last lesson.]

1. The New Jerusalem (continued) – 21:22-22:5

A. The “outer structure” of the bride/city has been described; now the picture turns to the inner workings. Again, I believe it is more consistent to see this imagery of the triumphant church in the world rather than glorified in heaven.

1. No separate temple – 21:22. The literal temple indicated separation between man and God. Only the priests could enter, and only the high priest into the holy of holies. But in the spiritual city “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” Every Christian has full access to fellowship with God and all the blessings He extends to His people.
2. Eternal “day” – 21:23. Again, Isaiah uses similar language: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory” (60:19). Night or darkness are metaphorical references to evil and ignorance. But among the saints, the light of God’s truth and character always illuminates. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness ... you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Th 5:4-5). In view of “eternal day,” the “gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there” (21:25). The open gates signify safety and access.
3. Nations walk in its light; kings bring glory and honor – 21:24, 26. This image is perplexing if the picture is of heavenly glory. “Nations” always stand for the unredeemed, those on the outside. How could “nations” walk in the light of the city of heaven? But if the reference is to the victorious church on earth, it makes sense. God’s people will go on shining their light upon the world even though it appeared they would be destroyed. Note again Isaiah’s similar picture: “The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you ... Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession” (60:10-11).
4. Nothing that defiles – 21:27. Why would this even be said if John is seeing a picture of heaven after judgment? There would be no evil to enter, in that case. “Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you” (Is 52:1). Yet again we see the precedent of Isaiah speaking in this very way concerning a messianic future. Israel had long been compromised by unfaithful Jewish elements who turned to idols or practiced wickedness in violating Mosaic law. But entrance into the city/church will be on the basis of purification from sin; no one can be united with Christ without the proper spirit and response to the Lord’s own conditions of salvation.

B. Both McGuiggan and Hailey note that the next section draws upon imagery of Eden. Hailey observes: “A close relationship between these verses and the first few chapters of Genesis is readily apparent. In Eden there was a garden, a river, the tree of life, man’s

disobedience and separation from these, a curse pronounced on the serpent, the soil and indirectly, upon man, for it brought death and separation from God. In the city of God, the eternal Eden of the redeemed, there is the river of water of life, the tree of life, the absence of a curse, and a perfect and full fellowship of the redeemed with God. What was lost in Eden is now fully restored; God's purpose is achieved" (420; note Hailey's view that this is heaven, rather than the triumphant church on earth).

1. River of water of life (proceeds from throne) – 22:1, 17. In an arid region, water is truly the gift of life, and as such it shows up in prophecy (Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8; Ezk 47:1-12). Jesus also spoke of giving "living water" to those who would come to Him (Jn 4:10).
2. The tree of life – 22:2. Fruit is produced continually and access is free ("in the middle of its street"). "And the leaves ... were for the healing of the nations." How can this be true of heaven? There will be no "nations"; i.e., unregenerate, to be healed. But as it relates to the church, life-giving water and eternal life will constantly be available through the gospel taught and embodied by the saints.
3. No more curse – 22:3. Whereas in Eden sinful man was barred from the garden, now free access to the throne is given to the servants of God.
4. See His face; name on foreheads – 22:4. To see God face to face is a figure describing intimate fellowship with Him (Moses – Num 12:8; cf. Ex 33:12-23; Job 42:5). Literally, no man can see God and live, but figuratively we see Him "face to face" by virtue of His revelation to us and by enjoying a close relationship of protection and providence. The idea of a name written on saints identifying them with God has been seen in 3:12; 14:1.
5. No night; God gives light – 22:5. We noted this earlier in 21:23, 25, but contrast this eternal day with the "lake which burns with fire and brimstone" into which the enemies have been cast. The source of light is completely different; one indicates complete destruction while the other suggests a warm glow of comfort and well-being.

2. I Am Coming Quickly – 22:6-21

- A. Three times in the closing exhortations "I am coming quickly" is repeated (22:7, 12, 20). This reflects how the book opened (1:1 – "shortly must take place"; 1:3 – "the time is near"). The angel says he came to reveal things "which must shortly take place" (22:6).
 1. This creates a big problem for those who say that Revelation concerns things yet future.
 2. To complicate the matter for these exegetes, John is told by the angel "do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (22:10). A comparison with Daniel shows that Daniel was told to seal his book "for the time of the end" (12:4, 9). In retrospect, Daniel was speaking of things that would occur 500 years later; this was considered so distant that the prophecy should be sealed. But John is told *not to seal* his prophecy due to the nearness of the fulfillment. How, then, can anyone argue that the events have not yet been fulfilled 2,000 years later?

B. A blessing and a curse are pronounced regarding the handling of the Revelation:

1. Blessing – “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7). “These words are faithful and true” (22:6); thus, anyone who observes them faithfully will enjoy the richness pronounced upon the saints herein (cf. 22:14).
2. Curse – “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 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” (22:19; cf. 22:15).
3. This should cause anyone some trepidation as he approaches the Revelation, yet there are so many who have completely adulterated the message of the book. They have failed to understand the symbolic language, or they have figurized and literalized at will, thus handling the book in a very inconsistent manner. While this principle holds true for all of God’s word, these specific warnings are issued concerning the Revelation. Surely God anticipated all the mishandling of the book that we witness in our own day, but of immediate concern would have been those who would corrupt it when the initial onslaught against the church was unfolding. To undermine the prophecy by addition or subtraction would undermine those whose strength against persecution would be bolstered by John’s message.

C. A second episode of John falling at the feet of an angel to worship occurs (22:9); he seems so overwhelmed by what he is seeing and hearing that he instinctively seeks to honor the power before him. Like before, he is rebuked and directed towards God. One application which is relevant to the events of the day: If a mighty angel of God is not an appropriate subject of worship, then is a Roman emperor?

D. What is the angel indicating in 22:11? Consider Hailey’s thoughts: “Each individual chooses the class in which he is identified. One’s actions grow out of the basic character he develops ... for himself. As he chooses his course he persists in traveling that path. He either practices sin, sinking deeper into his unrighteousness and moral defilement, or he seeks righteousness, rising higher and higher in holiness ... One either grows in grace and stature as a Christian or sinks deeper into hardness and indifference as a sinner; there is no standing still ... There is a point of no return (Heb. 6:4-6)” (428). As the words of the prophecy unfold, those in each category will receive the outcome they have chosen.

E. Jesus makes a direct statement as the prophecy closes, identifying His message, His nature (22:16) and issuing His invitation for all to come “and take the water of life freely” (22:17). What a heartbreak it must be to God for lost and dying men to repeatedly reject His open invitations to receive life!

Conclusion: It is hoped that this study has taken some of the difficulty out of studying Revelation. Whether we have captured its essence or not, I am convinced that the key of understanding the figures is OT terminology. In future study I hope you will rely heavily on previous prophecy to guide you through the images of this book. It is difficult, but it should not be scary.