



# REVELATION

*A REFORMED READING*



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Zack Flipse



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## Bibliography

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# SETTING THE STAGE

## *The Setting*

- *Revelation* was written around 95 A.D. Rome has become very powerful, though still in its early years.
- Domitian is emperor of Rome.
- “Caesar worship” has been a long tradition in Rome, starting around 30 A.D. after the death of Julius Caesar. The first temple for Caesar worship was built in Pergamum.
- Though this practice of Caesar worship was common, Domitian is the first emperor to *require* all citizens to worship and burn incense to him. Defectors would be killed by lions, fire, crucifixion, and other forms of torture.
- Domitian is well known for persecuting both Jews and Christians. During his reign, Christians often refer to Rome as “Babylon,” because of the similarities to the demands of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3).

*“[Domitian] was a devil. He was the worst of all things—a cold-blooded persecutor ...In particular he launched his hatred against the Jews and the Christians. When he arrived in the theatre with his empress, the crowds were urged to rise and shout: ‘All hail to our Lord and his Lady!’ He enacted that he himself was a god. He informed all provincial governors that government announcements and proclamations must begin: ‘Our Lord and God Domitian commands...’ Everyone who addressed him in speech or in writing must begin: ‘Lord and God.’ Here is the background of the Revelation. All over the Empire men and women must call Domitian god—or die. Caesar worship was the deliberate policy; all must say: ‘Caesar is Lord.’ There was no escape”*  
(Barclay, 19).

- Political enemies of Rome who were *not* killed were sent to any number of prison islands. Prisoners were free to roam about the island, but (according to Sir William Ramsay) they could expect to be
  - Constantly shackled
  - Barely clothed
  - Hungry
  - Sleeping on the floor
  - Worked hard under military oversight
  - Beaten frequently
- Patmos was one of these prison islands. It sits in the Mediterranean Sea between the shores of Corinth and Ephesus in modern day Turkey. It is small, rocky, and barren.
- The author of *Revelation*, John, is there (Rev. 1:9).
- It has been long believed by the church that this is the Apostle John, who was a disciple of Jesus. However, that has often been disputed.
- John was banished to the island of Patmos for his commitment to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ.

*“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”*

*(Revelation 1:9)*

- John addresses his letter to seven churches in Asia Minor – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
- These churches form a small circle in modern day Turkey, east of Patmos. Some believe John’s letter was passed from church to church, over and over again to continually encourage churches experiencing persecution from Rome.
- *Revelation*, then, is a letter from John to the churches in the same way *Galatians* is a letter from Paul to a church. It’s important to remember this context.

*“All Christians agree that the letters to the Colossians, Galatians and Romans convey the word of God to Christ’s people in all subsequent ages, but the messages of those letters reach us most effectively as*



*we grasp their intention for the churches to which they were originally addressed. That holds good for the Revelation of John equally as for the rest of the NT letters.”*

*(Beasley-Murray, 1422)*

- Contained in the letter, however, is a prophetic vision of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. The “hybrid” nature of the book makes it challenging.
- Most of the images John sees in his vision are familiar. They draw from *Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekial, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah, and Matthew.*
- The numbers John uses are also intentional. They draw from elsewhere in Scripture and have specific meaning:
  - “3” represents completion, or eternity
  - “7” represents perfection
  - “6” represents falling short of perfection, or fallenness
  - “12” represents God’s people
  - “1,260 days,” “42 months,” “three and a half years,” “a time, times, and half a time” represents a period of persecution
- The overwhelming theme of the book is “Jesus Wins.”

## *The Theology*

- The best way to interpret *Revelation* is in context with the rest of Scripture.
- Too often, readers disregard Scriptures’ consistent message, re-interpret familiar signs and symbols, and come to very wrong conclusions about the book of Revelation.
- 4 major interpretations of the book exist
  - Premillennialism
  - Premillennial Dispensationalism
  - Postmillennialism
  - Amillennialism

*“Although the Christian Reformed Church is generally amillennialist in its eschatology and especially in its interpretation of the book of Revelation, its assemblies have never made a specific pronouncement to that effect. In response to a theological challenge to its underlying eschatology, the*

*synod of the CRC adopted...succinct statements in 1920, which implicitly reject dispensationalism and some facets of premillennialism..."*  
(*Christian Reformed Church Position Statement*)

- We'll use Jesus' own summary of the end times in Matthew 24-25 to develop an amillennial understanding of *Revelation*. Jesus tells us three important things:
  - The earth is in great distress
  - His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will happen suddenly
  - The judgment is swift and final

## Matthew 24-25

- In this text, Jesus responds to two questions from His disciples' regarding the end times (Matthew 24:3).
  - "When will [the destruction of the temple] happen?"
  - "And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"
- Jesus begins with a general warning about interpreting signs:

"Jesus answered [the disciples]: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of **wars and rumors of wars**, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but **the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** There will be **famines and earthquakes** in various places. All these are the **beginning of birth pains**. Then you will be handed over to be **persecuted** and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will **betray and hate each other**, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, **and then the end will come.**'"

(Matthew 24:4-14)

- Jesus describes terrible things that would happen *before* the end will come:
  - War
  - Anarchy/Civil War
  - Famine
  - Earthquakes
  - Persecution
- Jesus makes sure to say “the end is still to come,” “the beginning of birth pains,” and “then the end will come” to clearly show that these kinds of things would all take place *before* the end times.
- This list from Jesus shares a striking resemblance to the Seals we will read of in Revelation 6.
- Jesus also says that “*many* will come” in his name to deceive. He does not describe one, specific antichrist but a general spirit of deceit (The term *antichrist* does not appear in *Revelation*).
- Jesus now addresses the first question directly, “When will [the destruction of the temple] happen?” and describes Roman rule that will soon become oppressive.

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”  
(Matthew 24:15-16)

- Jesus references Daniel 9:27, 11:31; and 12:11. Daniel prophecies correctly—to the exact day—of the destruction of the temple by Babylon in 167 B.C.
- Jesus now prophecies correctly about the destruction of the second temple by Rome in 70 A.D., which many of His followers lived to see.
- In Matthew 24:15-26, Jesus describes the days leading up to the second temple’s destruction.
- Now Jesus will address the second question, “And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the **distress** of those days **‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’** At that time the sign of the Son of

Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud **trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other...**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and **they knew nothing** about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. **Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.**"  
(Matthew 24:27-31; 36-42)

- Jesus explains the state of the earth
  - "Distress of those days"
  - Sun and moon are darkened
  - Stars fall from the sky
  - Spiritual turmoil
- This list from Jesus shares a striking resemblance to the Trumpets and Bowls we will read of in Revelation 8, 9, and 16.
- Jesus also explains the suddenness of His return
  - Not even the angels nor the Son know the time
  - It will be like the days of Noah
  - We are to keep watch
- Jesus goes on to tell 4 stories about being ready
  - A homeowner and a thief (Matthew 24:43-44)
  - A servant in charge (Matthew 24:45-51)
  - The Parable of the 10 Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
  - The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by

my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' ...Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

(Matthew 25:31-34; 41)

- Jesus explains the finality of His coming
  - When He returns, He sits on His throne to judge
  - All the nations are brought before Him
  - He separates them into two groups: sheep and goats
  - The sheep are called to eternal glory
  - The goats are condemned to eternal fire
- There is no third place or extended judgment. Jesus' return is sudden, swift, and final. (The word *rapture* is not used in *Revelation*).
- This must inform our reading of *Revelation*.

## How to Read Revelation

- Revelation is a letter of encouragement written to churches in Asia Minor. Despite the judgment that John explains—judgment that seems familiar to churches enduring persecution—he often pauses to encourage the people with the recurring theme, “Jesus Wins.”
- Revelation is not a linear story, it's a cyclical story about judgment with frequent returns to the theme. We'll refer to these as “Interludes” in the story.
- The outline:
  - Chapter 1 – We're introduced to John and he explains his purpose.
  - Chapters 2-3 – The churches are given explicit encouragements.
  - Chapters 4-5 – Our first interlude explains the theme: Jesus defeated death on the Cross and now redeems the world.
  - Chapter 6 – We are told of the horrors that will occur post-Cross.
  - Chapter 7 – Another interlude interrupts to remind us that God cares for His people and has prepared a place for them.
  - Chapters 8-9 – John shares a prophecy of the End Times.
  - Chapters 10-11 – Another interlude reminds us that even during destruction and tribulation, God has a purpose for His church.

- Chapters 12-15 – A longer interlude tells in more detail how Jesus overcame Satan and how God’s people will overcome him, too.
- Chapter 16 – We return to the prophecy of the End Times.
- Chapters 17-18 – Satan’s kingdom falls.
- Chapter 19 – Jesus returns victoriously, triumphing by His blood.
- Chapter 20 – There is a final, anticlimactic battle.
- Chapters 21-22 – John gives a description of Heaven.
- *Revelation* is applicable to daily life
  - Jesus was, is, and will be victorious! Revelation brings us comfort.
  - Christians will experience suffering. Revelation brings us encouragement.
  - Satan is still rebelling against God. Revelation brings us a warning.
  - There will be judgment. Revelation brings us a call.

# 2

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## THE INTRODUCTION

### *Revelation 1*

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”

(Revelation 1:1-3)

- *Revelation* begins much like the other books of prophecy. “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1) is similar to the common beginning “The word of the Lord.” We see the latter in almost every book of prophecy:

“The word of the Lord came to [Jeremiah]”

(Jeremiah 1:2)

“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea”

(Hosea 1:1)

“The word of the Lord that came to Joel”

(Joel 1:1)

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah”

(Jonah 1:1)

“The word of the Lord that came to Micah”

(Micah 1:1)

“The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received”  
(Habakkuk 1:1)

“The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah”  
(Zephaniah 1:1)

“The word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai”  
(Haggai 1:1)

“The word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah”  
(Zechariah 1:1)

“An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi”  
(Malachi 1:1)

- John states the purpose of this vision: “The word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” This is the Gospel, and this is what John will try to convey.
- At the very beginning of the book, we see the hybrid nature of *Revelation*, as it switches from prophecy to letter.

“John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’”  
(Revelation 1:4-8)



- Like the common prophetic introduction, this is a common greeting in all but two Scriptural letters:
  - Romans 1:1-7
  - I Corinthians 1:1-3
  - II Corinthians 1:1-2
  - Galatians 1:1-3
  - Ephesians 1:1-2
  - Philippians 1:1-2
  - Colossians 1:1-2
  - I Thessalonians 1:1
  - II Thessalonians 1:1-2
  - I Timothy 1:1-2
  - II Timothy 1:1-2
  - Philemon 1:1-3
  - James 1:1
  - I Peter 1:1-2
  - II Peter 1:1-2
  - II John 1:1-3
  - III John 1:1
  - Jude 1:1-2
  
- John’s greeting is very Trinitarian.
- Christ’s death is mentioned three times, reiterating the theme: Jesus Wins.
  - “the first-born of the dead”
  - “freed us from our sins by his blood”
  - “even those who pierced him”
- His final refrain closely resembles Jesus’ words in Matthew 24
  - “visible even in the west” (Matthew 24:27)
  - “coming with the clouds” (Matthew 24:30)
  - “the earth will mourn” (Matthew 24:30)

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”  
 (Revelation 1:9)

- We discussed the historical context in chapter 1.
  - John is a “brother,” a leader in the church of Asia Minor
  - John is a “companion in the suffering”
  - He is exiled to Patmos for his faith

“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.’”

(Revelation 1:10)

- These are churches in Asia Minor experiencing persecution from Domitian, emperor of Rome.
- Throughout the book, these churches will be represented by lampstands, a symbol of their shining lights in a dark culture.

“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man,’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”

(Revelation 1:12-16)

- John sees Jesus “among the lampstands,” and gives a beautiful description of our Risen Lord as He reigns in heaven with all power!

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right

hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

(Revelation 1:17-20)

- There some important notes here:
  - We are reminded again of Christ’s victory over death
  - Christ holds the keys of death and Hell
  - He has dispatched angels to care for His church
- Notice the amount of references to Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is intentional. The theme of the book is “Jesus Wins,” and the intent of John’s writing is to encourage churches under heavy persecution. He will continue to reiterate this point chapter after chapter.

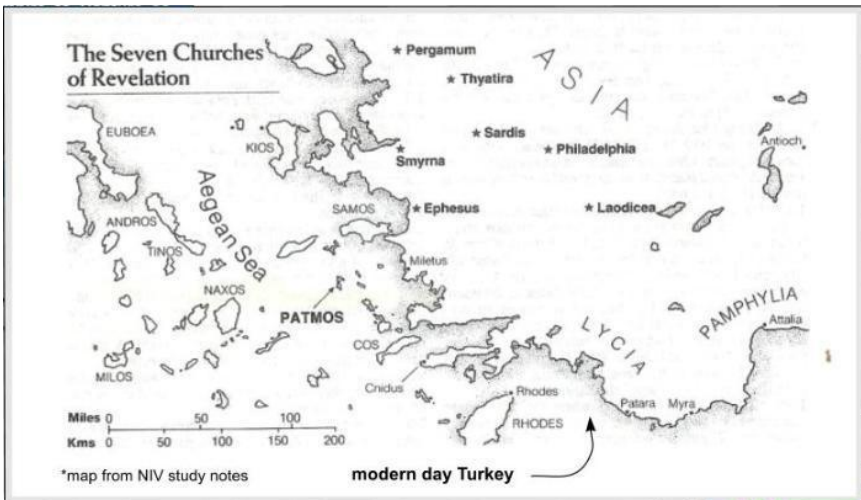


# 3

## THE CHURCHES

### Revelation 2-3

- John now passes along specific encouragements and instructions for the seven churches to whom he is writing.
- We stated in chapter 1 that it was important to understand the context of the cities. We know much about these cities.
  - Scripture mentions many of them elsewhere.
  - Paul wrote to many of them.
  - Ignatius, an early church leader, wrote to many of them.
  - Many well regarded early church leaders served at these churches.
  - Roman history has preserved details of each city.
- Each section begins by restating one of the descriptions of Jesus from Revelation 1.
- Each section ends with an encouragement that will be restated later in *Revelation*.



# Ephesus

- Ephesus is mentioned first.
  - It was the largest city in Asia Minor.
  - It was a major port on the Mediterranean Sea, the first stop from Patmos.
- It's slogan was "The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia."

"Its position made Ephesus the wealthiest and the greatest city in all Asia and it has been aptly called the Vanity Fair of the ancient world"

(Barclay, 58)

- Ephesus was home to major religious sites.
  - The Temple of Artemis, Greek god of wilderness
    - Was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the largest temple the Greeks built
    - Considered a sanctuary for criminals
  - Multiple temples for Caesar worship
- The Apostle Paul started the Ephesian Church (Acts 19:1-20) and spent more time there than any other place. His letter to the Ephesians is included in Scripture.

"Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears'...When [Paul] had said this, he knelt down with [the Ephesian elders] and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."

(Acts 20:31, 36-38)

- Timothy and the Apostle John are among the bishops of the church in Ephesus. Timothy was likely bishop there at the time *Revelation* began circulating, but was killed by worshipers of Artemis shortly after.
- Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians.

“Your visit to me was a godsend. The warm affection your name inspires is yours by right of nature, as well as by virtue of your faith and your love for our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

(The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius)

- **John’s notes begin with encouragement that echoes what Paul, Ignatius and others have said about this church.**

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.”

(Revelation 2:1-3)

- **The Ephesians are constantly encouraged because of their commitment to Jesus in a city so committed to Satan.**
- **We hear from Paul and Ignatius of false teachers that tried to infiltrate the church there, but they were wisely sent away by the Ephesians.**

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”

(Acts 20:29-31)

“I did hear of a visit paid to you by certain men from another place, whose teaching was pernicious. However, you refused to allow its dissemination among you, and stopped your ears against the seed they were sowing.”

(The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius)

- **Despite the commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the church is regularly chastised for its treatment of one another.**

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If

you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

(Revelation 2:4-5)

- It seems the Ephesian church has worked so hard to combat idol worship and false teaching in Ephesus that they have forgotten to meet and encourage one another in love.
- They are given three challenges
  - Remember
  - Repent
  - Do
- Both Paul and Ignatius spend considerable portions of their letters addressing the same topic.

“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

(Ephesians 4:1-3)

“I will certainly [write to you again] if the Lord reveals to me that you are all, man by man and name by name, attending your meetings in a state of grace, united in faith and in Jesus Christ, and are ready now to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread.”

(The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius)

- Despite these problems, they are again praised for their concern for true teaching. We will address the Nicolaitans in more specifics later in the chapter.

“But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

(Revelation 2:6-7)



- The promise that they will eat from the tree of life will be restated in Revelation 22:2.

## Smyrna

- Smyrna was another large port city.
- It was widely known for its beauty.
- There were many temples to Greek gods, including Zeus and Aphrodite.
- There was a large Jewish population in Smyrna, and they were hostile toward Christians.
- Ignatius also wrote a letter to the church in Smyrna.
- The great church father Polycarp was an influential part of the church, and later became their bishop.

“It so happens that one of the best known Christians in the early church was probably sitting in the congregation when this letter was read. This was Polycarp, who later became Smyrna’s bishop and was martyred about 160 A.D. (Beasley-Murray, 1428).

- Jews have been informing on Christians to Rome, so persecution here seems to be especially bad.

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”  
(Revelation 2:8-11)

- The Jewish informants are “synagogues” or “vessels” of Satan because they are aiding in intense persecution of Christians.
- “Ten days” is a symbolic term, a phrase that meant “a short time.”

- Polycarp and many of the members of the church in Smyrna were eventually imprisoned and martyred.
- Smyrna is one of two churches to not receive a rebuke.
- The promise that they will not suffer a second death will be restated in Revelation 20:6.

## Pergamum

- Pergamum was the long-standing capitol city of Asia. This made Pergamum the center of Caesar worship for all of Asia, and earns it the title “Satan’s seat” in *Revelation*.
- It was not on a major trade route, but was still a major cultural center.
- The temple to the Greek god Asclepius was particularly striking for Christians there.
  - Asclepius is worshiped as “Asclepius the Savior”
  - He is represented by a snake
  - Greek mythology claims he once raised himself from the dead

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

(Revelation 2:12-16)

- Like the other churches, Pergamum is praised for steadfast faith despite difficult surroundings.
- Unfortunately, some of these outside influences have begun to influence the church.
  - Teaching of Balaam
  - Nicolaitans

- Balaam’s story is told in the Old Testament. God would not allow Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24). Josephus explains how Balaam was able to cause Israel’s fall without a curse.

“Set out the handsomest of such of your daughters as are most eminent for beauty, and proper to force and conquer the modesty of those that behold them, and these decked and trimmed to the highest degree you are able. Then do you send them to be near the Israelites...and if they entreat them to stay, let them not give their consent till they have persuaded them to leave off their obedience to their own laws and the worship of that God who established them”

(Antiquities of the Jews, Book 4, Chapter 6)

“The men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor.”

(Numbers 25:1-3)

- “The teaching of Balaam” was sexual promiscuity.
- Similarly, the Nicolaitan belief was about gratifying sinful desires in belief that Christ’s forgiveness would cover any willful sinful behavior.

“Must a Christian be so very different? The Nicolaitans were suggesting that there was no reason why a Christian should not come to terms with the world.”

(Barclay, 68).

- It seems that in Pergamum, the pressures of culture and of persecution were changing the convictions of the Christians.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

(Revelation 2:12-17)

- The promise of a new name will be restated in Revelation 22:4.

# Thyatira

- Thyatira was the least important of the cities listed, and little is known about it. Yet, they receive the longest letter.
- It was not a center for idol worship and no threat of persecution existed.
- People there were mostly blue-collar tradesmen. Lydia is from Thyatira.

“One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

(Acts 16:14)

- Tradesmen belonged to guilds—similar to trade unions today—that shared work and fixed prices. Regular guild meetings would begin and end with sacrifices to gods.

“The Christians could not join any trade guild for all the guilds had a common meal as a central part of their practice which might well be held in a heathen temple and would largely consist of meat offered to idols. His abstention from guild membership was equivalent to commercial suicide”

(Barclay, 107)

- This was a huge economic and social challenge for Christians

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servant into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”

(Revelation 2:18-23)

- Thyatira seems to struggle with the same false teachings as the other churches. Notice Jezebel’s teaching leads people to:
  - Sexual immorality
  - Eating of food sacrificed to idols
- Jezebel may refer to a specific person or a specific false teaching. Either way, it is the same as Nicolaitan teaching: Christians can partake in worldly things. In Thyatira in particular, this was probably an excuse for Christians to join guilds.
- Jezebel’s “children” refers to those who follow this false teaching.

“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

(Revelation 2:24-29)

- “Satan’s so-called deep secrets” probably refers to Gnosticism, another common false teaching at the time. It taught that all material was bad and all spiritual was good.
- The Apostle’s Creed was written to combat Gnosticism.
- The promise to receive the morning star will be restated in Revelation 22:16

## *Sardis*

- Long before even Jesus was born, Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world. Its location on top of a high hill made it impenetrable.
- At the height of its power, Sardis was an incredibly wealthy city, too.
- Pride and “blind confidence” led to laziness, and eventually their repeated downfall.

“Twice Sardis had been taken by sneak attack, with forces coming over the supposedly impregnable acropolis.”

(Gorman, 94)

- By the time John wrote to them in *Revelation*, Sardis was a shell of its former self.
- The church in Sardis seems to share that same lazy, “blind confidence.”

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

(Revelation 3:1-6)

- The church in Sardis is rebuked for resting on their reputation. Jesus calls them to keep working, because their work is not yet complete.
- Sardis is the only church that experiences no false teachings or opposition.

“A church which is so lethargic as to fail to produce a heresy is mentally dead; and a church which is so negative as to fail to produce opposition is dead in its witness to Christ.”

(Barclay, 118).

- The promise that their names would never be removed from the book of life will be restated in Revelation 21:27.

<b>Church</b>	<b>Commendation</b>	<b>Condemnation</b>	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Promise</b>
Ephesus	Works, toil, endurance; intolerance of evil, suffering without growing weary; hatred of Nicolaitans'	Abandoned initial love	Remember from where fallen; repent; do works as previously. Otherwise: removal of lampstand	Ear from tree of life
Smyrna	Affliction, poverty, slander from those who claim to be Jews	None	Don't fear suffering; some jailed; 10 days of affliction. Be faithful til death.	Crown of life, escape from second death
Pergamum	Holding fast to Name in city of Satan's throne, even with martyrdom	Some follow Balaam in idolatry/sexual immorality (= Nicolaitans)	Repent. Or: Christ will come to make war against Balaam...	Hidden manna, white stone with a new name
Thyatira	Works: love, faith service, endurance; recent works greater than earlier ones	Tolerance of Jezebel, false prophet of idolatry/sexual immorality...	Distress to adulterers, unless they repent; death to children of Jezebel; others: hold fast	Authority over nations to rule them, morning star
Sardis	A few have not soiled clothes but walk with Jesus in white and are worthy	Name/reputation of being alive, but really dead; works imperfect or incomplete	Wake up, strengthen what remains; obey, repent; Or: Christ to come like thief	Clothed like faithful in white robes; Christ will not blot our name from book of life...
Philadelphia	Works; kept Christ's word about endurance and have not denied his name despite having little power	None	Synagogue of Satan (= false Jews) will bow before them and learn Christ loves them; protection from universal trial; hold fast	Christ will make them a pillar in temple of God, write God's name on them, name of new Jerusalem and Christ's own new name
Laodicea	None	Neither cold nor hot in works, but lukewarm; not rich but wretched, poor, blind, naked, pitiable	Wishes cold or hot; about to be spit from mouth; be earnest, repent; Christ knocks at door, will enter and eat with anyone who opens	A place with Christ on his throne

(Paraphrased from Gorman, 88-90)

# Philadelphia

- Philadelphia was a “city plant” the Greeks started to spread their language and culture to Asia. It is the youngest city in the list.
- The city was the victim of constant earthquakes and tremors. As a result, most of the city was crumbling and uninhabitable.
- Most people lived in the country, where land was very fertile. They yielded impressive grape crops at Philadelphia.
- Philadelphia shares several things in common with Smyrna:
  - There was a Jewish population persecuting Christians.
  - Ignatius traveled there and wrote to their church.
  - They receive no rebuke here in *Revelation*.
  - The Christian church still exists there today.

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”

(Revelation 3:7-9)

- Compare these verses to the ones written to Smyrna in Revelation 2:9: “I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”
- Ignatius spends much of his letter connecting the Old and New Testaments and showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. This may have been an encouragement in the face of Jewish slander of Christians.

“I am clinging for refuge to the Gospel message as though to the incarnate Christ, and to the Apostles as the collective ministry of the Church. Not, indeed, that the Prophets do not have a place in our hearts as well, since they too proclaimed the Gospel in their preaching, and set their hopes on Him. They waited in expectation of Him, and through their faith in Him they have obtained salvation within the unity of Jesus Christ...All the same, if anyone



should make use of them to propound Judaism to you, do not listen to him. Better hear talk of Christianity from a man who is circumcised than of Judaism from one who is not.”

(The Epistle to the Philadelphians)

- The city of Philadelphia endured several name changes throughout its short history, so the promise to receive a permanent name from God would have been meaningful.

“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

(Revelation 3:10-13)

- The promise of a new, permanent name will be restated in Revelation 21:2.

## *Laodicea*

- Laodicea was an incredibly wealthy town known for banking and commerce. They were so well resourced, they needed little aid from Rome.
- Much of their commerce came through wool and garment trade.

“One of the most famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was in that same year overthrown by an earthquake and without any relief from us recovered itself by its own resources.”

(Tacitus: Annals 14:27)

- They were not well strategically placed and had no water during summer months. They used viaducts to draw water from nearby rivers.
- Laodicea is near Colosse, and the two churches seem to have a relationship. Laodicea may be a “church plant” of Colosse.

“I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis...Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.”

(Colossians 4:13, 15-16)

- Laodicea is the only church that receives no encouragement.

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

(Revelation 3:14-16)

- Here Laodicean Christians are rebuked for having inactive faith. They have the ability to tap into living water, the River of Life, but are not.
- This references local geography. They are not healthy like other local churches, but are dry.

“Nearby Hierapolis was famed for its hot springs; Colosse, also near at hand, was noted for a cold, clear stream of excellent drinking water. Since, however, the River Lycus dried up in summer, Laodicea had to use a long viaduct for its water, which was not only tepid but impure and sometimes foul, making people sick. The church of that city had that effect on Christ.”

(Beasley-Murray, 1432)

- They are also specifically chastised for boasting in their wealth and commerce.

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears

my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

(Revelation 3:17-22)

- Despite their many shortcomings, the promise of forgiveness exists as true for the Laodiceans as it is for all mankind. If they repent, they will see Jesus.
- The promise to sit on the throne will be restated in Revelation 5:6.



# 4

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## THE THRONE ROOM

### *Revelation 4-5*

- The tone of *Revelation* makes a drastic switch again from “letter” to “prophecy” at the start of chapter 4.
- The text indicates this switch in 4:1 saying “After this,” or in other words, “next.” John moves through a “door standing open in heaven.”
- What we get is a stunning description of the Throne Room of God, including a picture of God Himself.

“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.”

(Revelation 4:1-3)

- The person sitting on the throne is God the Father. Notice God is not explained with physical characteristics, but instead in terms of light and color (Psalm 104:2).
- There is a rainbow around the throne, a symbol of mercy and a reminder of God’s covenant with all of creation (Genesis 9:12-17).

“Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature

was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.”

(Revelation 4:4-8)

- Now we get a description of the rest of the room.
  - The Holy Spirit is present (4:5)
  - A sea of glass separates God from others (4:6).
  - There are 24 worshipping elders (4:4).
  - There are four powerful creatures (4:7).
- These creatures are described as very powerful.
  - The lion, ox, eagle, and man are some of the most powerful creatures on earth.
  - They have multiple eyes and wings.
- This vision of the Throne Room of God shares striking similarities to Ezekial’s vision.

“I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings...Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces...Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning....Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome...Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in

the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.”

(Ezekiel 1:4-8, 10-11, 13-14, 22, 25-28)

- As we stated in the introduction, most of the images we find in *Revelation* are familiar in other places in Scripture. Ezekiel shares many similar images.
- Ezekiel and Revelation both speak of
  - A throne surrounded in light and a rainbow
  - Lightning around the throne
  - Four living creatures with wings: a lion, ox, eagle and man
- *Revelation* gives us additional information about how the creatures around the throne interact with God.

“Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’”

(Revelation 4:8-11)

- The creatures in Heaven worship God continually.
  - Even though the elders have received crowns, they don’t keep them but instead offer them back to God.
- God is worshiped because He is the creator

“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ But no one in heaven or on earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

(Revelation 5:1-4)

- We encounter a problem, a problem of fallenness: No one is worthy to receive the will of God.
- Romans wrote their wills on scrolls and sealed them with seven seals. In *Revelation*, the scroll represents God's will or plan for earth. In other words, who will receive earth when the last day comes?

"Many interpreters appeal to the fact that in the Roman world seven seals was the usual way of attesting the validity of a last will and testament. A will was witnessed by seven witnesses and seven seals were attached to the seven threads that secured the testament...Viewed in this way, the scroll is the symbol of the promise of the Kingdom of God which God's people are to inherit."

(Ladd, 80)

- In the scroll, God has the promise of Heaven. But no one in Heaven or on earth was worthy to receive it. Not the powerful creatures, not the mighty angel, and certainly not John.
- What we read next is Heaven's response to the Cross.

"Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

(Revelation 5:5-7)

- Jesus appears as a slain Lamb, and He is worthy to open the scroll and fulfill God's promises to earth.
- Because Jesus was the perfect representative of humanity, in His sacrifice all of God's chosen people share in that redemption.

"The elect...will forever honor the Lamb as the one who was able to open the book of God's plan for the accomplishing and applying of redemption in history, and make what was planned happen."

(Packer, 251)



- It is important to note that victory occurs not in the might and power of the creatures or angels, but in the humble sacrifice of Christ.
- Christ's sacrifice on the Cross saved a fallen creation, and all of Heaven worships Him for His victory. This is our theme: Jesus Wins.

“And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.’ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ The four living creatures said, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

(Revelation 5:8-14)

- Jesus wins! Jesus wins, and Heaven erupts in praise!
- This is a “new song.” John is being shown a vision of what happened in Heaven the moment Jesus defeated death on the Cross.
- If you view chapters 1-3 as introductions to the various readers, chapters 4-5 are our thesis.
  - God sits on His throne as Lord of creation
  - He has a will for the world
  - We are unable to receive those good gifts because we are fallen
  - Christ paid for it with His blood
  - We rejoice because Heaven is our home



# 5

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## THE SEALS

### *Revelation 6*

- In chapters 4-5, we saw that God’s promises for the world were kept hidden by seven seals. In chapter 6, we watch as Jesus pulls back the seals from the scroll.
- The seals represent the things that happen between the Cross and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. Jesus told us of these things in Matthew 24.

<b>Jesus’ Prophecy (Matthew 24)</b>	<b>The Seven Seals (Revelation 6)</b>
Wars and rumors of wars, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom	War
Betray and hate each other	Anarchy/Civil War
Famines	Famine
	Plague
Persecuted	Persecution
Earthquakes	Natural Disasters
And then the end will come	Trumpets (End times)

“Many commentators have pointed out that there is a similarity between the structure of the seven seals and the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13 and Matthew 24...The Kingdom of God will not be established at once, but the future will be a period of wars and rumors of wars, conflict, earthquakes, and persecutions even to the point of death. Matthew adds that there will also be famines. These preliminary evils, which characterize the ‘beginning of woes,’ are to be followed by a short time of great tribulation such as the world has never seen...After this will occur the coming of Christ and the gathering of the saints into the Kingdom of God. The same basic structure of thought appears in the Olivet Discourse and in the Revelation: a time of preliminary troubles marked by evils in human society and in nature (the seven seals), followed by a short

but terrible time of great tribulation (the seven trumpets and bowls, and the  
beast).  
(Ladd, 98)

- The events the seals represent are almost exactly the same. These are things that happen *before* the end times begin.

“I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.”  
(Revelation 6:1-2)

- The first seal represents war and military conquest. Let us not mistake the rider on the white horse as Jesus. In this vision, Jesus is the Lamb. Many have made this mistake.

“The passage we are here studying is telling of woe upon woe and disaster upon disaster; any picture of the victorious Christ is quite out of place in it.”  
(Barclay, 3)

- Jesus *is* depicted as a rider on a white horse in Revelation 19, but the horse and rider here in Revelation 6 represent military conquest.
  - Bows are commonly used symbols of military power in Scripture (Jeremiah 51:56; Hosea 1:5, Psalm 46:9).
  - The word for crown used here is different than the word for crown used to describe the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19.
- In Matthew 24, Jesus describes the many “Christ-figures” that would come to deceive the nations. It is likely that this horse is white in order to deceive peoples to nationalism or militarism.

“When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, ‘Come!’ Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.”  
(Revelation 6:3-4)

- The second seal represents anarchy, a breakdown of relationships. We think of civil war, high murder rates, or general feelings of mistrust in communities.

“When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!’”

(Revelation 6:5-6)

- The third seal represents famine. Wheat, oil and wine are common items used to describe necessities throughout Scripture. Barley is for poor people who can’t afford wheat.
- The amounts given are enough for one man, but not enough to support a family or to leave money for anything else.

“This pictures a situation where scarcity prevails, when it would take all that a man could earn—a denarius—to buy enough of the cheapest food for a small family. In ordinary times, a denarius would purchase twelve to fifteen times as much food.”

(Ladd, 100)

- The command to “not damage the oil and the wine” may mean
  - We are talking about scarcity rather than complete and utter famine.
  - Or it is meant as a specific judgment for John in the Roman Empire, who was experiencing that exact kind of famine where wheat and barley crops were scarce, but vineyards were producing normally.

“When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.”

(Revelation 6:7-8)

- The word “Death” could better be described as “pestilence,” or a disease that causes death.
- The fourth seal, then, represents disease.

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”  
(Revelation 6:9-11)

- The fifth seal represents persecution.
- We see “those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” come before God. These are martyrs. They ask God when persecution will end. God responds, “Not yet.”

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”  
(Revelation 6:12-14)

- The sixth seal represents natural disasters.
  - A great earthquake
  - Sun turned black...the whole moon turned blood red
  - Stars in the sky fell to the earth = meteors
  - Sky receded like a scroll, rolling up = tornados and hurricanes

- Notice that these first six seals are events we are familiar with throughout history
  - War
  - Anarchy/Civil War
  - Famine
  - Plague
  - Persecution
  - Natural Disasters
- Like Jesus' list from Matthew 24, these are things that would happen *before* the end times.

“These seals portray the general character of the End-Time, that is, the period stretching from Christ’s death-and-resurrection to his return at the end of the age.”

(Eller, 83)

- After these things, we will learn the terror of the end times.

“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”

(Revelation 6:15-17)

- God will come to judge all men and women, there is none too great or too small.
- Before the Lamb opens the seventh seal, John pauses for our first interlude.





# 6

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## INTERLUDE

### *Revelation 7*

- We said in the introduction that *Revelation* is a cyclical story, frequently pausing its visions of judgments to reiterate the theme: Jesus wins.
- John does exactly that in chapter 7. Before we open the seventh seal, we get a picture about how much God loves His people.

“Before John begins the story of the actual end, he pauses to employ a technique which he uses several times to interrupt the flow of his narrative. He inserts an interlude, painting a picture which is essential background to the flow of the narrative.”

(Ladd, 110)

- In this case, John finishes describing a world hiding in caves terrified of the last days (Rev. 6:15-17), and stops to remind them that God is in control and has a plan for His people.

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi

12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,  
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

(Revelation 7:1-8)

- It's important to remember that the number 12 represents God's people. Here, the 144,000—made up of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel—represents the fullness of God's people.

“The meaning of the number, 12 x 12,000 is not difficult. As usual in the Revelation, the number is symbolic and affirms that the full number of the people of God will be brought safely through the time of tribulation; not one of the people of God will be lost.”

(Ladd, 117)

- This does not represent a different or separate plan for Jewish people. “Israel” is a representation for God's people, as it is often used in the New Testament.

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

(Galatians 3:29)

“In John's mind there is no difficulty in using ‘Israel’ as a term to cover the church as a whole; the fact is, it is a more inclusive term for what John understands by the church than any other available to him.”

(Eller, 99)

- God knows each one of His children in detail.
- John says he “heard” the number of those who were sealed.

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angles were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped

God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'"

(Revelation 7:12)

- Finally, John gets to see the people he has heard God talk about. He sees "a great multitude that no one could count."
- These are all God's people together, praising Him in Heaven.

"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, 'they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

(Revelation 7:13-17)

- The elder gives one of the most famous and most beautiful depictions of life in Heaven we have anywhere. What a blessing to be a part of that multitude!



# 7

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## THE TRUMPETS

### *Revelation 8-9*

- In chapter 8, we finally return to the seventh and final seal on the scroll. If the first six seals were “the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:8), the seventh seal is the full pain of labor.
- The seventh seal is representative of the Great Tribulation.
- The last seal is represented by seven trumpets. The totality of the destruction the trumpets represent makes up the final seal. It can be understood as follows:

First Seal	War
Second Seal	Anarchy/Civil War
Third Seal	Famine
Fourth Seal	Plague
Fifth Seal	Persecution
Sixth Seal	Natural Disasters
Seventh Seal	Trumpets <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Fire from Heaven</li><li>2. Destruction of Waters</li><li>3. Destruction of Cosmos</li><li>4. Darkness</li><li>5. Spiritual Evil</li><li>6. Death</li><li>7. Kingdom Comes</li></ol>

- John’s vision sets the tone for the severity of the Tribulation with the strange introduction to the final seal.

“When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all

the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand."

(Revelation 8:1-4)

- In a book where thunder and loud voices have become commonplace, silence feels very strange.
- Two things happen during this silence:
  - The angels prepare to usher in the Great Tribulation with trumpets.
  - The prayers of the people come before God.
- How special that God commands silence in Heaven in order to give us a voice!

"Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

(Revelation 8:5)

- The silence in Heaven is dramatically broken, and the Great Tribulation begins.
- You'll notice similarities in the Trumpet plagues and the 10 plagues in Egypt. This is likely intentional. God sent 10 plagues on Egypt to soften their hearts and call them to repentance before He accomplished His will. We can understand the Great Tribulation in the same terms. God sends these plagues to earth to soften hearts and call people to repentance before He returns and judges them.

"Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up."

(Revelation 8:6-7)

- The first trumpet brings fire from Heaven.

“The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

(Revelation 8:8-9)

- **The second trumpet brings destruction to the waters.**

“The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.”

(Revelation 8:10-11)

- **The third trumpet brings distress to the stars.**

“The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: ‘Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!’”

(Revelations 8:12-13)

- **The fourth trumpet brings darkness.**

“The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts look like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of

gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come."  
(Revelation 9:1-12)

- The fifth trumpet brings spiritual evil or oppression.
- The fallen star represents a fall angel, or demon.
- In Revelation 1:18, we saw that Christ held the keys of death and Hades. Here, He gives the key to a demon to unleash Hell on earth.
- The locusts represent demons, who flock to earth to torment mankind. Since Christ owns the keys of death and Hades, it is on His terms that this can happen. Notice the strict stipulations:
  - No harming grass, plants, or trees
  - No harming those sealed by God
  - No killing
  - No longer than five months

"The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.



Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

(Revelation 9:13-21)

- The sixth trumpet brings death.
- As with the removing of the seals, John now pauses and takes an interlude before the seventh and final trumpet.
- We will include the seventh trumpet here before we move on, however.

“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: ‘ We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.’ Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”

(Revelation 11:15-19)

- The seventh trumpet brings the Kingdom of God. With the Kingdom of God comes more praise and final judgment.
- Some argue the seals and trumpets signify the same events or time period, but there are no real similarities other than John’s literary pause. They argue the silence in heaven is actually the seventh seal.

Seals	Trumpets
War	Fire from Heaven
Anarchy/Civil War	Destruction of Waters
Famine	Destruction of Cosmos
Plague	Darkness
Persecution	Spiritual Evil
Natural Disaster	Death
Silence	Kingdom Comes



# 8

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## INTERLUDE 2.0

### *Revelation 10-11:14*

- Once again, John’s vision takes a break from judgment and wrath and turns to encouragement.
- Chapter 10 includes a personal encouragement specific to John.

“Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the seas and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.’”

(Revelation 10:1-4)

- A large, powerful angel brings John a small scroll. He roars and speaks to John with a voice like thunder, but what he says John cannot share with his audience. This is an encouragement specifically for John.

“Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, ‘There will be no more delay!’ But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

(Revelation 10:5-7)

- Here we get further evidence that the seventh trumpet will bring God’s Kingdom to earth: “the mystery of God will be accomplished” (10:7).

“Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: ‘God, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’ So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, ‘Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’ I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.’”  
(Revelation 10:8-11)

- Now we get a broader encouragement. The message of judgment John is sharing with the people feels bitter, but we are reminded that it is sweet.
- This, too, is common imagery in Scripture.

“[Your laws] are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb”  
(Psalm 19:10)

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”  
(Psalm 119:103)

- Ezekiel also had a similar vision.

“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth...and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit.”  
(Ezekiel 3:3, 14)

- So we are reminded that the message of God is sweet, but taking His message to the world often feels bitter. John’s message of judgment brings about that tension.
- As we have repeated throughout these chapters, it is important to interpret the symbols in *Revelation* by what we know from all Scripture. That is especially true for the next section of the Interlude.

“I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, ‘Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they

will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.’ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”

(Revelation 11:1-4)

- First, we get a hint about the symbols John is using. He says that the “Gentiles” will trample the holy city. We know that Christ’s sacrifice extended grace to the gentiles, so “Gentiles” here does not refer to non-Jews, but to non-believers. So the 144,000 Jews mentioned in chapter 7 do not refer to Jews, but to believers. John is using the terms “Jews” and “Gentiles” like Paul does in Romans to mean believers and non-believers.
- If we understand John that way, the picture he sees is of non-believers persecuting Christians for a short time.

“A [possible] interpretation finds a prophecy of the church and its fate in a hostile world. While the church outwardly will suffer persecution and martyrdom, God will preserve his people and assure their ultimate triumph.”

(Ladd, 150)

- References to “42 months,” “1,260 days,” “three and half days,” or “a time, times and half a time” all reflect three and a half years. During the time of Antiochus, King of Syria, the Jews experienced three and a half years of persecution, and the term is often used to symbolize “terror” (Barclay, 68).
- Here we are introduced to two witnesses who are described a few ways.
  - Power from God
  - Prophesying
  - Clothed in sackcloth
  - Two olive trees
  - Two lampstands that stand before the Lord
- The first three—power from God (Acts 1:8), prophesying (Romans 12:6), and sackcloth (Matthew 5:3-5)—are common descriptions of the believers throughout Scripture. Even lampstands have been used already in *Revelation* to describe the church.
- The image of the two olive trees has caused much division in the interpretation of this passage. But even this symbol is used in multiple places in Scripture to symbolize the church.

“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”

(Romans 11:17-18)

- Paul uses wild olive branches to describe gentiles who have now been grafted into “a cultivated olive tree” (Romans 11:24). In other words, people are the olive branches and as a whole the church makes up an olive tree. Jesus is the root that supports the tree.
- We see a similar image in Zechariah 4. Here, Zechariah sees a vision of two olive trees.

“Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ Again I asked him, ‘What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?’ He replied, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ ‘No, my lord,’ I said. So he said, ‘These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.’”

(Zechariah 4:11-14)

- We have to be careful to interpret this vision correctly.
- For context, Zechariah is prophesying to the remnant of Israel that have returned from Babylon. Joshua is high priest and Zerubbabel is governor. They have been godly leaders for the people and have led them in rebuilding the temple. Both are expressly praised in Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah.
- In this vision, Zechariah sees two olive trees. Notice that when he asks the angel the meaning of the olive trees, he gets no response.
- So instead, Zechariah asks what the two olive *branches* represent. The angel explains “these are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.” He means Joshua and Zerubbabel.
- So, again, we understand olive branches to represent specific people. The olive branches make up the olive tree, like people make up the church.

“If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the

earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.”

(Revelation 11:-6)

- The church is described with the power of Elijah (withholding rain, I Kings 17:1) and Moses (10 plagues, Exodus 7). This is the power the Holy Spirit gives His people (John 14:12)!
- This is an encouragement to the church that God has given us power!

“Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.”

(Revelation 11:7-10)

- The world is in rebellion against God. They hate God and His church. The world will persecute and mock the church. Even when it seems the church is dead, still we know Jesus wins!
- “The beast” represents Satan, who leads this rebellion. We will meet him again in later chapters.
- We can take courage knowing death can only come “when they have finished their testimony.” God has a plan for our lives, and He will see to it that we fulfill it.

“But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies looked on. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.”

(Revelation 11:11-14)

- Let us recognize the beauty in this promise: Those who are in Christ will hear God say, “Come up here” and will go up to heaven when we die!

- John then summarizes the judgments we read of with the Trumpets: disasters and tribulation will seize the world, and many will die in judgment.
- Notice that we hear of hope, even during the tribulation: “The survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”
- Revelation 11:14-19 tells of the seventh trumpet, which we covered in the last chapter.



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# THE BACKGROUND

## *Revelation 12-13*

- After telling of the seventh trumpet and the coming of the Kingdom of God, John makes sure to share the background for this entire story.
- Much of the book of Revelation directly correlates with current affairs at the time (Rome, 95 A.D.). We noted in the Introduction how Caesar worship and persecution from Rome left the church in need of encouragement. Here, John's vision makes sure to convey that the turmoil in Rome is not new or special, but one instance in a long, spiritual battle between God and Satan.

“It is necessary to reveal the nature of the conflict which the Christ will bring to an end at his appearing. The struggle of the Christians against the contemporary exaltation of the emperor as Lord and Savior of the world is set in the context of a yet more terrifying contest, in which the age-old adversary of God and people strives by all possible means to thwart the purpose of God...It covers the whole Messianic period from the birth of Christ to the consummation.”

(Beasley-Murray, 1441)

- This is important for us, because it explains that *Revelation* is not only useful for Christians in 95 A.D., but for Christians in any age. Satan may war against God and His people, but we are reminded that Jesus wins!

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert

to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

(Revelation 12:1-6)

- The background story introduces us to the three major characters
  - The Woman
  - The Dragon
  - The Son
- The Son is Jesus, and the imagery here tells us a lot about His story:
  - He was born of a woman (Luke 2:7)
  - There were attempts to take His life
    - Herod tried when he killed all babies (Matthew 2:16)
    - Satan tried when he tempted Him in the desert (Matthew 4:5)
    - The people tried when they crucified Him (Matthew 27:50)
  - He overcame death (Mark 16:6)
  - He ascended to Heaven and is seated with God (Acts 1:9)
  - He judges the nations

“Satan is well aware that this child is the key to universal history. If he can get the babe, he’s got the ball game; if he misses the babe, he loses everything.”

(Eller, 126)

- The Woman is Mary and all God’s chosen people.
  - Mary was chosen by God to give birth to Jesus
  - God’s chosen people are protected from the evil one
- The Dragon is Satan.
  - He took fallen angels with him
  - He wants to frustrate the plans of God
  - He wants to devour God’s people
  - He has restrictions placed on him

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

(Revelation 12:7-9)

- Satan cannot and will not defeat God. There is rejoicing in Heaven!

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.’”

(Revelation 12:10-12)

- God’s people receive salvation from God and overcome Satan through the sacrifice of the Lamb, Jesus, and by sharing that message (the word of their testimony).

“During the end-time in which we live, as we see the tantrums and traumas growing ever more wild and reckless, it is not an indication that Evil is growing in strength and about to take over. Quite the contrary, it is evidence that the dragon already has been decapitated and can’t last much longer. This knowledge, of course, does not change the seriousness of his depredations or the reality of the damage he yet can wreak; but it does enable us the better to stand up under them.

(Eller, 129).

- Satan’s time is short, and he knows it. He wastes no time deceiving anyone he can that they might not believe in the testimony of Christ.

“When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s

commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.”

(Revelation 12:13-13:1)

- When the people of God are in distress, they will “soar on wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31) to a place that is prepared for them (John 14:2).
- The dragon threatens “those who obey God’s commandments” with death, but he is unsuccessful.
- Satan calls in reinforcements and tries a number of different methods to deceive God’s people.

“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, ‘Who is like beast? Who can make war against him?’ The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

(Revelations 13:1-10)

- The dragon calls up a beast from the sea as reinforcements. The beast from the sea is a deceitful Christ-figure, as Jesus warned of in Matthew 24. This is where the term “antichrist” often enters the narrative. As we stated in the introduction, that term is never used in *Revelation*.

- This may represent Satan’s use of false religion to deceive people. His primary tool here is pride and arrogance.
  - Uttered proud words and blasphemies
  - Exercised authority
- Satan is given some substantial power, but even still he cannot overcome those belonging to Christ!

“Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breathe to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.”

(Revelation 13:11-15)

- A third beast comes from the earth to move people to worship the beast from the water.
- Here, Satan further deceives the world by forming what is often referred to as the “Unholy Trinity.”
  - The dragon, Satan, takes the place of God the Father
  - The beast from the sea takes the place of God the Son
  - The beast from the earth takes the place of God the Spirit

“Revelation has as its protagonist the triune God and as its antagonist a somewhat parallel unholy trinity of Satan and two beasts, a parody of God-Christ-Spirit.”

(Gorman, 123)

- The primary tool here is lies.
  - Looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon
  - Speech leads people to false worship

“He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This

calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666."  
 (Revelation 13:16-18)

- If we remember our number symbolism from the introductory chapter, "666" represents complete fallenness. This is not license for irresponsible number games or gimmicks to predict the last days or the antichrist, but rather simple, straight-forward symbolism to represent the extent of Satan's evil.

"Symbolically, 666 is probably to be understood as a parody of perfection, which would be 777. The person who bears the number pretends in vain to be divine, embodying instead 'utter imperfection.'"  
 (Gorman, 126)

- Instead of focusing on the number, notice the similarities between the "mark" used by the beast and the "seal" God places upon His chosen ones. This, and many other similarities will be spelled out in the next chapter.

<b>Symbols of God</b>	<b>Symbols of Satan</b>
God the Father and Creator (4:11)	Satan the dragon and destroyer (12:3, 17)
God the Son and Sacrificial Lamb, slain (5:6)	Satan's sea beast and proud blasphemer, wounded (13:5)
God the Spirit and interpreter (4:2, 5)	Satan's earth beast and liar (13:11)
Mother of God's people, clothed with the sun and protected by God (12:1, 14)	Mother of Satan's people, clothed as a prostitute and destroyed (17:16)
144,000 known and sealed by God (7:3)	Those marked with the number of the beast (13:16)

- John has graphically detailed the battle between God and Satan in chapters 12 and 13. Many of the images he uses have direct connection to Rome and roman rule, but John's point is not to show that Rome, Domitian, or Nero represent a specific antichrist. Rather, he is explaining that Satan works through many avenues to impersonate God and deceive nations, including *but not limited to* Rome.

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# INTERLUDE 3.0

## *Revelation 14*

- John breaks from a graphic and intense background story of spiritual warfare to once again give an encouraging interlude.
- Here, we'll see the characteristics of God lifted high above those of Satan.
- In chapters 12 and 13, we saw Satan use death, pride, and lies to deceive those who would take his mark. In chapter 17 we'll see him use sex to entice people away from God.
- God's characteristics stand in stark contrast, and offer victory and life as a reward.

"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."

(Revelation 14:1-3)

- After reading of the forced mark of the beast, we are reminded of God's gracious seal offered to His people. Being chosen by God means we have access to the sights and sounds of Heaven.
- The vision continues with a list of characteristics that describe God's people.

"These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."

(Revelation 14:4-5)

- We begin to see the stark contrast between the people of God and the people of Satan.

<b>Satan</b>	<b>God</b>
Fear/Death (12:4, 17)	Dead are blessed (14:13)
Pride (13:5)	Humble service (14:4)
Lies (13:11)	No lie is found (14:5)
Slander God (13:6)	Fear and worship God (14:7)
Deceit (13:14)	Remain faithful to Jesus (14:12)
Adulterous (17:2)	Not defiled with women (14:4)
Full of filth (17:4)	Pure, blameless, obedient (14:4, 5, 12)
Fallen (14:8)	Everlasting (5:13)

- John’s vision shows, in incredible detail, how Christians ought to be set apart from the things of the world.
- That the 144,000 have not been defiled by women does not speak badly of appropriate sex and sexuality. This is not a special class of people set apart because of their virginity. Rather, this is likely a call back to the “teachings of Balaam,” or sex as it relates to idol worship.
- When understood in relation to the great prostitute in chapter 17, we understand the distinction.

“We conclude, therefore, that the one hundred and forty-four thousand are virgins and undefiled in the sense that they have refused to defile themselves by participating in the fornication of worshipping the beast but have kept themselves pure unto God.”  
 (Ladd, 191)

- Satan uses many things to entice people away from God—fear, pride, lies, deceit, sex, drunkenness, and much more. Chapter 14 reminds us that these things ultimately lead to ruin.

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, and earth, and sea and the springs of water.’”  
 (Revelation 14:6-7)



- God is incredibly gracious. Even in the last hour before judgment, He cares that the people hear the Gospel and offers them an opportunity to repent.
- Sadly, many will still deny God and run after evil things. Their judgment will be terrible.

“A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’”

(Revelation 14:8)

- In our introduction, we noted how the forced Caesar worship in Rome reminded Christians of the forced emperor worship in Babylon. Because of this, many Christians referred to Rome as “Babylon.”
- It’s important to remember the context of the visions found in *Revelation*, but also to remember that Babylon is not only a symbol of Rome but of any evil that sets itself up against God.
- So, Babylon also represents “The kingdom of Satan.” They end in ruin and experience God’s wrath.

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’”

(Revelation 14:9-11)

- Fear, pride, lies, deceit, sex, drunkenness—the things of Satan—lead to eternal punishment.
- Obedience, humble service, faithfulness, worship—the things of God—lead to blessing and rest.

“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’”

(Revelation 14:12-13)

- This is a beautiful promise for those who are in Christ Jesus! Death cannot hold us. On the contrary, dying is gain. In dying is blessedness and rest.
- The Holy Spirit notes that deeds will follow the people of God to Heaven. Let's be careful not to interpret this as evidence of works based salvation.

“Their works follow with them—at first this sounds as if the Revelation is preaching salvation by works. But we have to be careful what John means by works. He speaks of the works of the Ephesians—their labour and their patience (2:2); he speaks of the works of the Thyatirans—their charity and their service and their faith (2:19). By works he means character.”

(Barclay, 114)

- The Holy Spirit is noting that the people of God have the characteristics of God, not the characteristics of Satan.
- Following the gospel proclamation and the warning of judgment is a vision about Christ's second coming, similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 25.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’ ...Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

(Matthew 25:31-34; 41)

- Instead of using sheep and goats as symbols, here John uses different kinds of fruit ripe for harvest.

“I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.”

(Revelation 14:14)

- This is Jesus' second coming, returning to earth for final judgment

"Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested."

(Revelation 14:15-16)

- Much like Jesus invites His sheep to come, or as God calls His witnesses to come (11:12), or as the Spirit invites His people to rest (14:13), here again Jesus takes His own to be with Him.

"Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."

(Revelation 14:17-20)

- The angels help with the harvest on earth, and here we see them casting away non-believers from the presence of God—like the goats in Matthew 25.



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# THE BOWLS

## *Revelation 15-16*

- We should state again that the story in *Revelation* is cyclical. John tells the same story over again.
- We finished chapter 14 with the final judgment and saw God's chosen people go to Heaven and all non-believers be cast away. That's the end of the story, but the book of Revelation isn't finished yet.
- John backs up again to the beginning of the tribulation and starts again.
- We can see a strong correlation between what is foretold by the trumpets and what is foretold by the bowls.
- In chapters 8-9 we read of the preparation for and sounding of the seven trumpets that represented the tribulation leading up to the return of Christ. Chapter 8 made sure to pause so God could listen to the prayers of His people and showed the angels getting in to position, while chapter 9 told of judgments that came with each trumpet.
- The judgments in the seven bowls are communicated the same way. Chapter 15 makes sure to pause so God can listen to the praise of His people and shows the angels getting into position, and chapter 16 tells of the judgments that come with each bowl.
- We start with the pause for praise.

"I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and

bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

(Revelation 15:1-4)

- Those who have been victorious, the ones in Heaven, play music and sing praise to God.
- After this the angels take their positions with the seven bowls.

“After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”

(Revelation 15:5-8)

- The content of chapters 8-9 and chapter 15-16 are remarkably similar, so we must interpret them as different visions of the same event.

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.’ The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”

(Revelation 16:1-2)

- The first bowl brings painful sores, but it is designated only for non-believers. The fifth trumpet that brought locusts also came with the caveat that no Christians were to be touched. In both lists, only one judgment came with that rule.

“The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.”

(Revelation 16:3)

- The second bowl affects the waters, but specifically causes death.

<b>Chapters 8-9 (The Trumpets)</b>	<b>Chapters 15-16 (The Bowls)</b>
God pauses to listen to His people (8:1)	God pauses to listen to His people (15:3)
The angel messengers appear (8:2)	The angel messengers appear (15:6)
The angels receive their orders from God (8:3)	The angels receive their orders from God (15:7)
Smoke fills the room (8:4)	Smoke fills the room (15:8)
The Seven Trumpets	The Seven Bowls
<i>-Fire From Heaven</i>	<i>-Sores</i>
<i>-Destruction of Waters</i>	<i>-Death</i>
<i>-Destruction of Cosmos</i>	<i>-Destruction of Waters</i>
<i>-Darkness</i>	<i>-Fire from sun</i>
<i>-Spiritual Evil</i>	<i>-Darkness</i>
<i>-Death</i>	<i>-Spiritual Evil</i>
<i>-Kingdom Comes</i>	<i>-Kingdom Comes</i>

“The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’ And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’”

(Revelation 16:4-7)

- The third bowl again affects the water, this time not causing death but affecting what’s left of clean water.
- We also hear again from the martyrs under the altar in chapter 6. These were the ones praying for the evil to be judged, and their prayer will soon be answered in full.

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

(Revelation 16:8-9)

- The fourth bowl brings fire that scorches people.

- John states that people refused to repent. If the entire world would repent, God would not have to send any more judgments. As it is, He continues to send judgments with the intention of imploring them to repent.
- While these calamities seem wrong, God does it out of His great justice (evil must be judged) and His great love (the world has opportunity to repent).

“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.”

(Revelation 16:10-11)

- The fifth bowl brings darkness.
- Again, the people refuse to repent. This continues to be of importance to God.

“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. ‘Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.’ Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”

(Revelations 12-16)

- The sixth bowl brings spiritual evil.
- This spiritual evil corresponds with “Armageddon,” or the final spiritual battle between God and Satan.

“Despite the vast amount of speculation regarding the time and location of this battle, Revelation mentions it only in passing. The place name means ‘mountain of Megiddo,’ a city where numerous battles had taken place in the Old Testament. It is a logical setting for a symbolic battle of cosmic proportions—and nothing more.”

(Gorman, 142-143).



- Much has been said about the idea of Armageddon, but we will see this anticlimactic battle just briefly mentioned.
- In this section, there is also a short encouragement to believers to persevere and be ready. In the face of such terror and calamity, that could be difficult. But we can take comfort knowing Jesus wins.

“The exodus [plagues] was a journey through trauma to liberation; and just so is the church’s experience of the end-time. The important thing is not to become so overwhelmed by the trauma as to forget that it is liberation that is taking place.”  
(Eller, 146)

- We should again—as we did with the seven trumpets—notice a similarity to the 10 Plagues in Exodus. The correlation is strong, as is the purpose of the plagues. After God judges the world, we know we get to enjoy the riches of Heaven for eternity!

“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”

(Revelation 16:17-21)

- With one final, terrible plague the seventh bowl brings the end of earth and ushers in the Kingdom of God. We know this because:
  - 15:1 tells us with these bowls “God’s wrath is complete.”
  - 16:17 exclaims with the seventh bowl that “It is done!”
- With this bowl we read of the fall of Babylon, Satan’s kingdom. The next two chapters will zoom in on that destruction.

<b>The Seven Trumpets</b>	<b>The Seven Bowls, reordered</b>
Fire From Heaven	Fire from sun
Destruction of Waters	Destruction of Waters
Destruction of Cosmos	Sores
Darkness	Darkness
Spiritual Evil	Spiritual Evil
Death	Death
Kingdom Comes	Kingdom Comes

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# THE FALL OF SATAN

## *Revelation 17-18*

- In chapters 17 and 18, John explains the fall of Babylon, Satan’s kingdom, in greater detail.

“Now John will back up once more—although not very far. He will describe the collapse in greater detail than before, proceed into an account of the [second coming], and then keep on going. The book is a straight shot, a direct sequence, from here on out (or almost so).”

(Eller, 153)

- We are first introduced to the great prostitute that we mentioned briefly in chapter 10 of this study.

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.’”

(Revelation 17:1-2)

- The woman represents the mother of Satan’s people, born of sinful relations.
- Just as the “Unholy Trinity” exists as the opposite of the Triune God, so the great prostitute exists as the opposite of the pregnant woman in Revelation 12—who we noted was representative of the people of God.

“Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman was drunk with the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.”  
(Revelation 17:3-5)

- The great prostitute is
  - In the desert
  - Sitting on the beast
  - Dressed provocatively
  - Full of evil
  - Persecuting Christians

“Although John never has them meet, [the pregnant woman in Revelation 12], most likely, is meant to be placed in conscious juxtaposition over against the great whore, the woman of the world...Their distinctions are these: this one has beauty, that one has glamour (there’s a difference); this one is pregnant, that one is sterile; this one bears life, that one bears death. John is on target.”  
(Eller, 126)

- While the pregnant woman in Chapter 12—who represents God’s chosen people—is given safety and security, the great prostitute experiences war and turmoil. While the pregnant woman has a united offspring that stands together as one, the great prostitute leads a nation that will turn against her and cause her ruin.

“When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: ‘Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.’”  
(Revelation 17:6-8)

- The word used for “astonished” has positive connotations, and might be better translated “amazed” or “marveled.” This speaks to the enticing power of sin: that even John fell to its trap for a moment.
- The angel explains the nature of the beast—who is Satan’s beast of pride from chapter 13. He “once was, now is not, and yet will come.”

- This is in direct contrast to God, who is regularly described as the One who “was, is, and is to come.”
  - Was = Past
  - Is = Present
  - Is to come = Future
- God never changes and is always in control of His creation.
- Satan beast of pride, by contrast, “once was, now is not, and yet will come.”
  - Once was = Past, had pride and power
  - Now is not = Present, does not have pride or power
  - Yet will come = Future, we will see Satan’s last attempt to regain his pride and power in chapter 20.
- The fact that Satan “now is not” reflects the great victory Jesus won on the cross and at His resurrection, delivering a decisive blow to Satan.
- The term “now is not” also explains that the end times had not yet come, God is holding Satan back. During the tribulation, Satan will be given some power to torment the earth.

“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

(Revelation 17:9-14)

- The details of the beast are now explained.
  - 7 heads are 7 hills
  - 7 heads are also 7 kings
  - Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come
  - An 8<sup>th</sup> king belongs to the 7
  - 10 horns are 10 kings
  - All will fail to conquer the Lamb and His people
- We’ll explain each of these elements in detail.

- The 7 heads are 7 hills. This is a clear and direct allusion to Rome, the present world power.

“Most modern commentators see here a positive and inescapable identification of the great harlot with first-century Rome, because Rome was widely known as the city that was built on seven hills.”

(Ladd, 227)

- We have already seen throughout *Revelation* that “Babylon” is used to describe “Rome.” We have also already seen how both represent the larger kingdom of Satan, not just specific empires in time.
- The 7 heads are also 7 kings. In other words, John says, “The great prostitute resides in Rome, but also in every place deceived by Satan.”

“The beast...I see as representing more the spiritual power that lies behind worldliness...Worldliness has the function of a religion and is indwelt by a power, a motive, a tendency, a directive of its own. Men not only do worldly things; their loyalty is captured by ‘the prince of this world.’”

(Eller, 158)

- The succession of kings is explained:
  - Five have fallen
    - This shows that many—maybe even most—have come in the past.
  - One is
    - This shows that Satan is always working in the world in some way.
  - The other has yet to come
    - This indicates that the end has not yet come. When one evil leader falls, another will rise up.
  - The beast is an 8<sup>th</sup> king, the one behind all the others
    - This passage explains that he is ultimately going to his destruction.
- The 10 horns are 10 kings without a kingdom. This represents how Satan works not only through large empires or major world leaders, but through anyone or anything that directs people away from God.
- All these powers work together to defeat the Lamb—Jesus—but will ultimately be unsuccessful.
- The Lamb overcomes, and because of Him so do all of His people!

“Then the angel said to me, ‘The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.’”  
(Revelation 17:15-18)

- Jesus’ people are regularly depicted as being “from every nation, tribe, people and language” and standing united in worship before the throne.
- Here, the people of Satan are also described as “peoples, multitudes, nations and language,” but these people are divided and turn on each other.
- We also see here that God moves their hearts so that His will and purpose will be worked out. This is consistent with how He works throughout Scripture (Pharoah, Exodus 9:12; Cyrus, Ezra 1:1).

“The truth behind this is that God never loses control of human affairs. In the last analysis God is always working things together for good.”  
(Barclay, 149)

- The point of chapter 17 is to remind us of the fleeting beauty of sin. What seems marvelous or enticing—if it is sin—will ultimately lead to ruin.

“Flannery O’Connor, in answer to a question about why she created such bizarre characters in her stories, replied that for the near-blind you have to draw very large, simple caricatures. The Great Whore is one of these large, simple caricatures. It is an image that can bring to never-again-to-be-forgotten awareness the powerfully seductive presence of those who would obstruct or subvert our worship of the slain and risen Lamb.”  
(Peterson, 146)

- Chapter 18 contains a song commemorating the fall of Babylon, the city of Satan. This is a common “Doom Song” found throughout Old Testament prophecies.
  - Isaiah 13:19-22 records the doom of Babylon (physical Babylon)
  - Isaiah 34:11-15 records the doom Edom
  - Jeremiah 50:39, 51:37 records the doom of Babylon
  - Zephaniah 2:13-15 records the doom of Nineveh
  - Ezekiel 27 records the doom of Tyre

“It is something like this that John has in mind. He is catching up all that the prophets have said as they announce the doom of Tyre or Babylon or Nineveh. But he is thinking not of the fall of one city or empire but of the collapse of civilization.

Final judgment means the overthrow of all that opposes itself to God.”

(Morris, 214)

- This is what we hear in chapter 18.

“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.’”

(Revelation 18:1-3)

- The first part of the song is a direct quote from Revelation 14:8, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” This is a reminder of the cyclical nature of the narrative in *Revelation*.
- In chapter 17, we saw the great prostitute adorned in luxuries, but by the end of the chapter she is stripped naked. When the mask of pleasure and success is removed from the kingdom of Satan, we see it for what it is: “a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit.”

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her



as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.'"

(Revelation 18:4-8)

- Once again, God's people receive the call to "Come." This time, it seems to echo Jesus' words in Matthew 24.

"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

(Matthew 24:39-41)

- There are two things to note here:
  - Because of Christ's sacrifice, God's chosen people are exempt from the judgment pronounced to sinners here.
  - Understanding Jesus' words in this context shows that He is not describing a rapture in a sense that Christians will be removed from earth for a time, but is talking about the separating of the believers from non-believers on the day of judgment.

"All Christians on earth will be 'raptured' so that they may at once return to earth with him as part of his triumphant escort. The idea that the rapture takes them out of this world for a period before Christ appears a third time for a second 'second coming' has been widely held but lacks scriptural support."

(Packer, 251)

- Non-believers, however, *will* be judged for their sin.
  - Plagues
  - Piled up to heaven, God remembers
  - Paid back double
  - Torture and grief
  - Death, mourning and famine
  - Consumed by fire
  - God judges

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’ The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wind and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’”

(Revelation 18:9-14)

- All of the fleeting promises of the world will pass away and become useless. Those who put their trust in their worldly things will weep, because it will all be forgotten.

“The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!’”

(Revelation 18:15-17)

- The “merchants” raise the same cries as the “kings” in the previous section. The “sea captains” will respond the same way.

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treat you.’”

(Revelation 18:17-20)

- Every person, great and small, good or bad, who does not serve Jesus will be subject to this judgment. At their end, they will recognize who is God.

“The progression of this course, as Revelation 18 makes especially clear, is the pursuit of luxury and the neglect of the poor, first by Babylon itself, then by its clients, then by its everyday citizens.”

(Gorman, 147)

- Notice, the lament offered by each group is a selfish one. They regret losing their personal wealth, and have no allegiance to the city. This again reflects the division in the kingdom of Satan and contrasts the beautiful unity we find in the Kingdom of God.

“Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: ‘With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.’”

(Revelation 18:21-24)

- The kingdom of Satan is totally and utterly destroyed.



## THE RIDER

### *Revelation 19*

- John’s vision of evil’s doom in chapters 17 and 18 is followed by a song of celebration and the appearance of the victorious Christ.

“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ And again they shouted: ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’”

(Revelation 19:1-3)

- The song of celebration begins with attention on the destruction of Satan and evil.
- Note the torture for evildoers is described as going “up for ever and ever.” Hell is everlasting, just like Heaven.

“Most terrifying is the nature of the punishment—it’s ongoing with no end in sight...he goes on to say that the smoke of their torment goes up ‘forever and ever.’ And just to drive home the point, he adds the phrase [in chapter 14] ‘they have no rest, day or night.’”

(Chan, 104.)

- Quickly, the worshipers move their attention to their new heavenly reality.

“The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’ Then a voice came from the throne, saying: ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!’ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the

wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”

(Revelation 19:4-8)

- **The church—often described in Scripture as the bride of Christ—celebrates the coming of His Kingdom with a feast!**

“Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’ At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”

(Revelation 19:9-10)

- **John, possibly moved by the joy and humble attitude of worship shown in his vision, bows to worship the angel.**
- **He is reminded that angels are fellow servants of God, and it is God alone who deserves worship.**

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

(Revelation 19:11-16)

- Here we see pictured the victorious Christ! With His return and the establishment of His Kingdom we begin to see the fulfillment of the prophecies.
  - Eyes are like blazing fire (Rev. 1:14)
  - Has many crowns (Rev. 2:10)
  - He has a secret name (Rev. 3:12)
  - Robe dipped in blood (Rev. 7:14)
  - Armies of Heaven follow Him (Rev. 14:4)
  - Followers dressed in white linen (Rev. 3:5)
  - Sharp sword from His mouth (Rev. 1:16)
  - He will rule them with an iron scepter (Rev. 2:27, 12:5)
  - Treads the winepress that is God's wrath (Rev. 14:20)
- Christ fulfills all the Law and Prophets!
- That fact that His robe is dipped in blood is significant.

“He is robed in ‘a garment drenched with blood’—here is the key line of the entire scene (if not the entire book). This description usually is taken as just one more bloody detail out of the whole gruesome scene; but it deserves closer attention than that.”  
(Eller, 176)

- Here we find the Rider, Christ, wearing His own blood as symbol of and testimony to His victory on the Cross!

“In this book he repeatedly makes the point that it is in His capacity as ‘a Lamb as it had been slain’ that Christ conquers. He overcame, not by shedding the blood of others, but by shedding His own.”  
(Morris, 230)

“Moreover, this Jesus comes dressed in a robe dipped in blood—his own blood—because the battle has already been fought and won in his death.”  
(Gorman, 153).

“The blood on the Rider’s robe is that which he shed on Calvary. It is true, as John elsewhere has told us, that the saints wash their robes white in the blood of the Lamb; but that his own robe retains the stain is most vital to John’s story.”  
(Eller, 177)

- What an amazing scene! Jesus' shed blood exists as an eternal reminder of the love displayed at the Cross! Because of that blood, we are clothed in His righteousness forever in Heaven!
- Christ did not need to defeat death on the Cross and *then* defeat death in a battle. That battle was decisively won *on the Cross*.

“And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great. Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”

(Revelation 19:17-21)

- We once again see the “Unholy Trinity.” From Hell, Satan makes one last attempt to rebel against God. This is the last battle, Armageddon.
- Just as the mention of “Armageddon” in chapter 16 is brief, so this rebellion is quickly and effortlessly snuffed out, and Satan and all evildoers are confined to Hell.

“The beast and his confederates gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. They are gathered, that is, to Armageddon. But there is no battle! The armies of heaven watch while the beast and the false prophet are captured.”

(Beasley-Murray, 1451)

“John says nothing about the battle...He may mean that there was no battle. Though the forces of evil appear mighty they are completely helpless when confronted by the Christ.”

(Morris, 232)



“There just isn’t any battle; and since we already have witnessed the Armageddon scene dissolve in almost the same way, it would seem that John is being anticlimactic on purpose.”

(Eller, 178)

- **There is no battle, because the battle was already won on the Cross!**

“But why no battle, when everything was set for one? We have suggested the reason before: John is convinced that Jesus, in his death-and-resurrection, did all that needed to be done, won the only victory that needs to be won in order to take care of Evil once and for all. To portray Jesus in another battle necessarily would be to say that his first victory wasn’t good enough; and this, of course, John will by no means say.”

(Eller, 178)

- **Jesus wins!**



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# THE SUMMARY

## *Revelation 20*

- Chapter 20 is the source of much debate in the interpretation of *Revelation*.
- Revelation 20:6 mentions a “thousand year” reign of Christ. This is referred to as the *Millennium*.
- Although this thousand year reign is only mentioned in chapter 20, it is from here that the major interpretations of *Revelation* take their names.
  - Pre-millennialism
    - “Before millennium”
    - The interpretation that Christ returns to earth before this reign
  - Post-millennialism
    - “After millennium”
    - The interpretation that Christ returns to earth after this reign
  - A-millennialism
    - “No millennium”
    - The interpretation that Christ’s reign began upon His resurrection, and therefore “thousand years” is a symbolic term

“Postmillennialism means that the return of Christ would not occur until the Kingdom of God had been established by the church in human history. In this view, chapter 19 does not describe the coming of Christ but is a very symbolic way of describing the triumph of Christian principles in human affairs and the triumph of Christ throughout his church...Amillennialism is the term used to describe the view of those who do not look for a millennial reign of Christ either before or after his second coming. This way of interpreting Rev. 20 involves the principle of recapitulation, viz., that the structure of Revelation does not relate consecutive events but frequently covers the same ground from different perspectives...Premillennialism is the view that Rev. 20 is altogether eschatological. The coming of Christ will be followed by a binding of Satan and the resurrection of

the saints who will join him in a temporal kingdom when he reigns over the earth. This millennial kingdom will end with a final rebellion and the last judgment.”  
(Ladd, 260-261)

- We noted in the introduction that we would be studying from an amillennial perspective. We do so for a number of reasons
  - As we noted in the last chapter, Christ’s death and resurrection were all that were necessary for our victory over sin and death. We are not waiting for another victory to take place. This why Jesus said, “It is finished” on the cross (John 19:30).
  - Jesus told His disciples, “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18), indicating His reign had begun.
  - The apostle Paul taught that Christ reigns even as His enemies were still being defeated. “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (I Corinthians 15:25-26). Even while death still exists—or, before His second coming—Christ is reigning.
  - The story told in *Revelation* is quite clearly cyclical, which allows for a retelling to happen in chapter 20—as it has in several places in the book.
  - “A thousand years” is used symbolically elsewhere in Scripture, so there is precedent for reading it symbolically here (Psalm 90:4, II Peter 3:8)
- This is the predominant understanding among reformed theologians.

“Augustine’s interpretation, that the millennium is the period of the church between Christ’s first and second advents, became the official teaching of both the Catholic and Reformed churches.”  
(Beasley-Murray, 1452)

- We will interpret chapter 20 through this lens and treat it as a summary of events from Cross to New Creation—much like chapters 12-14.

“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”  
(Revelation 20:1-3)

- These are the consequences in the spiritual realm for what Christ accomplished at the Cross.
- There is evidence of this in *Revelation* and elsewhere in Scripture.

“Interpreters of this viewpoint often identify the binding of Satan and his incarceration in the abyss with the victory over Satan accomplished by our Lord in his earthly ministry. It is clear that the gospels do represent Jesus as having bound Satan (Matt. 12:29) and toppled him from his place of power (Luke 10:18); and this victory over Satan is reflected in the Revelation...”

(Ladd, 260)

- If we understand *Revelation* as a cyclical story, this moment has been told in a few places already.
  - Revelation 5: Heaven weeps when no one can fulfill God’s plan, but the Lamb overcomes through His sacrifice.
  - Revelation 7: Angels hold back evil from earth and God’s chosen people are sealed.
  - Revelation 12: The dragon failed to defeat the child and was thrown out and the woman is kept out of his reach.

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

(Revelation 20:4-6)

- The first death is death that occurs here on earth. This is what happens to our loved ones who have passed away.
- The first resurrection is for those who did not worship the beast, but instead held to the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. Believers who die on earth go immediately to be with God.
- This means believers who have died are with Christ *now*, reigning in glory!

- The second death is Hell, where non-believers are sent after judgment.

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle.”

(Revelation 20:7-8)

- This is the tribulation that occurs during the end times.
- If we understand *Revelation* as a cyclical story, this moment has also been told in a few places.
  - Revelation 9:1-11 describes the Abyss being unlocked and demons flocking to earth like locusts.
  - Revelation 12:17 and chapter 13 describes the dragon going to make war against humankind
  - Revelation 16:12-16 describes evil spirits gathering troops to stage a final rebellion against God.

“In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

(Revelation 20:8-10)

- Satan gathers together a huge army and they lay siege to the city of God.
- Notice that God’s people are not fearful, nor do they have to fight back, or even lift a finger. Fire comes down from Heaven and the battle is avoided entirely.
- If we understand *Revelation* as a cyclical story, this moment has been told in a few places, too.
  - Revelation 16:16-17 tells of Satan’s army gathering for battle, but no battle is described. Instead, God declares “It is done!”
  - Revelation 19:19-21 tells of Satan gathering an army to make war against God. No battle is described, but Satan and his army are thrown into Hell for eternal torment.

“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

(Revelation 20:11-15)

- This is the judgment that occurs when Jesus returns.
- Special promises are made for those who worship Christ as Lord, many of which we have noted. It is particularly important that we are promised to have our names in the book of life.

“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.”

(Revelation 3:5)

- If your name is written in the book of life, you are spared from judgment through the righteousness of Christ.
- If we understand *Revelation* as a cyclical story, this moment has been told in a few places.
  - Revelation 11:19 tells of the plagues that befall those outside God’s temple.
  - Revelation 14:8-20 tells of the judgment and eternal torment that awaits all who worship Satan.
  - Revelation 16:17-21 tells of the great distress of those who are not part of the Kingdom of God.
  - Revelation 17-18 tells of the implosion of the kingdom of Satan.
  - Revelation 19:20-21 tells of the capture and torment of Satan and his followers.





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# HEAVEN

## *Revelation 21-22*

- John’s vision closes with a beautiful picture of Heaven.
- It is in these two chapters that we get the clearest, most comprehensive picture of Heaven in all of Scripture.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

(Revelation 21:1-4)

- We see “a new heaven and a new earth,” and they begin to collide together in beautiful unity. God can once again dwell with His creation because sin and death are gone from it.

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

(Revelation 21:5)

- God doesn’t make “new things,” he makes “things new.” He restores Heaven and earth to their original goodness for their original intent.

“God’s original creation was ‘very good’—and God is not about to act now in a way that would deny the fact. Why, even the new holy city is still ‘Jerusalem’—very

different from the old one, of course, but Jerusalem nonetheless. God will make ‘all things new’—not, ‘all new things.’”  
(Eller, 195)

- This is important to understand as we continue. This is a spiritually real place, but also a physically real place. Anything on earth that is redeemable *will be redeemed* by God.

“He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”  
(Revelation 21:6-7)

- The voice from the throne describes Himself as “the Beginning and the End.” We saw both God and Christ describe themselves that way in Revelation 1, and this is not new imagery in Scripture. But for the first time, the name takes on a new meaning. We are at the beginning of a time with no end, and God is greater still.

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”  
(Revelation 21:8-11)

- One of the angels with the bowls brings the message. His instruction, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” stands in direct contrast to his earlier instruction.

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute.’”  
(Revelation 17:1)

- We are again reminded of the difference between the great prostitute and the bride of Christ. For the final time, we are reminded that non-believers are destined for Hell and God's chosen people are destined for Heaven.
- John again notices God's Holy City coming down to earth. Now he is taken in for a closer look.

"It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass."

(Revelation 21:12-21)

- The detail here screams out how perfect this city is for God's people.
- There are four things we should learn:
  - The city is very beautiful
  - The city is for God's people for eternity
    - Remember the number 12 represents God's people, and the number 3 represents completion, or eternity.
    - 3 sets of 12 describe the Holy City:
      - 12 gates of 12 pearls named for 12 tribes run by 12 angels
      - 12 foundations of 12 precious stones with 12 apostles
      - Walls are 12,000 stadia in length and 12x12 cubits thick

- The city is large
  - The measurements given make the city 2,250,000 square feet, a city that would “stretch nearly from London to New York” (Barclay, 212).
- The city needs no protection
  - The gates are never closed
  - The walls are only 266 feet high, shorter than historic Babylon’s

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

(Revelation 21:22-27)

- The temple was the place where God’s presence resided among the people (II Chronicles 7:1; Haggai 2:7). In Heaven, God needs no “middle man,” but instead can dwell and walk among His people as He did in the garden (Genesis 3:8).
- Notice that things from the former world are there, “the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.” If we are remembering that New Creation is a collision of Heaven and Earth, this makes sense.

“My own personal list of ‘the glory and honor of the nations’ would surely include Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* and Arvo Part’s ‘Spiegel im Spiegel’; green-tea crème brulee, fish tacos and bulgogi; *Moby-Dick* and the *Odyssey*; the iPod and the Mini Cooper. Of course I don’t expect any of them to appear without being suitably purified and redeemed, any more than I expect my own resurrected body to be just another unimproved version of my present one. But I will be very surprised if they are not carried in by one of another of the representatives of human culture.”

(Crouch, 170)

- God intended for development. Consider that at creation He gave us a garden, but He returns with a city. It was always part of God’s plan for His creation to create. That is a way in which we are created in His image.

- So it is not unrealistic that much of the material things of this world will be—in some way, shape, or form—part of the New Creation.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.”

(Revelation 22:1-3)

- In the final chapter of Scripture, we are pointed back to the very beginning. In the Garden of Eden, God placed a river that gave life to all living things (Genesis 2:10).
- Adam and Eve *were* allowed to eat from the tree of life, which would have allowed them to live forever (Genesis 2:9).
- When sin entered the world, however, God sent angels with flaming swords to guard the tree of life so no one would live under the curse forever (Genesis 3:24).
- Now, we see the tree of life has been restored. There is no more curse! It produces 12 crops of fruit and is in season year round. This symbolizes that Heaven has life enough for all of God’s people.

“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’ ‘Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’”

(Revelation 22:3-7)

- John returns to the “letter” style of writing to close *Revelation*. Here, he repeats and summarizes what has been said throughout the entire book.
- We will use each of his concluding remarks to summarize what we’ve discussed throughout this study guide.

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.”

(Revelation 22:8)

- *Revelation* is from the Triune God. It is “the word of the Lord,” or “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” John was in the Spirit. The visions he saw and the words he heard were given him by God.

“And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’”

(Revelation 22:8-9)

- *Revelation* is a story about Christ’s victory over sin and death. We ought to see the slain and risen Lamb as the object of our worship, as was shown in Revelation 5.
- We ought *not* to elevate any symbol or character in the story to undue importance. God is the center of the story; creating, saving, judging, recreating.

“Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.’”

(Revelation 22:10)

- We need to share the Gospel with the world, because judgment awaits those whose names have not been written in the book of life.

“Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.”

(Revelation 22:11)

- *Revelation* echoes what the rest of the New Testament has taught us: The world will hate us. This is a call to persevere in faith, no matter the challenges or tribulations we face.

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the

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

(Revelation 22:12-15)

- Believers are destined for eternal life in the Holy City, but non-believers are cast away to torment. There are clear consequences to the judgment at the end of time.

“‘I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.’ The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. I warn anyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

(Revelation 22:16-17)

- Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. There is no substitute, no addition, and no subtraction. His invitation to eternal life has been extended in His life and ministry, as prophesied and recorded in Scripture, and as made plain in creation.

“He who testifies to these things say, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”

(Revelation 22:20-21)









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