

# **God's Final Words**

## **Year 5, Quarter 4**

**Our five-year survey concludes with John's Revelation. This is a book much feared and misunderstood. Its imagery is difficult to decipher and has inspired volumes of false, speculative teaching. We must see the Revelation for what it is – verbal pictures which portray the ultimate victory of God's people over all challengers. It is a book of hope and trust.**

### **Outline**

#### **Week 1: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Time is Near (Rev 1:1-3)
- ◆ The Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:4-8)
- ◆ The Commencement of the Vision (Rev 1:9-11)
- ◆ The Glorified Christ (Rev 1:12-16)
- ◆ "I Am He Who Lives" (Rev 1:17-20)

#### **Week 2: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ Ephesus: "You Have Left Your First Love" (Rev 2:1-7)
- ◆ Smyrna: Faithful Though Persecuted (Rev 2:8-11)
- ◆ Pergamos: Where Satan's Throne Is (Rev 2:12-17)
- ◆ Thyatira: Corrupted by Jezebel (Rev 2:18-23)
- ◆ Thyatira: Power over the Nations (Rev 2:24-29)

#### **Week 3: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ Sardis: The Dead Church (Rev 3:1-6)
- ◆ The Open Door in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-9)
- ◆ The Hour of Trial (Rev 3:10-13)
- ◆ The Lukewarm Laodiceans (Rev 3:14-18)
- ◆ Knocking at the Door (Rev 3:19-22)

#### **Week 4: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Glorious Throne of God (Rev 4:1-6a)
- ◆ The Creator, the Lord God Almighty (Rev 4:6b-11)

- ◆ The Scroll (Rev 5:1-5)
- ◆ Worthy Is the Lamb Who Was Slain (Rev 5:6-10)
- ◆ Honor to God and the Lamb (Rev 5:11-14)

### **Week 5: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The First Four Seals (Rev 6:1-8)
- ◆ Seals Five and Six (Rev 6:9-17)
- ◆ The Sealing of God's Servants (Rev 7:1-8)
- ◆ Those Who Survive the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:9-17)
- ◆ The Seventh Seal (Rev 8:1-6)

### **Week 6: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The First Three Trumpets (Rev 8:7-11)
- ◆ The Fourth Trumpet (Rev 8:12-13)
- ◆ The Fifth Trumpet (Rev 9:1-6)
- ◆ The Description of the Locust Army (Rev 9:7-12)
- ◆ The Sixth Trumpet (Rev 9:13-21)

### **Week 7: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Mighty Angel and the Little Book (Rev 10:1-7)
- ◆ The Bittersweet Book (Rev 10:8-11)
- ◆ God's Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-6)
- ◆ Death and Resurrection of the Witnesses (Rev 11:7-14)
- ◆ The Seventh Trumpet (Rev 11:15-19)

### **Week 8: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Woman, Her Child and the Dragon (Rev 12:1-6)
- ◆ Heavenly War (Rev 12:7-12)
- ◆ The Dragon's Pursuit of the Woman (Rev 12:13-17)
- ◆ The Beast from the Sea (Rev 13:1-10)
- ◆ The Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:11-18)

### **Week 9: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ Victorious Followers of the Lamb (Rev 14:1-5)
- ◆ Babylon Is Fallen (Rev 14:6-13)
- ◆ The Harvest of the Earth (Rev 14:14-20)
- ◆ The Song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:1-4)
- ◆ The Seven Last Plagues (Rev 15:5-8)

### **Week 10: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The First Four Bowls (Rev 16:1-9)
- ◆ The Last Three Bowls (Rev 16:10-21)
- ◆ The Harlot Atop the Beast (Rev 17:1-6)
- ◆ The Mystery of the Woman and the Beast (Rev 17:7-11)
- ◆ The Ten Horns of the Beast (Rev 17:12-18)

### **Week 11: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ Judgment Against Babylon (Rev 18:1-8)
- ◆ The Weeping Merchants (Rev 18:9-20)
- ◆ Life Ceases in Babylon (Rev 18:21-24)
- ◆ Alleluia! (Rev 19:1-10)
- ◆ Victory Over the Beast and False Prophet (Rev 19:11-21)

### **Week 12: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3)
- ◆ The Reign of the Saints (Rev 20:4-6)
- ◆ Satan: The Eternal Loser (Rev 20:7-10)
- ◆ The Second Resurrection and Death (Rev 20:11-15)
- ◆ God's Victorious Church (Rev 21:1-8)

### **Week 13: The Revelation of John**

- ◆ The Bride and the City (Rev 21:9-21)
- ◆ The Light of the City (Rev 21:22-27)
- ◆ The Throne of God in the City (Rev 22:1-5)
- ◆ "I Am Coming Quickly!" (Rev 22:6-11)
- ◆ Invitation to Enter the City (Rev 22:12-21)

## MEMORY VERSES: YEAR 5, QUARTER 4

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- Week 1:** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.  
✎ Revelation 1:3
- Week 2:** Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.  
✎ Revelation 2:10
- Week 3:** I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.  
✎ Revelation 3:15-16
- Week 4:** You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.  
✎ Revelation 5:9
- Week 5:** After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.  
✎ Revelation 7:9
- Week 6:** They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.  
✎ Revelation 9:4
- Week 7:** But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.  
✎ Revelation 10:7
- Week 8:** And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.  
✎ Revelation 12:11

**Week 9:** Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

↻ Revelation 14:13

**Week 10:** For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

↻ Revelation 17:17

**Week 11:** And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

↻ Revelation 19:6

**Week 12:** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

↻ Revelation 21:3

**Week 13:** Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

↻ Revelation 22:14

## **Special Introduction**

The study of Revelation often produces anxiety, frustration and confusion. In spite of its obvious difficulties, we must trust that God gave us this book in this particular form for a reason. It is incumbent upon us to discover the truth conveyed upon its pages as we are able and thus receive the benefit God intended.

It is God's prerogative to withhold information from man. But we must always remember that when He chooses to reveal something, He fully intends for man to understand what is revealed. The word "revelation" itself means a disclosure, an uncovering or unveiling. Jesus admonishes, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; comp. also 13:9). Blessing was pronounced upon those who would read, hear and keep the things of the book (1:3; 22:7). The man of understanding is told to "calculate the number of the beast" (13:18). Why, then, does Revelation seem so obscure and shrouded in mystery?

### ***Literary style***

The literary style of Revelation is the primary reason for its difficulty. It is not biographical like the gospels, conversational like the letters of Paul, historical like Acts or polemical like Romans. The literary style is apocalyptic, like Zechariah, Ezekiel and the latter half of Daniel. This kind of literature is highly symbolic and figurative and is designed to inspire courage and fidelity in a time of crisis.

Apocalyptic literature is not a logical, progressive argument or treatise which attempts to sway the intellect by reasoned analysis. Instead, it is a "photo-album," a picture-book with imaginative imagery aimed at stirring the emotions and bringing comfort to those who are being challenged or threatened.

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

### ***Old Testament terminology***

God communicates with men in each cultural setting as they communicate between themselves. There is no such thing as "heavenly language" which God employs to speak to men. The reason that Revelation is so different from other NT books is that it is written in OT terminology. Homer Hailey observed that there are 260-400 allusions to the

OT in Revelation. Ferrell Jenkins observed, “The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. This book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets ...” (**The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation**, p. 22).

It naturally follows, then, that previous study of the OT is crucial to understanding Revelation – just as algebra and geometry are prerequisites of trigonometry and calculus. This greater familiarity with the OT likely made the Revelation more readily understandable to its original recipients. Additionally, their suffering and trials made the apocalyptic imagery more meaningful to them.

### ***Practical importance of this study***

Revelation is a book upon which much popular false teaching is based. People who know little about the Bible have heard of “Armageddon,” the “rapture,” the “tribulation,” a thousand-year reign of Jesus and other millennial teachings from their preacher, on television, or the popular books of men like Hal Lindsey and John Walvoord. When these people cite Revelation for their doctrines, we cannot adequately answer them simply by turning to other passages. Unless we can take the scripture in question and offer a more reasonable and Biblically sound explanation, we will lose our credibility and those who are deceived by such teaching will have no incentive to abandon it.

Also, Revelation does have something to say to us today. Its themes have to do with answered prayer, God’s sovereignty, victory over enemies, patience, reward for faithfulness, warning against compromise with the world and other relevant issues. To ignore the book is to forfeit the blessing that it contains for those who attempt to live by faith.

### ***A bit of advice***

DON’T *DON’T DON’T* get discouraged! Revelation is difficult, and if you have not studied it before or do not have a thorough background in the OT, you will have some problems with the imagery. Try not to get too bogged down with the details of each vision; it is the overall picture or message that is important.

A modest goal for this study is to simply work toward a better understanding than when you began. For many of us at Hueytown, this is the second time through Revelation in five years. It takes years of studying the book several times through in order to become comfortable with it. Be patient, understand what you can, and be satisfied with whatever progress you make.

Finally, try to rid yourself of preconceptions and keep an open mind. Things are rarely what they appear on the surface. Honor the context and the figurative language of the book and resist the urge to suddenly take an image literally. Very little in Revelation is literal.

## Day 1: The Time Is Near (Rev 1:1-3)

The importance of the Revelation is indicated by the agents involved in its transmission. It originated with God, who gave it to Jesus, who sent His angel, who then “signified” (to express by signs, symbols) the message to an apostle (John), who then sent it to the seven churches of Asia. There is an urgency to this prophecy which rules out a far-distant fulfillment: “*things which must shortly take place*” (1:1); “*the time is near*” (1:3). This urgency is repeated at the end of the epistle: “*things which must shortly take place*” (22:6); “*the time is at hand*” (22:10); “*I am coming quickly*” (22:7, 12, 20). John writes to the seven churches of Asia about matters of vital importance to them, and those who would read, hear and keep the things written would be blessed (1:3). **John writes about events which have already taken place.** However, we can still benefit from the timeless truths embedded in his message.

1. What does the word “revelation” mean?
2. What does John affirm concerning his role in delivering this prophecy?

## Day 2: The Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:4-8)

The great question of Revelation is “Who rules?” The persecutions of Rome might make it appear that Caesar holds the upper hand; indeed, even Jesus’ own blood was shed by Roman treachery (1:5b). But Jesus was raised to become “*the ruler over the kings of the earth,*” and He has invited His redeemed ones to rule with Him as “*kings and priests*” (1:5b-6). The present period of Roman domination is due to a gracious delay of God’s wrath to afford the opportunity of repentance. But that delay is coming to an end, and the Roman oppressors will be punished. The phrase “*who is and who was and who is to come*” is used of both Jesus and the Father (1:4, 8). While the language of 1:7 sounds like “final judgment” terminology, it is characteristic of *any* judgment of the Lord against His enemies. The thoughts come from the apocalyptic writings of Zechariah (12:10-12) and are used by Jesus in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt 24:30). In this picturesque imagery, being seen by one’s enemy suggests vindication and victory (see Rev 11:11-12). Remember also that Revelation does not describe literal events; rather, it conveys messages in picture form. The message of 1:7: Jesus will have the last word and ultimate victory over His enemies.

3. What do the terms Alpha and Omega mean (check a dictionary if need be)?
4. Describe Jesus and His relationship to believers in Revelation 1:5.

## Day 3: The Commencement of the Vision (Rev 1:9-11)

John identifies with his readers as one who himself has suffered persecution “*for the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (1:9). While on Patmos, Jesus via the Spirit imparts the visions of the Revelation to John and instructs him to write to the seven churches of Asia.

5. How does John describe himself in Revelation 1:9?
6. What do you think is “the Lord’s Day”?

#### **Day 4: The Glorified Christ (Rev 1:12-16)**

When John turns to investigate the source of the voice, he sees a symbolic representation of Jesus standing among His people (seven lampstands = seven churches – 1:20). The imagery combines to present a picture of heavenly glory, power and victory. This is not Jesus as a gentle shepherd but a fierce warrior in the midst of His people and ready to defend them. His flaming eyes will expose His enemies and they will be trampled under His feet of refined brass and slain by the sharp sword protruding from His mouth.

7. How is Jesus’ voice described (see Revelation 1:15, 10)?
8. What was Jesus’ countenance like?

#### **Day 5: “I Am He Who Lives” (Rev 1:17-20)**

This Jesus was not the one with whom John felt comfortable reclining at a meal. Instead, awed by the image before him, he “*fell at His feet as dead*” (1:17). This reaction is similar to earlier prophets who were confronted with the glory of God or His messengers (cf. Dan 10:10-11, 15-19). Jesus eases John’s anxiety and, for the third time already, declares Himself to be the First and the Last (1:8, 11, 17). Jesus, Himself, had become a victim of Roman power, but long after the Roman Empire is gone Jesus will remain, for “*I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen*” (1:18). In these initial images a principle is being set forth: God’s people must trust in and remain loyal to Jesus Christ, for in the end they will be vindicated and rewarded while His enemies will be overthrown. Regardless of how things may look from our perspective, Jesus is near and will act on behalf of the faithful when the time is right.

9. What is John instructed to write?
10. What keys does Jesus hold? What do you think this means?

### **Introduction to the Mini-Epistles**

There is no compelling reason to take figuratively Jesus' command to John to write to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 1:11). The Revelation concerned "*things which must shortly take place*" (1:1). Therefore, these mini-epistles do not represent seven church ages; they are simply letters to congregations regarding their spiritual condition.

Why only these seven churches were addressed is not explained, but their relative strengths and weaknesses typify churches in every age. The exhortation "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (2:7, 11, 17, 29, etc.) commends the messages to all faithful people. The specific prophecies, however, have already been realized.

Hendriksen suggests the following general pattern to the epistles (**More Than Conquerors**, pp. 59-60):

- |                              |                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Salutation/address        | 5. Warning/threat |
| 2. Christ's self-designation | 6. Exhortation    |
| 3. Commendation              | 7. Promise        |
| 4. Condemnation              |                   |

The mini-epistles and the symbolism to follow may be summarized thusly: Do not be deceived by appearance; the things which have occurred and are about to transpire are according to God's plan and under His control. Victory over your enemies is assured and you have been given the power to overcome ("overcome" is used 28 times in the NT, 24 times by John and 17 of those in Revelation). No matter what happens, you must remain faithful to God; otherwise, you will forfeit eternal life.

### **Day 1: Ephesus: "You Have Left Your First Love" (Rev 2:1-7)**

Some forty years earlier, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders about false teachers who would arise among them (Ac 20:28-31), and he later issued similar warnings to Timothy as his young protégé worked in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3-4, 6-7; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 3:6-9, 13; 4:3-4). Evidently the warnings were heeded and the congregation had a history of opposing doctrinal error (Rev 2:2-3). Sadly, however, this is not the whole story of faithfulness. Christians must be properly motivated in all they do, and Jesus tells the Ephesians "*you have left your first love*" (2:4). Paul warned the Corinthians of a similar drift (1 Cor 13:1-3). Jesus does give an additional word of commendation: "*You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*" (2:6). Nothing else is known of these people, but note that the *intolerance* of the Ephesians for these people is praised. In our day, intolerance for any reason is condemned by a society which is insistent upon having its own way.

1. What three things must the Ephesians do to be restored fully to Jesus' favor (Revelation 2:5)? What will Jesus do if the Ephesians do not repent?
2. Describe the quality of the work done by the Ephesians over the years.
3. What is promised by the Lord to those who overcome?

## **Day 2: Smyrna: Faithful Though Persecuted (Rev 2:8-11)**

Jesus uses the phrase "I know" in every epistle. This divine knowledge is a comfort to the honest heart. The Lord knew of Smyrna's works which had been rendered amid poverty and persecution. The primary source of opposition in this city appears to be the Jews (2:9), for He declares those who would blaspheme His name and torment His people to be a "*synagogue of Satan*." Jesus does not promise to alleviate Smyrna's suffering; instead, He says that prison, testing and tribulation await. The number "10" is "a significant number in all historical ages ... suggestive of a rounded total, large or small" (**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Vol. 4, p. 2162). This indicates a definite period known to and controlled by God but the duration of which is not revealed to the Smyrnans. Smyrna is not cited for any act of unfaithfulness by the Lord.

4. In spite of their poverty, Jesus says the Smyrnans are \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Who would cause them to be thrown into prison?
6. If they are faithful until \_\_\_\_\_, they will receive a crown of \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Day 3: Pergamos: Where Satan's Throne Is (Rev 2:12-17)**

Pergamos was the political capital of Asia and thus a seat of pagan worship, including emperor worship. This pervasive Roman influence is described as "*where Satan's throne is ... where Satan dwells*" (2:13). Rome will be later identified as Satan's agent of opposition to the Lord's kingdom. These brethren had already faithfully endured serious persecution, yet Jesus says, "*I have a few things against you*" (2:14). He cites two flaws in particular: fellowshiping those who hold the doctrine of Balaam (see Num 23-25; 31:8, 16; 2 Pet 2:15 and Jude 11) and condoning the Nicolaitans (2:14-15). Jesus warns the Pergamos church to repent of this lest He "*fight against them with the sword of My mouth*" (see Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16).

7. How did the Pergamos church respond to the death of one of their members?
8. What two stumbling blocks were put before Israel by Balaam's advice?
9. What did Jesus say He hated?
10. In what way was Satan's "throne" in Pergamos?

## **Day 4: Thyatira: Corrupted by Jezebel (Rev 2:18-23)**

This church had much in its favor: the Lord praises them for their *“works, love, service, faith and ... patience”* (2:19). Not only that, it is a growing church: *“as for your works, the last are more than the first.”* This, however, is being compromised in favor of a congregational “Jezebel” who is leading the church astray (2:20). The OT Jezebel corrupted Israel with her idolatry, treachery and murder (1 Kgs 16:29-22:40; 2 Kgs 9:22, 30-37). She was the de facto ruler of Israel during the reign of her weak husband Ahab. Thyatira’s Jezebel was unopposed as she led part of the church down the path of idolatry and fornication. The Lord has been patient with Jezebel, allowing both her and her followers time to repent. His patience is now wearing thin.

**11.** What does the Lord threaten against Jezebel?

**12.** What did Jezebel call herself?

**13.** What would all the churches know by the punishment of Jezebel and her followers?

## **Day 5: Thyatira: Power over the Nations (Rev 2:24-29)**

Thyatira was a “blue-collar” town, noted for its manufacturing and trade guilds (labor unions). Some believe that Christians were being influenced to compromise their faith to ensure job security. If this is correct, then the imagery of shattered pottery in Rev 2:27 becomes more meaningful. The quotation is from Ps 2:8-9 where reference is made to Messianic rule over the nations. Jesus promises the faithful that if they remain steadfast to the end they will be like iron bars against clay pottery.

**14.** What two phrases in Revelation 2:25-26 stress the need for endurance?

**15.** What would Jesus put upon those in Thyatira who had not been corrupted?

**16.** What had Jesus received from the Father?

**Day 1: Sardis: The Dead Church (Rev 3:1-6)**

Jesus has no congregational praise for Sardis. Others surely would have been surprised by Jesus' rebuke, for Sardis has a reputation of spiritual vitality: "*You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead*" (Rev 3:1). The admonition to "be watchful" (3:2) would be significant to a citizen of Sardis. The city was perched high on a rock and was nearly invincible. This location bred overconfidence which proved fatal on two major occasions: the invasions of Cyrus in 549 B.C. and of Antiochus in 218 B.C. Likewise, the church in Sardis was not aware of its spiritual demise and Jesus threatens to come upon them Himself if they do not repent (3:3). Though collectively the Lord considers them dead, there are certain individuals in Sardis who are yet faithful. The Lord's judgment of men is individual, not congregational. However, as with Lot in Sodom, there is not enough righteous influence in Sardis to spare the church in its present condition.

1. How can a dead church maintain a reputation of life among brethren?
2. What had Jesus not found perfect before God?
3. How does Jesus describe the faithful in Sardis?
4. Does Jesus mention any elements of persecution or false teaching in Sardis? Do you think this is significant?

**Day 2: The Open Door in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-9)**

Jesus has the true "key of David" (3:7), not the Jews who apparently are the primary instigators of trouble in Philadelphia (see "the synagogue of Satan," 3:9). As with Smyrna, no condemnation is spoken against Philadelphia. They are commended for their modest strength, obedience and fidelity to Jesus' name (3:8). Thus Jesus promises to open a door of opportunity to them that no opposing power will be able to shut.

5. What does the key of David enable Jesus to do?
6. What would Jesus make the persecuting Jews do before His faithful Philadelphians?

**Day 3: The Hour of Trial (Rev 3:10-13)**

Jesus' warning of "*the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world*" enhances the sense of urgency and immediacy with which Revelation began (1:1-3). He further exhorts, "*Behold, I come quickly!*" (3:11). Whatever the nature of the trial, it is designed to "*test those who dwell on the earth*" (3:10). The "earth" in Revelation often stands in juxtaposition to the saved. Thus "earth" often connotes the unregenerate. The wrath of the

Lord will soon be poured out upon His enemies, but those faithful to Him will be spared. This does not mean that the righteous will not suffer, for some have already been martyred (Rev 2:13). But they will not be subject to the penalties of wrath if they “hold fast” (3:11). In contrast to the persecuting Jews, the Christian who overcomes will be “a pillar in the temple of My God” (3:12).

7. The Philadelphians (and we) should take care that no one steal what?

8. What would be written upon those who overcome?

### **Day 4: The Lukewarm Laodiceans (Rev 3:14-18)**

The message to Laodicea draws heavily from its outstanding features: hot springs surrounded the city; it was famous for an eye salve called Phrygian powder; its rare black sheep produced a soft, glossy wool that was in great demand; and it was an opulent city, home to many banks, millionaires and all the trappings that come with great wealth. Laodicea was self-sufficiently rich, and the Christians there began to see themselves in the same light (3:17). This led to an apathetic lukewarmness which the Lord loathed. The Laodiceans need to revive their sense of spiritual need and humble themselves before the Lord for the blessings He can bestow (3:18).

9. What was the true condition of Laodicea (Revelation 3:17)?

10. How does Jesus feel about those who serve Him with indifference?

### **Day 5: Knocking at the Door (Rev 3:19-22)**

After encouraging the Laodiceans to repent, Jesus describes Himself as One who knocks at the door of the hearts of men. If anyone is willing to open to Him, “*I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*” (3:20). This picture of intimate fellowship is designed as comfort and strength to those undergoing trials.

11. Who receives rebuke and chastening when necessary?

12. Though Caesar sat on Rome’s throne, where would Christians who overcome sit?

13. Discuss: Is it harder to live faithfully to the Lord in some places than in others?  
What do you think is spiritually challenging about living in Hueytown, Alabama?

**Day 1: The Glorious Throne of God (Rev 4:1-6a)**

Although there has already been a substantial amount of imagery in the mini-epistles, it is the exclusive vehicle of thought from this point on. The rest of the book is filled with challenging visual images, and we must resist imposing our preconceived notions upon them. Remember that Revelation presents ideas and principles in picturesque form. Descriptions are not intended to convey what something *looks like* but rather an essential truth about the subject (i.e., the description of Jesus in 1:12ff). Consider Homer Hailey's admonition:

“... the reader must not become bogged down in efforts to interpret and apply stage settings and incidentals to the point of missing the overall theme and lesson of the book. He must watch, listen, and strive to learn what God, the author of the script, is revealing in His spectacular drama of the ages. To the literalistic mind, lacking the power of imagination, Revelation will forever be a sealed book; to the speculative and visionary mind the book will provide fuel to inflame far-fetched assumptions and conjectures which totally miss the truth. But to the mind prepared by the rest of the Bible for reality in picture and action, impressions of truth will be made that give strength for victory in every conflict of life”  
(**Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary**, p. 165).

Thus the imagery in ch 4 is not an attempt to describe what heaven looks like but is a symbolic picture of God's sovereign rule. In order for the Asian Christians to properly evaluate and understand their circumstances they must begin with the proposition that God is the supreme ruler and all things are under His control. In forthcoming chapters, heaven (where God's throne is) will dictate the flow of events in the clash between God's kingdom and the Roman Empire (cf. 8:1ff; 11:15ff; 14:1ff; 15:1ff; 19:11ff; etc.). In the Revelation we are allowed to see in symbolic form the inner workings of God's power and purpose.

1. What does the trumpet-voice invite John to do?
2. What general impression do you get of God's throne from the picturesque language?

**Day 2: The Creator, the Lord God Almighty (Rev 4:6b-11)**

The word “throne” is found 17 times in chs 4-5. Whatever the meaning of each specific detail, the central message is the absolute rule of God over creation. It is impossible to positively identify the elders and the living creatures in the throne scene. Since the elders sit on thrones, wear white robes and crowns of gold (4:4), things which are promised to God's redeemed people (Rev 2:10; 3:5, 21), they may represent the totality of saved people who surround the throne and “*worship Him who lives forever and ever*” (4:10). The living creatures, similar to the seraphim of Isaiah 6 and the cherubim of Ezekiel 1

and 10, may represent a higher order of heavenly beings or possibly all earthly elements which exist at God's command and are subject to His will. What is more important than *who* they are is *what* they are doing: offering praise to God without rest day and night (4:8).

3. What do the four living creatures praise about God in Revelation 4:8?

4. What do the elders acknowledge of Him in Revelation 4:11?

### **Day 3: The Scroll (Rev 5:1-6)**

John sees a sealed scroll in the hand of God but is distressed when no one suitable to open it is found. He is comforted by one of the elders who declares that a Lion from Judah and a Root of David has prevailed to open the scroll. But when John looks for this Lion, what he sees is a Lamb – a slain Lamb that yet lives. The connection between the terms Judah, David and Lamb all point to the Messiah as introduced by the OT prophets (2 Sam 7:11-14; Ps 89:3-4; Is 11:1-11; Jer 33:15-16; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 7:14; etc.).

5. How had the Lion/Lamb qualified to open the scroll?

### **Day 4: Worthy Is the Lamb Who Was Slain (Rev 5:7-10)**

While more detail about the scroll will be found in ch 6, note for now that it originates with God; it is in His hand. It does not appear to be God's scheme of redemption, for in the vision redemption has already been provided (5:6, 9-10). The scroll represents the plan and purpose of God, "*the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole earth*" (3:10). These purposes will be executed by the Lamb; He is worthy because He died and yet continues to live. The message for these Christians is that their Lord is alive and more powerful than Caesar. As they face death for His name, they need reassurance that it is not because He is unable to help. The vision indicates that all is unfolding according to a specific plan which is designed to glorify the Father and the Son and their kingdom.

6. What are the golden bowls full of incense held by the elders?

7. What did the elders sing?

### **Day 5: Honor to God and the Lamb (Rev 5:11-14)**

The chapter ends in a crescendo of praise to God and the Lamb from the angels, living creatures, elders and every created thing on earth. Again, do not be deceived. Things may appear to be out of God's control, but this is an illusion. Everything, including persecuting nations, exist to glorify the Father. All praise will be His in the end. Note that the Lamb is considered worthy of equal praise with the Father.

8. List the things ascribed to God and the Lamb.

**Day 1: The First Four Seals (Rev 6:1-8)**

Four principal characters are involved in these seals: the Lamb, who has power over the seals; the living creatures, who call forth the horses and riders; the horses and riders, who bring death and hardship upon the earth; and John, who sees and hears in order to communicate the vision. Horses were the ultimate war machine in ancient times (Job 39:19-25). They symbolize in OT apocalyptic literature the will of God as He imposes it wherever He chooses upon the earth (Zech 1:8-11; 6:1-8). The first horse may symbolize Christ, Himself, or the principle of divine will going forth and accomplishing God's purposes. The other horses anticipate a period of hostile reaction to the will of God and resulting persecution. Jesus had promised to spare the Philadelphians "*the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth*" (Rev 3:10).

1. Compare Revelation 6:4 and Matthew 10:34. What might the sword in 6:4 signify?
2. What seems to be indicated by the effect of the black horse?

**Day 2: Seals Five and Six (Rev 6:9-17)**

The appearance of martyrs "*who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held*" (6:9) seems to verify that the first four horses involved religious persecution. The martyrs cry to God for justice and vindication, but they are told that God's purposes are not yet fulfilled and more must die even as they did (6:10-11). The day is coming, however, when the wrath of the Lamb will be outpoured upon His enemies. The imagery in 6:12-17 is from the OT and was used of God's wrath upon the nations (cf. Is 13:13; 34:3-4; Ezk 32:7-8; Joel 2:30-31). We must guard against automatically assigning such language to the second coming of Jesus.

3. Were the martyrs justified in asking God to avenge them?
4. How long must the martyrs rest and wait?
5. From what were the enemies of God trying to hide?

**Day 3: The Sealing of God's Servants (Rev 7:1-8)**

Chapter seven interrupts the opening of the seals to answer the question of the ungodly in 6:17: "*Who is able to stand*" before the wrath of the Lamb? God assures these Christians (and all believers) that His people are marked for identification and will not be overlooked. "*The Lord knows those who are His*" (2 Tim 2:19). "Sealing" plays a prominent role in Revelation. See Ezekiel 9 for OT background. God's servants are described in terms of Jewish tribes (7:4-8). This should not be surprising since other NT references

call Christians “Israel” (Gal 6:16), indicating a chosen, spiritual nation which is inclusive of both Jews and non-Jews by heredity (see Rom 2:28-29; Ph 3:3). The number 144,000 has no numerical significance; it merely represents the full complement of believers whom God identifies as His people.

6. What is the reason for delay in restraining the winds?

7. What beings are operating on God’s behalf in this passage?

#### **Day 4: Those Who Survive the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:9-17)**

Again, it is easy to assign this passage to the final judgment but such is not consistent with the context. After indicating that God would put His mark of identification on His servants, the vision now describes the character of those who are so identified and the benefits that accrue to them. Those who would survive the wrath of the Lamb would do so only by acknowledging that salvation is in Him (7:10). They “*washed their robes ... in the blood of the Lamb*” (7:14). The redeemed will not be subject to the Lamb’s wrath (comp. 3:10).

While 7:15-17 may look like an “in heaven” scene, remember that Revelation relates abstract ideas in picture form. These images figuratively describe Christians in this life who respect the authority of the Lord and benefit from spiritual blessings in Him. “*He who sits on the throne shall dwell among them*” (7:15b) echoes passages like 2 Cor 6:16, 1 Cor 3:16-17 and Eph 2:19-22. The Lamb, having poured His wrath upon His enemies, now shepherds His people and provides “*living fountains of waters*” (comp. Jn 4:10-15; 7:38), shade from the heat and comfort in sorrow. These figures reflect Isaiah’s prophecies uttered 700 years previously concerning God’s Messianic Servant (Is 49:10). The Lamb will care for and defend His people, the church, but He will be a terror to His enemies.

8. From where did this innumerable multitude of people come?

9. What leads to the conclusion that they are Christians, redeemed people?

#### **Day 5: The Seventh Seal (Rev 8:1-6)**

The specific reason for the half-hour of silence is not stated, but it serves to heighten the drama and suspense of what is to happen next. It further serves as a backdrop to the sounds of prayer coming from the saints to the throne of God. (8:3). Seven angels who stand before God are ready to blow their trumpets, and the silence gives way to the rumbling of thunder, earthquakes and other terrifying noise. With the protection of the saints assured, the opening of the last seal introduces judgments upon God’s enemies.

10. What did the angel offer on the golden altar before the throne?

11. What does this image suggest about prayer?

**Day 1: The First Three Trumpets (Rev 8:7-11)**

As with other figurative images in Revelation, it is impossible to identify certain historical events which coincide with the sounding of the trumpets. (On the OT use of trumpets, refer to Num 10:1-10). Remember, John is seeing principles in symbolic form rather than specific incidents which are to occur. Note the proportion of the things affected at the sounding of the trumpets: one-third of the trees, the sea and its creatures, ships, rivers and springs. This contrasts with later judgments in Revelation of greater proportion, possibly indicating the gradual increase of pressure by God in an effort to encourage repentance among His enemies.

1. What affected the trees and grass?
2. Which Egyptian plague does the second trumpet resemble?
3. Research "wormwood" from Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15. What do you think the third trumpet represents?

**Day 2: The Fourth Trumpet (Rev 8:12-13)**

The dimming of heavenly bodies signifies a substantial judgment of God that brings distress upon humanity (comp. Ezk 32:6-8 in reference to Pharaoh). The constancy and light-producing capability of heavenly bodies has always provided man with a sense of comfort and continuity. Consequently, upsets to this order, mixed with superstition, have historically produced terror. This fourth trumpet is a warning that worse is to follow. Woes are pronounced upon "the inhabitants of the earth." **Note:** Things associated with the "earth" in Revelation often refer to non-Christians: "inhabitants of the earth" (8:13); "kings of the earth" (6:15); "those who dwell on the earth" (11:10; 12:12; 13:11-14); "the harvest of the earth" (14:15). Christians, on the other hand, are "redeemed from the earth" (14:3). They are often described as being in heaven, on Mt. Zion or before the throne (cf. 7:9, 15; 11:15-19; 14:1-5; etc.).

4. What is the alternate reading of "angel" in Revelation 8:13?
5. What is the triple cry of the angel?

**Day 3: The Fifth Trumpet (Rev 9:1-6)**

Locust invasions were often a form of judgment against God's enemies in the OT (cf. Ex 10:1-20; Joel 1-2). But these are no ordinary locusts. They swarm from the abyss to afflict and torment only those not sealed by God (non-Christians), and they produce such misery that their victims will wish for death but not find it. Given these facts, and con-

sidering the darkness which envelops the earth together with the name of the king over the locusts (Death or Destroyer, 9:11), the picture may be that of rampant sin and its detrimental effect upon mankind. Gross immorality and excessive indulgence in sin are signs of God's judgment against a people (cf. Rom 1 – "*God gave them up ...*"). While lamentable, moral decay is sometimes God's way of arresting a free-fall of rebellion. Such indulgence in sin is certainly characteristic of Rome in its waning years.

6. What from the bottomless pit darkened the sun and the air?
7. What authority was not given to the locusts? How long would they have power?
8. Who was affected by the locusts? Who, then, was **not** affected?

#### **Day 4: The Description of the Locust Army (Rev 9:7-12)**

The description of the locusts, as with the living creatures in Rev 4:6-8, resembles nothing which naturally occurs. Rather, the locusts are a conglomerate of various images not all of which are easy to explain. The resemblance to war horses and teeth like a lion reflect Joel's locusts (Joel 1:6; 2:4). This, together with the "*crowns of something like gold,*" indicate success and victory in the purpose for which they are sent. The affliction of the locusts is likened to the sting of a scorpion: excruciating, sickening and inflaming but not usually lethal. This is not a leaderless army; they have a king. Their king is not the one who sits upon the throne of chapter 4; he does not issue the "crown of life" (Rev 2:10). Rather, their king is also the angel of the abyss, whose very character is best described as "destruction." Satan certainly is the author of sin, and through it he desires to destroy all the good things that God has made. The sin that he incites serves to bring miseries of all kinds upon man, causing him to mourn his condition. The imagery seems to suggest that the first woe is immersion in immorality, ignorance, idolatry and everything else associated with rampant sin.

9. What sound did the locusts' wings make? What does this suggest?

#### **Day 5: The Sixth Trumpet (Rev 9:13-21)**

This passage seems to affirm that the fifth trumpet involved sin, for now sin is to be greatly punished (9:20-21). The Euphrates River symbolizes the approach of God's judgment, for in the OT both the Assyrians and Babylonians came from the north, beyond the Euphrates, to afflict Israel. In the vision, four angels are released from the River and become an army of horsemen two hundred million strong. The fire, smoke and brimstone consumes one-third of mankind, but the remaining two-thirds refuse to repent.

10. From where does the command to release the angels come? What had come from this before (Revelation 8:3-4)?
11. List the works of men's hands for which they were punished.

**Day 1: The Mighty Angel and the Little Book (Rev 10:1-7)**

Both the fearsome appearance and ominous pronouncement of the mighty angel indicate that a significant time is nearing: *"there should be delay no longer ... the mystery of God would be finished"* (10:6-7). The vision is filled with sight and sound: the sun, clouds, a rainbow, fire, the roaring of a lion and rumbling of seven thunders. John is moved to write by the display but is forbidden by a voice from heaven to continue. The phrase "delay no longer" is a key to the remainder of Revelation. I see the book not as a series of sequential events but overlapping images of Rome's downfall. Many commentators fall into the irresistible trap of trying to fit Revelation into a historical framework, which is impossible. With God's judgment upon Rome, Daniel's fourth world empire, *"the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets"* (10:7). Homer Hailey's observation on the unity of the Bible places Revelation in a proper context: "The Old Testament prophets never dealt with the specific events beyond the coming redemption, the permanent establishment of the spiritual kingdom, the termination of the Jewish theocracy, the persecution of the saints, and the destruction of the fourth world empire" (**Commentary on Revelation**, p. 246).

1. Where was the mighty angel standing?
2. Upon what aspects of God's person did the angel swear that God was about to act?

**Day 2: The Bittersweet Book (Rev 10:8-11)**

John is commanded by the voice from heaven to take the book from the hand of the angel and eat it. The prophet Ezekiel was given similar instructions (Ezk 3:1-3). God's word is sweet in its justice and truth, and we can take comfort in the sovereignty of His will. Bitterness, however, comes from the hardships that God's judgments bring. Great distress and suffering are coming upon the Roman Empire and those allied with her. Unfortunately, many innocent people will likewise suffer as the wrath of the Lamb is unleashed.

3. How broad were the prophecies of John? Who would be affected by them?

**Day 3: God's Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-6)**

The identity and purpose of the kingdom is here described by various figures: a temple, a holy city, two witnesses, two olive trees and lampstands. The trampling of the holy city by the Gentiles suggests that persecution awaits God's people. However, this persecution will not prevent the two witnesses (in the OT, a sufficient number to establish a matter as truthful) from finishing their testimony, for they have an unlimited source of power at their disposal (11:4-6). These calamities were actually inflicted by prophets of

God did in the OT. But under the new covenant “*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*” (2 Cor 10:4).

4. The two witnesses would prophesy clothed in \_\_\_\_\_. What does this mean?
5. What assurance is given by the symbol of olive trees and the lampstands? See Zech 4, especially verse 9, for the OT symbolism.

#### **Day 4: Death and Resurrection of the Witnesses (Rev 11:7-14)**

The unregenerate are also called a city; it has the characteristics of Sodom, Egypt and, by implication, Jerusalem. This city rejoices when the beast from the abyss rises up and kills the witnesses, but the joy is premature as the witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven. This is not the final judgment but a vivid, apocalyptic picture of triumph and vindication (comp. the same imagery in Rev 1:7: “*every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him*”). Here again is the sweet and the bitter: God’s kingdom will be victorious but not without cost.

6. Who are “those who dwell on the earth” and why do they rejoice?
7. When was the first woe completed? When was the second woe completed?

#### **Day 5: The Seventh Trumpet (Rev 11:15-19)**

The sixth trumpet seems to include all the events from Rev 9:13-11:14. Again, the seventh trumpet does not depict the final judgment. It is the third woe directed toward the “inhabitants of the earth” (8:13; 9:12; 11:14), and the third woe is “*coming quickly*” (11:14). Also, the angel declared that the mystery of God would be finished at the blast of the seventh trumpet (10:6-7). Remember the nature of apocalyptic imagery. Concepts and ideas, rather than specific events, are set forth in picture form. What is described in this vision is not the beginning of Jesus’ reign, for He was inaugurated on Pentecost (cf. Rev 1:5, 9; 2:26-27; 3:21). Rather, the passage affirms the supremacy of Christ’s rule as manifested by the church’s victory over Roman aggression. Note again a judgment and reward are mentioned (11:18), just as a resurrection was also mentioned earlier (11:11-12). We must not make literal what John intended to be a figurative image. A quick scan of chapter 11 reveals it to be an overview of the early days of the kingdom as it bears witness to the gospel, suffers attack, and stands victorious in the end.

8. What sounds are in this vision?
9. Who is rewarded?
10. What is seen in the temple of God in heaven?

**Day 1: The Woman, Her Child and the Dragon (Rev 12:1-6)**

The general message of ch 12 is the same as ch 11 only from a different point of view. God's victory over Satan is again portrayed, but this time the focus is upon the antagonism in the spiritual realm which affects events upon the earth. A woman is pictured giving birth to a male Child who is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron (cf. Rev 1:5; 2:27). This destiny angers the great dragon who stands poised to devour the Child upon delivery. His plan, however, is thwarted and the Child is transported safely to God and His throne. This part of the vision is a summary of God's redemptive plans throughout history. The woman is best explained by the Abrahamic genealogy which eventually produced God's Messiah. This does not mean merely fleshly Jews, for most of them were not faithful to God. Rather, the glorious woman would be the remnant of faithful people who were the "true" Israel down through the ages. Satan tried to destroy God's purpose by annihilating the faithful through the Egyptians, Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, Babylonians and others. With great pain and suffering the Messiah was brought forth (12:2).

1. What did the dragon intend to do to the child?
2. What is the significance of the woman fleeing to the wilderness?

**Day 2: Heavenly War (Rev 12:7-12)**

This passage is not concerned with the origin of Satan. The dragon has been unsuccessful in destroying the Child, so he attempts an assault on heaven itself where the Child is now enthroned. Defeated in this battle by an angelic army, he and his angels are cast out of heaven to the earth. This is a behind-the-scenes look at the reason for the earthly conflict between the church and Rome. Satan could not prevent redemption from being offered to men; he couldn't avert the birth of Jesus, couldn't destroy Him on earth, and certainly cannot overthrow the rule of Christ in heaven. His only recourse is to wage war against the people of God and try to destroy them. This, too, will fail as they "*did not love their lives to the death*" (12:11).

3. How would the dragon be overcome?
4. Who should rejoice at this turn of events? Who would experience woes?

**Day 3: The Dragon's Pursuit of the Woman (Rev 12:13-17)**

The dragon is intent upon persecuting the faithful remnant of God's people, the church, but God provides them protection and sustenance in a safe haven. Further enraged and frustrated by his inability to destroy the church, the dragon "*went to make war with her offspring*" (12:17). Who are they? Possibly they represent Christians considered individ-

ually rather than collectively, who “*keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*” While Satan cannot destroy the kingdom and rule of Christ, he will content himself with deceiving and subverting as many individual Christians as possible. This effort is what we experience when tempted to sin. Satan is seething with hatred toward those who have escaped his dominion through the blood of the Lamb, and he constantly seeks to reclaim them by persuading them to abandon the redemption which he cannot nullify.

**Special Note:** We have seen references to equivalent time spans such as “time, times and half a time” (12:14), “1260 days” (12:6; 11:3) and “42 months” (11:3). As previously noted, numbers in Revelation rarely have literal numeric value. They usually indicate a concept or principle. For example, the number “7” has occurred repeatedly. Seven usually suggests perfection or completeness. Seven seals meant the scroll was completely inaccessible; seven horns declare God’s infinite power; seven trumpets herald complete judgment against God’s enemies. If seven represents completeness, then three-and-a-half falls far short and thus suggests incompleteness or imperfection. These persecutions against God’s people will be ineffective in accomplishing their purpose; viz., to overthrow God’s rule and destroy His kingdom. Satan would cause havoc by God’s permission, but he would be unsuccessful in the end.

5. From whom does a flood of water spew forth? Who is this (cf. 12:9)?

6. How did the earth help the woman? What do you think this means?

#### **Day 4: The Beast from the Sea (Rev 13:1-10)**

This chapter tells how the dragon would make war with the offspring of the woman. John sees a beast rising out of the sea which resembles the dragon (comp. 13:1 with 12:3) and receives authority from him (13:2, 4). Hence, the beast is the manifestation of Satan upon the earth. Given the characteristics of power, authority, a throne, the world’s submission (13:3, 4, 7), and the purpose of making war against the saints (13:6-7), it is both reasonable and Biblically consistent to identify the beast as the empire of Rome. Further comparison between this beast and that of Dan 7:17-27 identifies it as the fourth world empire to come; i.e., Rome (Babylon → Medo-Persia → Greece → Rome).

Note again the designation of God’s people as “*those who dwell in heaven*” (13:6) in contrast with “*all who dwell on the earth*” (the unregenerate, those whose names are not written in the Book of Life and who worship the beast – 13:8). Permission is granted by God (13:5, 7) for the beast to wage war against His people for a limited period of time (42 months, see 11:2-3).

7. Who was worshiping the dragon and the beast (Revelation 13:3-4, 8)?

8. What name was on the heads of the beast and what came out of his mouth?

9. What should strengthen the patience and faith of the saints?

## Day 5: The Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:11-18)

This beast is an accomplice of the beast from the sea; they are distinct forces though one in purpose. The religious overtones in the description of the earth beast (worship, signs, make an image, etc.) suggest that false religion, specifically emperor worship, is indicated. This earth beast will later be referred to as “*the false prophet*” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

The earth beast derives its power from the sea beast (13:12). Without the power and approval of the civil state, pagan priests and the emperor worship they promoted would have been without foundation. In return, the earth beast fosters worship of the sea beast. Rome was a very diverse empire; cohesion was fostered by a common though forced allegiance to the emperor (comp. Nebuchadnezzar’s forced worship of the image in Dan 3).

The mark of the beast was not a literal mark, just as the seal of God in ch 7 was not literal. It simply meant to share the nature of the beast and acknowledge him as ruler instead of God. In describing the name or number of the beast, John says “*it is the number of (a) man: His number is 666*” (13:18). This passage, like no other in the book, has given rise to wildly speculative theories. However, no specific individual is under consideration. Remember, the beast is an empire. The number assigned represents the imperfection of humanity. If the number was 777, then its power and success would be complete. But “sevens” come from heaven; “sixes” come from man and fall short of perfection. The beast, a cooperative effort between Satan and man to destroy God’s kingdom, is doomed to failure.

- 10.** List the religious terminology associated with the beast from the earth.
- 11.** Whose worship does the earth beast encourage?
- 12.** What would happen to those who refused to worship?
- 13.** What number indicates that Rome and its false religious system would ultimately fail?

**Day 1: Victorious Followers of the Lamb (Rev 14:1-5)**

Homer Hailey accurately summarizes this section: "John is not describing a final scene in heaven, but the Zion of the Messiah to which the saints of this dispensation have come ... the scene symbolizes security, permanence, and a victorious spirit of rejoicing enjoyed by the church on earth at any time" (**Commentary on Revelation**, p. 302). The contrast between the warring parties is striking: the dragon is on a rampage and his beasts are killing all who oppose them; the Lamb is standing on Mt. Zion with His redeemed ones accompanied by music and singing. Looks can be deceiving. David didn't *look* like he could beat Goliath; Jesus didn't *look* victorious as He hung upon the cross; and Christians didn't *look* blessed of God while the Romans were slaughtering them. This vision reassures the faithful of their true condition before the Lamb, and it is very similar to the images in Rev 7.

1. What is on the foreheads of believers (Revelation 14:1; 7:3)?
2. Describe the moral qualities ascribed to the 144,000.

**Day 2: Babylon Is Fallen (Rev 14:6-13)**

Three angels appear in succession to pronounce doom upon the enemies of God. The first angel represents the commission of Jesus to preach the gospel to "*those who dwell on the earth*" (14:6). This reflects the activity of the two witnesses in ch 11. A fundamental part of that message was "*fear God and give glory to Him*" (14:7), but Satan had encouraged the world to fear Rome and give glory to the emperor. "That great city," formerly identified as Sodom, Egypt and Jerusalem (11:8), is now called Babylon and is declared "fallen" by a second angel (14:8). Babylon was the destroying force of Judah and Jerusalem in the OT. As such it is symbolic of any great enemy of God's people. A third angel follows with a message of doom for all those who worship the beast (14:9ff).

3. Why does the second angel say Babylon is fallen?
4. What indicates that Revelation 14:10 is not the final judgment (comp. 2 Thes 1:9)?
5. What victorious message is John instructed to write?

**Day 3: The Harvest of the Earth (Rev 14:14-20)**

Finally, "*the harvest of the earth is ripe*" (14:15). This is the time for which the righteous had been waiting and praying. The souls of the martyrs had cried for the avenging of their blood (6:10) and they were told to wait patiently. Now, "*the hour of His judgment*

*has come*” (14:7); *“here is the patience of the saints”* (14:12; 13:10). The harvest of grapes is thrown the winepress of God’s wrath, and so great is the trampling of God’s enemies that the winepress yields a huge river of blood (14:20). In this scene Christ and His angels are portrayed as working hand in hand in the harvest. This is reminiscent of their cooperation when Satan was defeated in heaven (12:7-9).

6. Who reaps the harvest of the earth? Who gathers the clusters of grapes?
7. How vast was the pool of blood which collected from God’s enemies? What lesson(s) does this convey?

#### **Day 4: The Song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:1-4)**

Revelation repeatedly contrasts the status of God’s people as opposed to His enemies. Before the seven bowls of wrath are poured out, we are given another triumphant picture of the saints. *“Those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name”* are “standing” (see 6:17; 7:9; 14:1) and giving praise to God. The “song of Moses” was sung in celebration of victory over the mighty Egyptian army (Ex 15). Pharaoh possessed every conceivable advantage over the servile Hebrews, yet he was defeated by the outstretched hand of God. So it will be between the church and Rome. The saints are already pictured as victorious even as the bowls of wrath remain yet unpoured. But note the foreboding tone: the bowls contain *“the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete”* (15:1; comp. 10:7; 14:8).

8. How do the saints feel about God even though they have suffered for His name?

#### **Day 5: The Seven Last Plagues (Rev 15:5-8)**

Seven angels, *“ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation”* (Heb 1:14), are now sent forth from heaven to unleash the plagues of God’s wrath upon mankind. This is a frightening picture: the angels come from the temple of God in heaven; i.e., God, Himself, commissions them to afflict the earth. Their purpose will not fail.

9. What did John see opened in heaven?
10. Who gave the angels the bowls of wrath?
11. What is the origin of the smoke in the temple?
12. What could not be done until after the bowls of wrath were poured out?

**Day 1: The First Four Bowls (Rev 16:1-9)**

Again, it is neither necessary nor possible (and, therefore, not intended) to specify certain historical events represented by the bowls. The overall picture is clear: God's patience has run its course; it is time to vindicate His people (16:5-7). The images are deliberately gross and disgusting. Those loyal to the beast break out in oozing sores; the earth and sea are awash in blood which kills all marine life; and the blazing sun bakes it all into a putrefied mess. As with Pharaoh when the plagues descended upon him, those who worship the beast blaspheme God rather than repent (16:9).

1. What is the "just due" of those who worship the beast?
2. Compare these results with those of the sixth trumpet (Revelation 16:9; 9:20-21).

**Day 2: The Last Three Bowls (Rev 16:10-21)**

The misery of the plagues continues as does the blasphemous obstinacy of God's enemies. The sixth bowl assembles the kings of the earth "*to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*" (16:14). The Euphrates, a natural boundary which restrained the enemies of Israel, is dried up "*so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared*" (16:12). Compare this image with the lesser judgment of 9:14 where four angels were released from the Euphrates to slaughter one-third of mankind. The OT imagery (see ch 15: plagues, song of Moses, temple) continues with reference to Mount Megiddo (Armageddon, 16:16). The mention of this famous battlefield northwest of Jerusalem signifies victory for the army representing the will of God (though not always Israel or Judah). Many vain attempts have been made to identify the time and participants of the millennial "battle of Armageddon," a phrase **not used** in Revelation or anywhere else in the Bible. But the reference is not to any specific war – past, present or future. Remember yet again that Revelation portrays concepts in vivid imagery. The concept is that God is allowing His enemies to amass their strength so that His power and glory will be further magnified when they are destroyed. The seventh bowl pictures that destruction. The wrath of God is outpoured in a crescendo of thunder, earthquake and giant hailstones. The great city of Babylon crumbles and falls along with the other cities of the Empire that formed an alliance of evil.

3. What did the voice from the temple/throne say at the pouring of the seventh bowl?

**Day 3: The Harlot Atop the Beast (Rev 17:1-6)**

The harlot seems to represent the imperial city of Rome. She "*sits on many waters*" (17:1) which refers to the whole of human civilization (17:15). Rome "*is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth*" (17:18). The power of ancient empires was fo-

cused upon a dominant city; i.e., Babylon, Nineveh, Jerusalem, Damascus, etc. From such cities went forth the military, political and economic might that ruled their respective worlds. Rome depended upon the loyalty of her subjugated kings and cultures, enforced by the mighty legions, to maintain its supremacy. Rome, then, was a “harlot” as she enticed the kings of the earth, the independent rulers of various lesser nations (the Herods, for example), to “commit fornication” with her (17:2).

Another prominent feature of the harlot is drunkenness. She is “*drunk with the blood of the saints and ... martyrs of Jesus*” (17:6), and she holds “*a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication*” (17:4) by which she makes drunk the inhabitants of the earth: i.e., the unregenerate (17:2). The ancient city of Rome, grand in so many ways (power, luxury, architecture, engineering, etc.), was morally rotten, spiritually dead and corrupt to the core. Her filth contaminated her allies, but this was of no consequence as everyone wanted to share in Rome’s richness and success. As one’s name summarizes attributes and characteristics, so the harlot’s name describes her true essence (17:5). Those whose senses were dulled by drunkenness, however, would only see enticing beauty and thus be lured to their death.

4. What is John being shown according to Revelation 17:1?

5. What are the “many waters” on which the harlot sits?

6. With what is the harlot drunk?

#### **Day 4: The Mystery of the Woman and the Beast (Rev 17:7-11)**

This, along with Rev 20, is probably the most difficult section of Revelation. We must resist becoming overly burdened with the details and remain focused on the larger picture. We have previously identified the beast as the fourth world empire of which Daniel spoke. Whereas the harlot refers to the city of Rome, the nerve center of the world, the beast refers to the whole Empire, the presence and authority of Rome throughout civilization. Rev 17:8 speaks of the origin, purpose and destiny of this creature. The harlot sits on seven heads, which are identified as seven mountains and apparently seven kings (17:9-10a). In the OT, the term “mountain” sometimes refers to a kingdom as the city best fortified on high ground ruled (comp. Is 2:2-3). Two general things are indicated in 17:10-11 about the imperial rule of Rome: 1) It has almost run its course, and 2) God has allowed an ample amount of time and power for Rome to destroy His spiritual kingdom – if it could. Rome was the perfect fullness (the seven kings become eight – more than enough) of civil power. No nation on earth could successfully resist Roman rule. Surely if any force could destroy God’s kingdom, Rome could. When all is said and done, no one will be able to argue that Rome could have destroyed Christianity if only it had been a stronger kingdom. It was the best Satan and man had to offer, and it was destined to failure.

7. Who is speaking in this section?

8. How are “those who dwell on the earth” described? What makes them marvel?
9. Where is the beast eventually going (17:8, 11)?

### **Day 5: The Ten Horns of the Beast (Rev 17:12-18)**

The ten horns represent “*ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast*” (17:12). In return for their limited authority, “*they will give their power and authority to the beast*” (17:13). This portrays the mutually beneficial relationship between Rome and the client kings who were allowed to rule in their respective territories under Rome’s authority. In order to protect themselves and their relationship with Rome, these kings throughout the Empire would “*make war with the Lamb*” (17:14; comp. also 16:14); i.e., they would join the beast in the persecution of God’s people and in the promotion of immorality and idolatry. But Christians should not fret over this conspiracy against righteousness, for in the end “*the Lamb will overcome them*” (17:14). In fact, these vassal kings who were the strength of the Empire, would become its weakness (recall the iron/clay feet of Daniel’s image, Dan 2:42-43). The horns would come to “*hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire*” (17:16). This will be God’s will, “*for God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose*” (17:17). Pride, lust and greed can only be suppressed for a while. As soon as Rome shows a weakness, the vassal kings will turn upon and cannibalize her.

These images are admittedly difficult to understand. Scholars become hopelessly bogged down in each minute detail of the vision and end up in complete contradiction with one another. I believe we can understand the general thrust of the visions without total agreement on each detail and without consulting secular history for specific fulfillment.

**Synopsis of ch 17:** The world empire of John’s day, the city of Rome together with its network of vassal kings, was waging war against the people of God through active persecution, idolatry, immorality and materialism. God had allowed sufficient time and power to overturn His rule and destroy His kingdom, but it could not be done. Some of His people had been killed, but even this resulted in their ultimate triumph. God would cause the Empire to self-destruct; its cultural diversity and greed would be the ultimate weakness that would unravel the apparently indestructible human kingdom.

10. To whom do the ten kings give their power?
11. Against whom will they wage war? Who will win?
12. Who is with the Lamb?
13. What will the kings eventually do to the harlot?
14. How is the harlot described in Rev 17:18? To what do you think this refers?
15. Who is the controlling force behind these events?

**Day 1: Judgment Against Babylon (Rev 18:1-8)**

The fall of Babylon (Rome) was declared back in 14:8 (see also 16:19). Why the drawn-out end? God wants no doubt as to who is responsible for the destruction and why. Therefore, the fall of Rome is examined from various angles in the closing chapters of Revelation. Since Rome is the duplicate of ancient Babylon in character, the angel applies the sentence passed upon Babylon to Rome (Rev 18:2; comp. Is 21:9; 13:19-22). Note the arrogance Rome: *"I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow"* (18:7). This echoes the smug pride of Babylon before its fall (Is 47:7-11). God calls His people to separate themselves from the iniquities of Rome lest they *"receive of her plagues"* (18:4). Those awed by the beast wondered, *"Who is able to make war with him?"* (13:4). The answer: *"Strong is the Lord God who judges her"* (18:8).

1. Describe the angel who pronounces judgment against Babylon.
2. What had reached unto heaven?

**Day 2: The Weeping Merchants (Rev 18:9-20)**

This description of Rome's demise strongly resembles the judgment against Tyre in Ezk 27-28. Merchants and kings became rich and powerful through their alliances with Rome which explains their grief as they behold Rome going up in smoke (18:9-11, 15-19). The spectacle is dumbfounding: *"What is like this great city?"* (18:18). Equally shocking is the thrice-repeated span of "one hour": *"For in one hour your judgment has come"* (18:10); *"For in one hour such great riches came to nothing"* (18:17); *"For in one hour she is made desolate"* (18:19). Remember that numbers in Revelation do not carry numeric value; rather, they convey a concept. The concept seems to be that when Rome finally collapses, it will seem to have come swiftly though, in fact, the processes leading to its ruin have long been at work. The fall of the Berlin wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union are modern examples. In contrast to the sorrow of the world over Rome's demise, the apostles and prophets rejoice over the avenging of their blood (18:20).

3. Why did the merchants stand at a distance (Revelation 18:10, 15)?
4. Why are the merchants and sailors so upset when they see Rome in ruins?
5. Who has avenged the apostles and prophets?

**Day 3: Life Ceases in Babylon (Rev 18:21-24)**

The image of daily life grinding to a halt is found in various OT passages: Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; Is 24:7-8. Note the play on words: because the blood of prophets and

saints was found in Babylon (18:24), there would *not* be found in Babylon the everyday sounds of music, craftsmen at work, wedding celebrations, etc. In fact, Babylon itself “*shall not be found anymore*” (18:21).

6. What does the angel do to depict the final end of Babylon?

7. What did Babylon use to deceive the nations of the earth?

#### **Day 4: Alleluia! (Rev 19:1-10)**

The rejoicing in heaven answers to the cry of the martyrs from beneath the altar in Rev 6:9-10. Finally, in His own time and according to His own purposes, God “*has judged the great harlot ... and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her*” (19:2). The image of the marriage of the Lamb and His bride depicts not the commencement but the affirmation of Christ’s relationship with His people. Care must be taken to keep this passage and those that follow in their proper setting. The context does not have the end of time in view. Romans 7:4 and Ephesians 5:22-33 indicate that the current fellowship between Christ and His disciples constitutes spiritual marriage. The Lamb’s vindication of His saints and their cause is here figuratively described as taking them as His bride, just as the victory in Rev 11:15ff was described as the affirmation, not the establishment, of His kingdom. It will be very tempting, especially in chs 20-21, to leap away from the context of Rome vs. the church and into final judgment scenes. Caution must be exercised against abandoning the figurative nature of the imagery.

8. How many “alleluias” are there and who says them?

9. Whose reign is upheld by the fall of Babylon?

10. What human celebration expresses the victory of God’s people?

#### **Day 5: Victory Over the Beast and False Prophet (Rev 19:11-21)**

This section amplifies Rev 16:14 and 17:14 which spoke of the kings of the earth being gathered against Christ at Mount Megiddo. First, Christ and His heavenly army are victoriously portrayed (though the battle itself is not actually described): righteous judgment and war (19:11; comp. 16:5-7); many crowns (19:12); the sharp sword and rod of iron by which the nations would be defeated (19:15a; comp. 2:26-27); treading the winepress of the wrath of God (19:15b; comp. 14:19-20). Whereas the fall of Babylon had been followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9), the birds are now invited to feast upon the carcasses of the enemies of God (19:17-18, 21). This is OT imagery indicating complete overthrow (see Jer 7:32-33).

As we consider the fate of the beast (sea beast) and the false prophet (land beast, comp. 16:13; 13:11-17), we must not stray from the context. The “lake of fire” immediately brings to mind the image of hell after final judgment, but final judgment is not here in

view. We have identified the beast and false prophet as the Roman empire, the earthly manifestation of Satan's hatred and opposition toward the people of God. The casting of these two into the *"lake of fire burning with brimstone"* simply indicates a final end. Such a fate was already assigned to those who would worship the beast: *"he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever"* (14:10-11). Then Rome, the imperial capital and harlot, was left in a smoking heap: *"and her smoke rises up forever and ever"* (18:8-9, 18-19; 19:2-3). Now the forces of the Empire considered individually – kings, captains, mighty men, horses, all men slave and free, small and great (19:18) – are being picked over by the birds. Finally, the corporate Empire in the form of the beast and false prophet, which encompasses Rome, the vassal kings, the military might, religious deception, economic blackmail and every other force hostile to Christians, is brought to final ruin. This is symbolized by being cast into a lake of fire, reminiscent of the annihilation of Sodom and its neighboring cities.

God is assuring the seven churches of Asia that the forces causing them so much grief will not ultimately triumph over the church. Remember, these are things that will *"shortly come to pass"* (1:1); *"the mystery of God would be finished"* (10:7); *"the seven last plagues have come, and in them the wrath of God is complete"* (15:1). *"It is done!"* declared the loud voice from the throne as the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air (16:17). **The final, end-of-time judgment is not in view!**

- 11.** The rider of the white horse is named or called what four things? Who is the rider?
- 12.** Where did the gathering of the armies in 19:19 occur?
- 13.** What happened to "the rest" of Revelation 19:21, those not cast into the lake of fire?

**Day 1: The Binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3)**

**Special note:** This is the most challenging chapter in Revelation to maintain the figurative application of the images presented: a thousand year period, resurrections (note the plural), a judgment scene and the lake of fire. Temptation arises to stretch the symbols through the entire Christian dispensation and beyond to the final judgment. But we have noted that Revelation portrays concepts and principles in symbolic form rather than specific historical events. Time references have consistently conveyed quality rather than chronology (one-half hour, one hour, three-and-a-half days, forty two months, forever and ever, etc.). A resurrection and ascension have already occurred which represented the success and victory of a cause – the preaching of the gospel (11:11-12). For consistency's sake, we must honor both the time frame and figurative language of the book and not take the same liberties for which we criticize the premillennial theorists.

Having declared the defeat of the harlot, beast, false prophet and all those loyal to them, sentence is now passed upon the one ultimately responsible for the persecution – “*the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil or Satan*” (Rev 20:2; comp. 12:9). The image of 20:1-3 is of Satan's total incapacitation, not merely a curtailing of his power. He was laid hold of by an angel, bound with a great chain, cast into the abyss, shut up and sealed within it “*so that he should deceive the nations no more*” (20:3). Does that sound like a *partial* or *total* confinement? (Was Jesus' tomb sealed to give *limited* or *no* access?)

But to what does this total binding refer? It refers to the *means* whereby Satan has been operative throughout the book – Rome, the fourth world empire of Daniel. This passage does not address how Satan tempts or influences man today. Remember the context! Satan was persecuting these Christians through the Roman Empire, and the binding for a thousand years indicates that he will never again be able to do so. Why? Because Rome has come to its final end in the lake of fire. But what of the releasing for a little while after the thousand years? The fact that Rome will be destroyed does not mean that Satan will be inactive in the world and abandon his attack against God's kingdom. But the “little while” indicates the weakness and ineffectiveness of such attempts. It is the assurance that as God has defeated the best Satan had to offer, the Roman Empire, so shall He defeat Satan in every future threat against the church.

**1.** How did Satan “deceive the nations” (Rev 20:3; cf. 18:23; 13:14)?

**Day 2: The Reign of the Saints (Rev 20:4-6)**

The defeat of Satan/Rome (bound for a thousand years – 20:2) is contrasted with the complete victory of Christ and the martyrs who had died at their hands (live and reign for a thousand years – 20:4). Note carefully who reigns: “*the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the*

*beast or his image*" (20:4). This is the same group as 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 13:7; 17:6; 18:20, 24 and 19:2. Blessing had been pronounced upon those *"who die in the Lord from now on"* (14:13). They are pictured on thrones, having judgment committed to them, living and reigning. These are the same ones who had been despised, judged and killed by Rome. The tables have been turned.

The reference to the "first resurrection" (20:5) should immediately alert us to the fact that final judgment is not in view. Jesus and His apostles taught only one final resurrection of all men at the end of time (Jn 5:28; Ac 23:6; 1 Cor 15:20-28). Like the resurrection in Rev 11:11-12, this resurrection in ch 20 has reference to victory of a cause. Note that only the "blessed and holy" participate in this first resurrection, and they *"shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years"* (20:6). This is the victory of the martyrs and the persecuted over Satan's attempt to annihilate them. They are alive, ruling, reigning, judging, blessed, holy and priests of God. But what of their enemies? They are dead (20:5).

**Note:** Rev 20:4, 6 says nothing about how long Christ reigns. Millennialists have built an entire doctrine around this, affirming that Jesus will reign upon the earth for 1000 years. But look carefully at the verse. The emphasis is upon *the martyred saints*: they are not dead but alive; they are not defeated but reign; they are with Christ. How long *He* reigns is not under consideration. The thousand years is not a period of duration but a symbol of complete triumph over the dragon. Christ reigns *forever*; the death of these saints does not prevent their victory in Christ.

2. In what sense do you think the saints sit on thrones of judgment (Revelation 20:4)?
3. When will "the rest of the dead" live again? Who are they?

### **Day 3: Satan: The Eternal Loser (Rev 20:7-10)**

Satan is pictured again mustering an army to threaten the people of God (20:9). The use of "Gog and Magog" is from Ezekiel 37-39 where we find a resurrection of God's people (Ezk 37) and the rise of a vague, threatening army (Ezk 38:9-12, 15-17). The crushing defeat of this army is described in Ezk 38:18-23; 39:4-7. John's Gog and Magog has the same purpose as Ezekiel's: attack on the "beloved city" (Rev 20:9). They also meet the same fate: utter defeat. The images are a footnote to Revelation and expand on 20:3. Satan will continue, as long as the world stands, to fight against the kingdom of God. He cannot do otherwise, for such is his nature. But he is always doomed to failure, for the same Christ who shattered Rome with a rod of iron continues to rule over all human kingdoms with the same rod (Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Rev 20:10 portrays Satan not in the final judgment but as an eternal loser; all his attempts to oppose the kingdom of God will end in failure.

4. What will Satan do to the nations which he had done via Rome (Rev 20:8)?

5. What does the fire of God do?

#### **Day 4: The Second Resurrection and Death (Rev 20:11-15)**

I consider this judgment scene to represent the ultimate failure of the enemies of God. It is “the dead” who are before God, but God’s people in Revelation have always been pictured as alive, triumphant, dressed in white (20:4; 19:8; 15:2; 14:1-5; 11:11-12; 7:9, 14-17). These dead ones come from the sea, Death and Hades; they were dead because they had been slain by the wrath of God (see 20:5). They are now resurrected (“standing” – 20:12) and judged by their works while the saints are already arrayed in the fine linen of their righteous acts (19:8). This judgment is a summary condemnation on all the forces which had tormented and persecuted the people of God. It is called the second death. That is, the lake of fire again represents a final end, the complete defeat of those in opposition to God and who would not submit to the authority of the Lamb. The dragon, beasts, harlot, those with the mark of the beast and all the kings, captains and mighty men have met their doom. This same type of judgment setting is found in Dan 7:9-14 and describes the defeat of the fourth beast of Daniel’s vision.

While it may be difficult or even impossible to satisfy ourselves on every aspect of these images, it seems more consistent with the message of the book to see ch 20 as a contrast between the fortunes of the church and the fate of Rome rather than a final judgment scene.

6. What do the books that were opened represent?

#### **Day 5: God’s Victorious Church (Rev 21:1-8)**

My view of this passage differs from most, for I consider it to be descriptive of the victorious people of God rather than heaven. John has consistently contrasted the enemies of God and their fate with the church and its glorious success. With all enemy forces now defeated and cast into the lake of fire, Revelation closes with a vision of the church of God as a radiant bride and a glorious city. All of the figures used by John are found elsewhere in reference to the church. The passing away of the first heaven and earth (21:1) and the former things being removed (21:4) refer in context to the change in world order now that the dominant force, the Roman Empire, is gone (comp. Is 65:17; 66:22). The hostile climate of persecution has changed; no longer would weeping, sorrow, death and pain be caused by the dragon and his allies (21:4). This reflects the prophetic vision of the Messianic age: *“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying”* (Is 65:19; comp. Is 25:8).

John sees *“the holy city, New Jerusalem”* coming down out of heaven from God (21:2). Remember, things which originate from Satan come out of the abyss, the earth or the sea, but things that originate with God and reflect His will come down from heaven. So it has been consistently throughout Revelation. God’s redeemed people have already been described as a city (11:2; 20:9). This mirrors OT prophetic descriptions of God’s

people in the future: *“And they shall call you The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel”* (Is 60:14); *“That I may plant the heavens, lay the foundation of the earth, and say to Zion, ‘You are My people’”* (Is 51:16). As the city appears, a voice declares it to be the dwelling place of God among men (comp. Is 4:4-6; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22). All the things said here are descriptive of relationship between God and His people. **Fellowship** is in view, not **location** (heaven).

*“It is done”* connects with 16:17 where the seven last plagues would complete the wrath of God (15:1). If this is final judgment and heaven is being described, then a problem is presented in resolving the finality of the language. Note yet another contrast between the blessed family of God (21:7) and the condemnation of the wicked who *“shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone”* (21:8).

7. Compare Revelation 21:5 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. How, according to Paul, have all things become new?
8. Of whom does God say, *“I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (2 Corinthians 6:16; comp. Revelation 21:3, 7)?
9. Describe the kinds of people who will be subject to the second death.

**Day 1: The Bride and the City (Rev 21:9-21)**

Note who shows John the bride; it is one of the seven angels who were pouring out the last plagues (comp. 15:1; 16:7). This brings unity to these last seven chapters and further indicates that heaven is not under consideration. John is to be shown the Lamb's wife, but he beholds a great city descending "**out of heaven from God**" (21:9-10; comp. 21:2). Is the Lamb married to a **place** (heaven) or a **people** (His church)? The Lamb's wife in 19:7-8 was "*arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*" These were **people**, the ones who had remained faithful to Him and had their blood shed because of it (19:2; 18:20, 24). Compare also Is 60:14 where God's redeemed people are called "*The City of the Lord.*"

Further, the twelve gates have the names of the twelve tribes written upon them. How was the church identified back in 7:4? "*One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*" Also, the great wall of the city had twelve foundations upon which were written the names of the twelve apostles (21:14). Ephesians 2:20 states that the church was built upon the apostles and prophets. Contextually, this refers to the truths that they presented concerning the spiritual blessings in Christ (see Eph 3:5). Finally, the measurements of the city echo the measurements that were made of God's people back in 11:1-2 (from Ezk 40:1ff, especially 42:20). For these reasons, and others to follow, I believe this passage is not a description of heaven but the church in its triumph over Roman persecution.

1. Compare Revelation 21:12-14 and Isaiah 60:18. What does Isaiah say the walls and gates will be called?
2. Do you think heaven is actually made of corruptible materials like gold and jewels?

**Day 2: The City of Light (Rev 21:22-27)**

The imagery here is from Is 60, so it would be helpful to read that passage and compare it with John's description of the city. Isaiah is looking ahead to John's day, and John is looking back to Isaiah's prophecies to describe the church in the midst of an unsaved world. In Is 60, spiritual Zion is to be sought by the Gentiles. There will be light in Zion (60:1-3, 19-20); the glory of God would illuminate His people (60:2, 7, 9, 19); the gates would be open continuously (60:11); the wealth of the Gentiles would be brought (60:5 – flocks, herds, silver, gold, etc.); Zion would be called the City of the Lord (60:14). Various NT passages speak of the church being bathed in the light of God's truth ("sons of light and sons of the day" – 1 Th 5:5; "walk in the light as He is in the light" – 1 Jn 1:7; "the day is at hand ... put on the armor of light ... let us walk properly, as in the day" – Rom 13:11-13; etc.). If John is picturing heaven, in what sense would "*the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it*" (Rev 21:24)?

Also, Rev 21:27 indicates that nothing defiled or unclean would enter the city though the gates which would be continuously open (Is 60:17-18). This spiritual city is entered by cleansing; to be written in the Lamb's book of life was to be redeemed to God by the Lamb's blood (Rev 5:9). The image is of purity and holiness, which the inhabitants of the city must possess, but it is also one of constant access to those who would come to the light. No one could enjoy the blessings of Roman citizenship anymore because Rome was gone, consumed by the harlotry which marked its fellowship with the nations. But the city of God, His church, His kingdom, was still standing, and all who desired could become a citizen through holiness.

3. What constituted the temple in this city?

4. Why did a city shut its gates at night? Why is this not necessary in this city?

5. Who are the only ones who can enter this city?

### **Day 3: The Throne of God in the City (Rev 22:1-5)**

The imagery continues as the throne of God and the Lamb and the tree of life are found in the city (22:2-3). The description of the tree of life is somewhat incongruous; it is in the middle of the street and yet on either side of the river. The idea seems to be access (street) and longevity (abundant water supply). Consequently, fruit is born throughout the year. The water of life is featured several times in this image (21:6; 22:1, 17). The invitation to partake of the water of life freely reflects the salvation *now available* in the gospel: *"whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life"* (Jn 4:14; cf. Jn 7:37-38). As the water of life nourishes the tree of life, the tree's leaves are *"for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse"* (22:2). If this is descriptive of heaven, in what sense would the nations have continual access to the tree of life for healing? It is more consistent with the context to understand these images as referring to the rule of God in the lives of His people and the access to spiritual life that is found in a relationship with Him through Christ.

6. How often would the tree of life bear fruit? What do you think this means?

7. What is on the foreheads of God's servants (Revelation 22:4; cf. 14:17:3)?

8. Why will there be no need for the sun, moon or lamps?

### **Day 4: "I Am Coming Quickly!" (Rev 22:6-11)**

The revelation closes with the same sense of urgency with which it began: these are things *"which must shortly take place"* (22:6; 1:1); *"the time is at hand/near"* (22:10; 1:3); *"I am coming quickly"* (22:7, 12, 20; 3:11). John is told not to seal these words of prophecy because of the relative nearness of their fulfillment. Compare this with the

command to Daniel to seal his prophecy “for it refers to many days in the future” (Dn 8:26; 12:4, 9). Whether or not we can satisfy ourselves through the historical accounts of Rome’s ultimate fall, we must look at the events prophesied in Revelation from the perspective of “soon to happen” rather than “off in the distant future.”

9. “Blessed is he who \_\_\_\_\_.”

10. What does John attempt to offer the angel? Why does he not accept it?

## Day 5: Invitation to Enter the City (Rev 22:12-21)

The final words of the book, and the closing remarks of God’s revelation to man, fittingly come from Jesus, Himself. He identifies Himself with several designations assigned to Him in the beginning passages of the book: the Alpha and Omega; the Root and Offspring of David (22:13, 16; comp. 1:8; 5:5). He also calls Himself the Bright and Morning Star (22:16; cf. Num 24:17). Homer Hailey notes simply: “As the morning star, He heralds the approach of eternal day” (**Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary**, p. 431). Jesus affirms for the second and third time that He is coming quickly, “and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (22:12, 20; comp. 20:12). Again, this is not the final judgment but judgment against those forces which have opposed and persecuted the saints. This judgment is simultaneously a vindication of His church. This is consistent with our explanation of 20:11-15.

A final invitation is extended to enter the city and partake of the water and tree of life (22:14, 17). The Holy Spirit beckons all who desire to enter the city and partake of the life freely offered. The bride, the corporate church, likewise invites all to join her in blessed union with the Lord. The invitation is for all men for all time to claim victory over Satan and his allies.

The solemn warnings against the corruption of the prophecy sounds as if Jesus clearly anticipates future mishandling of the symbols and figures (22:18-19). This should cause us to approach our study of Revelation with humility, reverence and industry that we may properly assess the message God intended to convey.

11. Who has the right to enter the city?

12. What is the penalty for altering these revelations given to John?

**A Final Word:** This concludes our five-year overview of God’s scheme to redeem man from His sins and create a family of faithful, loyal and loving children. My hope is that this study has enlightened us on the unity of the Scriptures, the wisdom and power of God in executing His plan, and the great assurances given to believers that we can overcome our frailty and inherit eternal life. It is also my hope that the study has sharpened our desire to learn everything possible about what God has revealed in His word. There is no greater ambition in life than to think the thoughts of God.