

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
October 29, 2001

Introduction

When we think of this last book of the New Testament, a very reasonable question for us to ask is, *Why should we spend time reading and studying a book like the book of Revelation when our time might be more profitably spent with other books of the Bible?* Usually this question is prompted by the fact that godly Bible teachers and earnest Christians often differ greatly in their interpretation of this book of Revelation. And it is a correct observation that they do. However, let me suggest some reasons why it is very important for us to study this book in spite of the different interpretations that there are.

(1) First of all, we need to recognize that Revelation is just as much a part of the Word of God as any of the other sixty-five books of the Old and New Testaments. And so it comes under what the Apostle Paul said about the Scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. (Quote.) When we read those two verses we should not overlook the verses which precede them, and those which follow in 2 Timothy 4. (Read.)

Therefore we must look at the book of Revelation as a book that can make us wise unto salvation, a book that is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. It is a book that will help us to grow in the Lord, and a book which prepares us to do “good works.” According to 2 Timothy 4, it is a book to be preached “in season, out of season,” and we are to use it to “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” And the various descriptions and uses that are applied to Scripture throughout the Bible all have their application to the book of Revelation. For example, it will keep us from sin, according to Psalm 119:11. It is “quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword,” according to Hebrews 4:12. And we could go on and on quoting or reading verses which tell us about the unique character of the Word of God, and they all apply to this book of Revelation.

But let me give you another reason why it is important to read and study this book of Revelation.

(2) You can see a good reason in its name. It is a “revelation.” The Greek word which is translated “revelation” is ἀποκάλυψις. We get our English word *apocalypse* from the Greek. It means *a manifestation*, or *a disclosure*. In calling this last book of the Bible a revelation, the Apostle John was calling it what any book of the Bible could be called. God reveals to us what we could never discover for ourselves, nor can it be known in any other way. This is what makes the whole Bible, and the book of Revelation in particular, so unique. God has given us in this book truth that would be beyond our reach if He had not given it to us.

Now most Christians know that the Apostle John wrote what God revealed to him. He had no other way of knowing what he wrote. But one special thing that is to be noted about this book (even though it is true of the others also), is that it is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” That alone ought to make every Christian want to know what is in this book. It is a revelation which God gave to Christ, and which our Lord gave to John. But this term also means that it not only came *from* the Lord, but it is a revelation *about* the Lord. So if you and I neglect the study of this book of the Revelation, we are going to be deficient in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And we certainly would not want to be in that position. So we will be studying this book to see what it tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we learn more of Him, we will love Him more, we will worship Him more, we will be encouraged to serve Him more, and we will look forward more than ever to the time when we will see Him.

But let me add still another reason for wanting to study this book.

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(3) Without moving out of the first verse of chapter 1, we see that this book also has to do with “things which must shortly come to pass.” In other words, it is a book about the future. It is a book of prophecy. Now there are people we can hear on our televisions and radios every day who try to predict what the weather is going to be the same day, or the next day, or for the next ten days. But very often they are wrong. Sometimes they are right, but it is amazing how often they are mistaken. They try to be right, but while they are trained to predict the weather, they have absolutely no control over the weather. God is very, very different. He controls the weather. He could tell us right now what the weather will be like on Christmas Day, or on your next birthday. And He will never be wrong. He knows the end of all things, and He has known them from the beginning because He is sovereignly in control of all things.

He has given us in this book quite a detailed revelation of “things which must shortly come to pass.” And notice the word “must.” This means that they have been determined by Him, and He will not be wrong on any point. The Apostle John could not have written a book like this “on his own.” But our Lord told him what to write, and he has written it. It has never been revised, and it never will be. We can be absolutely sure of every detail of this book because *it is the Word of God!* Read verse 1 again.

Now if what we read about in this book “must shortly come to pass,” and that was 2,000 years ago, think how much closer we are today to the fulfillment of these prophecies that John was when he wrote them down.

But I am not through.

(4) Look at verse 3. This is a book which we need to study because we are promised to be blessed if we read it, and hear it, and keep it. I want all of the blessing I can get, don't you? I ask the Lord for blessings every day. Well here blessing is guaranteed if we do those three things with it – read it, hear it, and keep it. We all know what it means to read it. But we all know also from our reading that it is possible for our minds to wander as we read so that we are not really hearing what we are reading. Hearing also means accepting and believing what we hear. Keeping means that we are going to bring our lives into agreement with the things that we will read in this book. So this book, as I have already recognized in talking about what the Word will do for us, this book will enable us to be more like the Lord wants us to be, and to bring our lives into harmony with His Word. This means that this book was written primarily for believers. It is a book that, by the blessing of the Lord, will increase our sanctification.

I know that I can't possibly mention all of the benefits that await us in the study of this book. But there are more to which I want to call your attention.

(5) Let me say just a word about the writer of this book. He was the Apostle John. He wrote four other books of the Bible, but this is the only one of the four which carries his name. We have it in 1:1, 4, 9; and in 21:2 (KJV), and 22:8. The other books he wrote were the Gospel of John, and the three epistles of John. But do you know where he was when he wrote this book? His name is often connected with the church in Ephesus, and you might think that he was writing from the pastor's study in that church. They probably did not have a building, but met in some home. He wasn't in Ephesus when he wrote this book; *he was on the isle called Patmos*. And he was not there on a vacation. He had been exiled by the authority of a very cruel Roman Emperor by the name of Domitian. And why had he been exiled? He tells us in verse 9: “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” He had been exiled because he was a preacher of the Word of God, and because he was telling people about Jesus Christ. And it is only because of the grace of God that Domitian had been kept from killing him. All of this was in A. D. 95 or 96. What a time the Lord had chosen for the Apostle John to write this book.

What did this book mean to the Apostle John, and what does that have to do with us as we read it? It was writ-

ten for the encouragement of this old and faithful bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. This book shows us that God is in control of all that goes on in the world, not Domitian. And it shows that the Lord is caring for His church, and that the Lord is caring also for the nation Israel. And it tell us that the Lord is moving world events toward that wonderful day He spoke about while He was here on earth when He will suddenly come from heaven, putting down all rule and authority and power, to set up His kingdom on earth where He will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

So it is written for our encouragement too. Most of the people in our nation today are gripped with fear, and one reason for their fear is that they do not know the truth of the book of the Revelation, nor do they know the God of this book, the one and only living God, nor do they know His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. But what comfort it ought to bring to our hearts to know that everything and everyone, and every nation, is under the sovereign control of our Almighty God. So, as we go through this book, let's look for all of the encouragement that is to be found in it.

And along that same line let me mention another important purpose that we can expect to profit from in this book.

(6) This book has a lot to teach us about how to worship the Lord. In this first chapter we read about how the Lord appeared to the Apostle John. Now the Apostle John had seen the Lord, and had heard Him teach, and had seen Him perform miracle after miracle, and he had served the Lord faithfully. He was even known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." *But he had never seen the Lord as he saw Him here.* What happened when He saw the Lord? He tells us in verse 17: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." Why would he do that? Because he was overwhelmed with the glory of the Savior, and like Isaiah many years before, was over-whelmed with his own unworthiness even to look upon such a gloriously holy Person as our Lord Jesus Christ is.

We are going to see in this book much about how angels worship God, and what they said, and what they did. And we, too, are going to get a new understanding of our own unworthiness even to bow before Him and worship Him as our Lord and our God. We can look forward to that, can't we?

Another very valuable point about this book we are going to study has to do with the churches to which our Lord addressed Himself, and with the individuals who made up those churches..

(7) Probably most of you know that this book was originally written to seven churches. We have letters written to each one of them in chapters 2 and 3. Those letters came from the Lord, not from the Apostle John. And in them you can see what the Lord approved of in those church, but you can also see the things that He did not like. And you can see the blessings that He promised to each one if they were seeking to please Him.

I personally have a great interest in Trinity Bible Church. And I've had it for a little over twenty years. And I have a group of elders and deacons who are equally interested in Trinity Bible Church. We want this church to be as much like the Lord wants it to be as we by the grace of God can make it. The study of the book of Revelation can be a tremendous help to us in knowing what the Lord wants us to be, and what He wants us to be doing as a church. We hear a lot from certain church people talking about "today's church," or "today's music" in the church, as though it ought to be different from what it was even a generation ago. We are really old fashioned here at Trinity because we believe that the Lord's orders for the church were given in full when the Bible was completed almost two thousand years ago, and that today's church ought to be like the first century church. The study of the book of Revelation is going to help us to see how we can do a better job with our churches, and make our churches more pleasing to the Lord. It not only is going to make us better, but the study of Revelation is going to make Trinity Bible Church better if we will read, and hear, and keep in our lives

what God has given us in this book.

But let me add a very important reason for studying the book of Revelation which is connected especially with the letters our Lord sent to the seven churches of Asia. And we can add this to what I have just pointed out about how this book can help churches.

It is impossible to have godly churches unless we have godly people who make up those churches. And so our Lord's appeal to the churches of Asia, was, and is, an appeal to all churches, but we can't stop there. As letters to the churches, they are letters to the individuals who make up those churches. If the Ephesian church had lost its first love, it was because the people in those churches had lost their first love. The problem of each church was the problem of the people in those churches. And every person needed to pay attention to what was addressed to their church. And so, adding to what we have already seen in the first reason I gave for studying the book of the Revelation, because it was a part of the Word of God and "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness," we must say that the book of the Revelation needs to be studied because it will contribute greatly to our sanctification. And it is sanctification which qualifies us for service that is pleasing to the Lord. So this is a major, major reason for studying this book.

(8) One of the stated purposes of this book is that of reaching unsaved people with the Gospel, and calling them to come and "take of the water of life freely." We see the Gospel and the Savior throughout this book. And so it is not to surprise us if unbelievers reading this book, or hearing it taught, will find themselves being drawn to the Savior. And it would be delightful, wouldn't it, if people would be saved because of what we will have learned from this book, and the urgency that the Spirit of God would put in our hearts to tell people about our Savior.

And this is where another purpose is mentioned.

(9) There is a very solemn warning that the Apostle John gave to us from the Lord about this book, and it would be a big mistake for us to overlook it. You will find it in the last chapter, 22, and verses 18 and 19. (Read.)

Even we as believers must be careful about tampering with the Word of God in any way. So this applies not only to this book of Revelation, but to all of Scripture. No one must add to what has been written, and no one should dare to remove anything that the Lord has given us in these twenty-two chapters. There are some prominent Christian leaders today who are saying, for example, that hell is not eternal. But the Bible says that it is. I grant you that this is a doctrine that is difficult for us to understand, but it is not for us to be able to know how people will be able to suffer eternally for their sins. The Bible says that they will, and we must not tone down that message at all. People need to know Christ not so they will be happier, or wealthier, or healthier, but because they are under the judgment of God because they are sinners and facing eternal torment if they go out of this life without Christ as their Savior.

So let us be prepared to take this book as God gave it to Christ, and as Christ gave it to the Apostle John. And let us remember that one major reason you and I are left here after we are saved, is that we might join those saints like John the Baptist who would rather face exile or death rather than to keep silent about the Word of God and the testimony of Christ.

Let me mention one more reason for studying the Revelation. This will give us a total of ten with a lot of reasons related to what I have pointed out. But the tenth is this:

(10) It has to do with the Lord's promise and the Apostle John's prayer in the next to the last verse of

the book. (Read Rev. 22:20.) The study of the book of the Revelation should make us eager and longing and prayerful about the coming of the Lord. There are other passages of Scripture which tell us that the Lord is looking forward to the time when He will come, first, for us, and then, with us. The kingdoms of this world have been under the dominion of Satan long enough. The trend in every generation from the first sin of man has been downward and away from God. What a glorious day it will be when the Lord will be King, and sin will ultimately be banished forever. The study of the book of the Revelation should make us look forward to that time.

There are doubtless many other benefits that we can experience from the study of this wonderful book, but we will see them as we go through the book. Let me encourage you to read it as often as you can. Perhaps you can concentrate on a few chapters at a time because I know that most of you are doing other Bible reading, but the main point for all of us begins with the reading. Remember that is where the blessing will originate, not in coming to this class, but in reading the book for yourself.

But now let me say just a word about some ways that some people have used this book which are not included in the purposes that God had in giving it to us.

(1) It was not written so that we could attempt to be sensational in our teaching of it. The Lord has told us much, but He obviously has not told us everything. For example, He didn't name who the beasts are that are mention-ed in chapter 13, and so we can't name their either. There may be some things that we can't explain to every-one's satisfaction. We will have to let it stand that way. (2) The Lord did not give us this book to satisfy our curiosity. He gave it to us, His people, that it might make us more godly, and more zealous, and more faithful in doing His will. And so may we "amen" what the Apostle John said in the latter part of Rev. 1:6, ". . . to Him [God] be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Now I have already told you many of the details that we are interested in when we come to the study of any book of the Bible, and we need to know them about this book. The writer was the Apostle John, the last of the apostles. He wrote it about A.D. 95 or 96. He was in exile for preaching the Gospel when he wrote it. The place of writing was off of the coast of the Roman province of Asia which is now the area occupied by the government of Turkey. And John wrote it, and sent it to seven church which were in that Roman province. The churches were at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. (Show the overhead of the area, and encourage the people to look at the maps in their Bibles.)

And then I want you to know the major different ways in which men have interpreted the book of the Revelation. There are four ways in which this book has been, and is, being interpreted:

1) THE SPIRITUALIZING METHOD. One writer has called it THE IDEALISTS' METHOD. Those who use this method treat the book as an allegory with everything, or practically everything, symbolic. They look for some meaning behind the obvious meaning. It is true that signs and symbols have a large place in this book. This is indicated by John's use of the word "signified" in 1:1. But this becomes a hopeless method of interpretation when the symbols and figures of speech are pushed to such ridiculous limits that it is impossible to agree on what they mean. I believe it was Dr. B. B. Sutcliffe who used to say, "When common sense makes good sense, seek no other sense."

2) THE PRETERIST METHOD. ("Preterist" means *past*.) Those who follow this method believe that the book was fulfilled in the early history of the church, although those who accept this view differ as to how far into church history the book goes.

3) THE HISTORICAL METHOD. This is the method of interpretation which treats the book of the

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Revelation as continuous history from John's time to the establishing of the new heaven and the new earth. As Angus Green in his Bible Handbook (p.764) said that the application of this principle "seems to be arbitrary and hazardous in the extreme."

4) THE FUTURIST METHOD. Those who accept the book as dealing primarily with the last days are futurists. Most of the book has yet to be fulfilled. The major portion of the book deals with the period of time from the Great Tribulation to the setting up of the Eternal State with the new heavens and the new earth. This, I believe, is the right method. Those who hold to this method believe in a literal interpretation of the book except in places where there is a clear indication that the meaning is symbolic.

Now I want to call your attention to the outline of this book of Revelation which I have revised for our present study. I have tried to keep it from being as long as the book of the Revelation itself, but I have tried to include enough information which would help anyone to understand the main subjects of this book by just looking at the outline.

(Discuss the outline.)

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Chapter 1

The outline of the book is given in verse 19 of this chapter. Generally speaking the divisions are chapter 1, then chapters 2 and 3, with the rest of the book giving us the third division. There is a brief introduction to the book in 1:1-8, and a conclusion in 22:6-21. Following the introduction (1:1-8) we have *the things which John had seen*. Chapters 2 and 3, the Lord's letters to the churches of Asia, make up the second part of the book called, "the things which are." And from 4:1 to 22:5 the Apostle John, writing by the Spirit of God, has given us "the things which shall be hereafter."

Now we want to begin with the Introduction to this book of prophecy, the only book in the NT which is a book of prophecy.

In the introduction, as indicated in our outline, we have three points:

- A. The title and description of the book (1:1-2).
- B. The benediction (1:3).
- C. The salutation (1:4-8).

So we begin with:

- A. **The title and description of the book (1:1-2).** This verse gives us the title of the book. It is "the revelation of Jesus Christ."

God gave it to Christ to show unto His servants. He, Christ, "sent and signified it by His angel unto his servant John." So it came from God Who gave it to Christ who gave it to His angel who gave it to Christ's servant, John – the Apostle John.

The word "revelation" is, as I have mentioned before, the translation of the Greek word, ἀποκάλυψις. Lit. it conveys the idea to us of *the removal of a cover*. Robert Thomas defines it this way: "Referring as it does to 'a disclosure of what had been concealed,' the word implies prior hiddenness and is a convenient vehicle to express the further ideas of 'a disclosure of divine truth' or 'a manifestation from God.'" This would tie it in with the word "mystery" which is used in Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7. A mystery in the NT is a truth, or truths, not previously revealed, but which has now been made known.

Now the question is raised by the expression, "the revelation of Jesus Christ," does this mean that it is a revelation about Jesus Christ, or a revelation from Jesus Christ? Expositors differ on that answer to the question. The right answer probably is that it refers to both. The Apostle John certainly saw the Lord in chapter 1 in a way that he had never seen Him before. At the same time we have to recognize that here in verse 1 of chapter 1 God gave the revelations of this book *through His Son*, so in that sense it came from Him.

Both interpretations seem to be indicated by what the Lord said in John 16:13-14:

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

Verse 13 speaks of the Spirit of God showing "things to come." Verse 14 speaks of the Spirit glorifying Christ, by receiving the truth about Christ and showing it to His people.

So we can expect both in this "book of the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Now the fact that this is an unveiling, an uncovering of something already in existence, but never before revealed, indicates that what is revealed in this book was not being made up as it was revealed to John, but it was a part of God's foreordained plan which was established before the foundation of the world. God knew when He began where and when and how all things would end. That ought to be an encouragement to us. God is even now, in current events, as they are being played out all over the earth, and in the heavens, working "all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

This statement of the manner in which the revelation went from God to John, certainly does not exclude the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Apostle Peter said that "men . . . spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." So the Holy Spirit carefully supervised the transmission of the revelation from God to John so that there was no change in the revelation from the time it was given by God to His Son, given by His Son to the angel, and then passed on by the angel to John the Baptist, and then committed by John to writing. What God gave is what John wrote, without any change, all under the close supervision of the Holy Spirit.

So actually all Three Persons of the Godhead were involved in giving this revelation. The whole revelation is viewed as one great unveiling from God. And so in line with the warning of chapter 22, no part can be deleted, and nothing can be added.

The manner in which the message of this book was given to John is expressed in the words, speaking of our Lord, that "he sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." And to have a more complete understanding of what this statement means, we need to add to it the meaning of the last statement of verse 2 which tells us that John "saw" what is written in this book.

Those who hold to *the spiritualizing method* of interpreting this book, point to the verb "signified" and claim that this justifies their method, that it means that John was given a revelation of symbols, and that we must not take the book literally. But, as I pointed out before, this means that anyone can take this book to mean anything that he wants it to mean. However, there is no agreement as to what the symbols mean. One interpreter will interpret a passage as meaning one thing, and another comes along and says that it means something entirely different. So, while there are symbols in the book, yet the best way of looking at the book as a whole is to begin with a literal interpretation unless there is some evidence that we have symbols.

A good illustration of the use of symbols in this book is given to us in this first chapter. As John described the vision that he was given by the angel, he wrote in verse 12 that he "saw seven golden candlesticks." And then in verse 16 he said that the Lord had "in his right hand seven stars." Then going down to the last verse of chapter 1, we read this:

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Rev. 1:20).

Clearly here "the seven stars" are "the angels of the seven churches," and "the seven golden candlesticks . . . the seven churches." This does not mean that we ought to build our church buildings to look like candlesticks, but that churches are meant to shine in their communities. This is their testimony, the light of the Word of God that shines forth through the churches. So this is clearly a symbolic part of the vision of Christ, but the vision itself was of the real Christ. And yet there are certain symbols used even to describe Him.

But let us go back to the word, "signified." J. A. Seiss who wrote a commentary which he called, *The Apocalypse, Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, had this very interesting comment about the words "signified" and "saw." This is what he said:

The word rendered *signified*, taken in connection with the fact that the things signified were matters of contemplation by means of the eyes, can denote nothing else than an actual picturing of those scenes—a

making of them pass before the view the same as if they were really transpiring. The office of the angel, then, . . . was, to form the connection between John's senses . . . the things which he was to describe, making to pass in review before him what was only afterwards to take place in fact. How this was done, I cannot say: but as the Devil could take Jesus to a high mountain, and show him at one view "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," I am sure that it falls sufficiently within the sphere of angelic natures thus to picture things to man; and that when commissioned of the Lord for that purpose, no good angel is wanting [lacking] in ability to be the instrument in making John *see* whatever visions he describes in this book. And when God Himself tells me that what is here set forth *was* thus signified to John, I will persist in referring every one of the visions, with all that he says he saw and heard, to the intervention of this angelic agent, and believe that in all sacred things we are vastly more dependent upon angelic ministrations than we know or can understand. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14) (p. 20).

We can see from this that God was a couple of thousand years ahead motion pictures, even in color, and TVs and computer monitors. This seems to me to be a very accurate description of the word "signified," and explains why there is special significance when John said that he "saw" these things.

"Must shortly come to pass." The word "must" is an important NT word. It is the word $\delta\epsilon\iota$, and it speaks of *that which has to take place because it has been made certain by the decree and counsel of God*. And "shortly" means that nothing needs to take place before the judgments of this book can begin. So no one is to take comfort from the fact that they have not yet happened. They are going to happen, and they can begin without any more notice than is given to us in this book of prophecy. To assume that they will not happen because they have not happened, is to court disaster.

Twice we have the word "servant" – once in the plural, and once in the singular. The plural would refer primarily to the churches; the singular, to John. It is the Greek word for bondservants, or slaves – $\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$. A bondservant is a person of humble circumstances, usually one devoted to his master, one pledged to serve, one whose master always supercedes his own. They stand in marked contrast with the person of the world who is so often proud, self-centered, intent on having his own way, and only serving others when it will benefit himself in some way. Those who have a servant's relationship to the Lord, are those whose hearts are open and receptive to the truth.

The fact that an angel had a part in giving the revelation to John, anticipates the major place that angels are to have in this book.

1:2 As we begin this verse, let me call your attention to the Apostle John's love for trilogies, groups of three. See verses 2, 3, 4 and 5, 5 and 6, 7, 8.

The Apostle John was here declaring that he had faithfully borne testimony to the Word which God had given, which had also the support of "the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw." In no way had he deviated from the message which was given to him. It is not the business of a servant of the Lord to try to embellish what God has given, nor to alter it in any way, but to given what was given to him. And this is probably the reason that the Apostle John was to give it the Lord's bondservants. They, too, would be faithful like the Apostle John was.

And this is our responsibility too. No one will be rewarded merely on the basis that he has preached, but the Lord is concerned about *what* is preached, and for what reason. Is it to please God, or men? As Paul told the Galatian churches, if he were still seeking to please men, he would not be the servant ($\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) of Christ.

Notice that the Apostle John speaks of our Lord as “Jesus Christ” in 1:1, 2, 5, 9. “Jesus” speaks both of His humanity as well as of His work as our Savior. The angel who appeared to Joseph when he discovered that she was pregnant, assured him that Mary had not been unfaithful to him, but that she had conceived a child by the Holy Spirit. And the angel told Joseph, “And thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

In the Name “Jesus” there is an emphasis upon our Lord’s humanity. And that is true where we have it combined with Christ where “Jesus” comes first, as it does here – “Jesus Christ.” And yet not to the exclusion of His Deity. His Name means, *Jehovah is salvation*. “Joshua” is its equivalent in Hebrew. In Hebrews 4:14 we have the expression, “Jesus the Son of God.” There are many places in the NT where there is an emphasis on the Name, “Jesus.” The book of Hebrews is one of them.

“Christ” speaks of his anointing by the Father to do what His Father sent Him to do, and includes the position that He will ultimately take as King of kings and Lord of lords. And yet neither is His humanity excluded from His title, “Christ,” or *Messiah*. From our Lord’s words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. He found them confused about what had happened in Jerusalem, the death of Jesus of Nazareth. And what in particular had confused them was the report that He had been raised from the dead. The Lord, in graciously rebuking them used His title, “Christ.” This is what He said:

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

A short time later he did this when he was with the eleven disciples. And Luke gives us this report:

44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-47).

So we must say that the title “Christ” in the NT has a direct bearing upon the predictions concerning the Messiah in the OT.

In reading what the Scriptures have to say about our Lord, always notice how His name is used. Sometimes it is “Lord Jesus Christ.” Sometimes, as here in verse 2, it is “Jesus Christ.” Sometimes it is “Christ Jesus.” Sometimes only “Lord,” or only “Jesus,” or only “Christ.” Several times it is “Lord Jesus, and once, in Col. 3:24, “Lord Christ.” There is always a reason for the way the Spirit of God refers to our Lord.

So let me say again that in verses 1 and 2 we have the positive confirmation that what is in this book is exactly what God gave to Christ and what our Lord gave to John, and that John faithfully has recorded the message just as it was given by God to Christ, and then by Christ to His angel, and then by the angel to John, and then by John as he wrote it in this book.

Our next point in this introduction is:

B. The benediction (Rev. 1:3).

1:3 We ordinarily think of a benediction as that which comes at the end of a prayer, but it actually means *a blessing*, whether it comes at the end or at the beginning or some place in between. Sometimes a benediction is thanksgiving for blessings received, such as Eph. 1:3. Sometimes it is for blessings which continue on, such as 2 Cor. 1:3-4. But the blessing here in verse 3 is a blessing which is promised for what we may do – reading, hearing, and keeping “the words of this prophecy.” The word μακάριος with which this verse begins is a word which means *happy*. It is the word that the Lord used in His beatitudes. So this is a promise of happiness, and it is always a blessing to be happy.

When this book was written, as also was the case with the other NT books, copies were not plentiful. I don't think we know if John wrote one copy and circulated it among the seven churches, or if each church had a copy. Whatever may have been the case, we know that each believer did not have his own copy as we do now with our Bibles. So this book had to be read to the congregation. And the one who gave his time to reading it for all of the people, was promised blessing for himself. Perhaps, because of the size of this book, they may have had several readers. Paul told Timothy, “Give attendance to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13). Reading was a large part of the meeting of the churches. The word translated “reading” (ἀναγινώσκων) is a present participle, and speaks of reading and re-reading. The object is to get exact knowledge of that which one is reading.

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But not only is the reader blessed, but the one who hears is also blessed. In the day when John wrote this book, the reader was one person, and the hearer was usually another person. And yet the reader was supposed to hear what he was reading. Today sometimes they are two persons (at least) also. A pastor, or some man in the congregation reads; the people hear – even though they may follow in their Bibles what is being read. A father reads the Scripture, and his family hears what he reads. When the children are grown and have homes and families of their own, sometimes, as it is with Lucille and me, I read, and she hears, or she reads, and I hear. Obviously this benediction means that God has given us His Word that it might be read and heard.

Let me make a point here. I hope that all of you read some in the Bible every day. And when it is read to us, whether at church, or at home, or anywhere else, let us give the reading of the Word our undivided attention. Those of you who have read Bishop Ryle's booklet that Lucille and I gave to you, will remember, I hope, that he said that each year we ought to read more of the Bible than we did the previous year.

It seems like there is a great inclination on the part of most people, to read. But be careful what you read. It is possible to do a lot of damage to yourself if you are reading the wrong thing. When I see people reading books as they wait for a bus or for the Max, I have a strong inclination to ask them *what* they are reading. At the athletic club where I swim each week, I see people using various athletic equipment, such as a treadmill, or an exercise bike, and they are reading as they take their exercise. Sometimes you will see people having lunch in a restaurant, and they not only are reading while they wait for their food to be served, but they read while they eat. Every once in a while I see someone reading the Bible. It is wonderful to read books that help us to understand the Bible, *but nothing can compare with reading the Bible itself!* Don't read anything that is going to hurt you, but read that which will bless you, and make you happy. That is what the reading of the Word does.

But we have one more word in this verse, don't we? It is the verb “keep.” “Blessed” are they who “keep those things which are written therein.” What does it mean to “keep” the Word, or especially this book of the revelation of Jesus Christ?

It is the Greek verb τηρέω, and it can be translated in a number of ways. It can mean that you need to own a Bible, and you need to take care of it. The people who sell Travelers Checks, say, “Never leave home without

it.” That’s good advice for us with our Bibles. If you go on a vacation, never leave your Bible behind.

This verb also conveys the idea of guarding it, like you would your most precious possession. But it does not just mean to guard it as a book, but to guard what is in it. Take this book very, very seriously. And don’t be silent when it is being attacked, or when you hear it falsely explained. We are in a spiritual warfare. It is our weapon.

But the word “keep” means to obey it, do what it says you should do. Be what it says you should be. Yes, the book of Revelation is a practical book. You and I should not be able to read it and remain just like we have been. Under the blessing of God, the Holy Spirit, you will be a better person, and I will be a better person, not only if we have a Bible and read it, and carefully listen to it as we read it or as we listen to someone else read it, but as we make sure that it affects our lives, our behavior, our character.

The last statement of verse 3 tells us *why* we need to read this book, and listen to this book, and obey this book. It is because “the time is at hand.” Lenski explained this statement as meaning the time “during which these things shall occur” (*Revelation*, p. 34). This statement reminds me of Heb. 10:25:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

That “day” is the day of the Lord’s return.

So verse 3 indicates what we are to be doing with the book of Revelation, but the same applies to all of the Word of God.

The next point in our outline is:

C. The salutation (1:4-8).

This carries us to the end of the Introduction.

1:4 “John,” the Apostle John, is the writer. What simplicity and humility is apparent in this simple mention of his name. There was no need for him to identify himself as an apostle because the churches of Asia all knew Him, loved Him, and looked up to him as their spiritual leader. He never used his name in any of His epistles, nor in the Gospel of John. In the latter he spoke of himself in the third person as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” See John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20. John would not use this expression, not in pride, but in the deepest humility. He marveled that the Lord would love him. Remember what he wrote in 1 John 4:10:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And then he added in 1 John 4:19, “We love Him, because He first loved us.” That was John’s security, not that he loved God, but that God loved him. The first verse of that grand old hymn, “I’ve found a Friend,” states it better than we can say:

I’ve found a Friend, O such a Friend! He loved me ere I know Him;
He drew me with the chords of love, And thus He bound me to Him.
And round my heart still closely twine, Those ties which nought can sever,
For I am His, and He is mine, For ever and for ever.

We found Him only because He was seeking us. God and the Lord Jesus have loved us longer than the world is old because we were “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.”

And this book was first sent “to the seven churches of Asia. This means the Roman province of Asia, what

used to be known as Asia Minor, but which now is the country of Turkey. The names of the churches are given in verse 11, and, of course, in the letters in chapters 2 and 3 which were addressed to them: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Why these churches were chosen when there must have been more than seven churches in the province of Asia at that time, has been the subject of much discussion. Probably it was because these were the churches that John was most familiar with. He had spent much of his ministry at Ephesus, probably serving as the pastor of the church there. Two other reasons for these seven churches are, (1) that these were the best locations for communication to the seven districts where these churches were located (Robertson, VII, p.285). (2) William R. Newell suggested that these seven churches were “typical assemblies with regard to their histories and spiritual states” (Newell, W. R., *The Book of Revelation*, p. 8).

Seiss said regarding this greeting that “there is not another book of holy scripture which opens with so much special remark and solemnity” (p. 25). This surely was meant to impress upon the reader the great importance of this book, and that it should be read and studied with the greatest care and seriousness. We can't say that John meant to put this book above all others in the NT, but he surely meant to put a special emphasis upon its place of importance in the word of God.

“Grace be unto you, and peace” – This is the usual Christian greeting that was used by believers in the first century (and perhaps beyond). Robert Thomas said that the noun “grace” may have been coined by the Apostle Paul to represent “to reflect the distinctive spiritual benefits that belong to Christians. And the “peace” that we enjoy has its roots in “grace.” We would have no peace in our hearts, and surely no peace with God, if it were not for the grace of God. Seiss said that “what the Apostle here bespeaks upon the Churches is, the entire fulness of the blessing of the Gospel, in all its length and breadth and depth and height of consolation and eternal prosperity” (*Op. Cit.*, p. 27). These words are frequently used in the epistles of the NT, and therefore they are designed to show how constantly we as believers are of the grace and people which comes from the Members of the Godhead. It is not possible for us to convey these blessings upon others except as the Lord may see fit to use us as instruments of His blessing.

Usually when Paul used these word (adding “mercy” in the Pastoral Epistles) they were “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” But here it is from all Three Persons of the Godhead. But all three are referred to in more extended ways than that used by the Apostles Paul and Peter. Here God is spoken of as the One “which is, and which was, and which is to come.” It is a unique way of saying that what the Father is, He always has been, and He always will be. So is a reference here to His eternal nature, His unchanging character. He is the living God, Jehovah. And most of you have heard me say before that Jehovah in the OT is a name from the Hebrew verb, *to be*.

The Holy Spirit is called here, “the seven Spirits which are before his throne,” that is, the throne of Him Who is and was and is to come. The seven undoubtedly is related to the seven churches. The Spirit of God, as far as His relationship to the seven churches, is as though He were seven Spirits because He is with each of the seven churches, and all at the same time. From the seven days of creation the number seven has been taken by the people of God as the number of completeness. But remember also that there were seven annual feasts under the Law in the OT. There are seven kingdom parables in Matthew 13. And here in the book of the Revelation, in addition to the seven churches, we have seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. And so the idea is suggested here that the Holy Spirit is completely sufficient for all of the people of God, and this is true for all of us wherever we may be in the world.

1:5 Grace and peace, we know, come also “from Jesus Christ.” This is the same name of our Savior that is used in verses 1 and 2 – “Jesus Christ.”

Walter Scott, in his commentary, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 18. He had this to say about the Name, “Jesus Christ”:

Here Jesus Christ is viewed as Man, not in essential Deity as in John 1:1, 2. The divine and human natures of our Lord, both absolutely perfect, are distinguished in office and action, but must not be separated. There is but one Savior and one Mediator, Who is very God and very Man, and on this fundamental trust reposes the whole system of Christianity. Faith believes and grasps it firmly, while not pretending to solve the mystery of the Godhead. Our own complex being is a mystery, much more so the Being of our adorable Lord.

The expression, “very God and very Man, is an older English way of saying that our Lord was *truly God and truly Man*, or *really God and really Man*. This is the truth that is emphasized when in Scripture our Lord is called “Jesus Christ.”

And consistent with the Apostle John’s use of trilogies, groups of three, our Lord is here called, “the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”

Summarizing the manner in which God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and our Savior are referred to here, Scott had this to say:

Thus we have God in the greatness of His being, the Spirit in the plenitude of His power, and Jesus Christ in holy humanity now glorified, united in blessing the saints who are about to have unfolded to them the prophetic counsels of God respecting the earth (p. 25).

“Jesus Christ, Who is the Faithful Witness” – The use of “Witness” here has reference especially to His testimony in this book of the Revelation. We can see that one of John’s main purposes in this introductory part of the Revelation, is to show about absolutely true and trustworthy is the record given in this book. In Rev. 22:20 the Apostle John said, “He which testifieth these things (an obvious reference to this book) saith, Surely I come quickly.” The revelations of events in this book are so fantastic, so incredible if they were just the work of a mere human, that the Apostle John, as in the earlier verses of this chapter, wants us to be assured, that there is nothing but the truth, the truth of God the Son, that is to be found on these pages.

But while the emphasis here is upon what we are to read in this book, the title, “faithful Witness,” applied equally to our Lord’s ministry in the Gospels; in fact, it applies also to those times in the OT when He appeared to minister to His people, as He did with Jacob and Bethel and Peniel.

This is never true of the prophecies which men utter “on their own.” But here we have the truth of God. Our Lord would not allow His Name to be attached to anything that was not completely true. False prophets are always unfaithful witnesses. In contrast, when the Lord was before Pilate, and Pilate had asked Him if He were a king, this was His response:

Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37).

But our Lord is also “the first begotten of the dead..” He was not the first to be raised from the dead, but He was the first to be raised who would never die again. As Paul said in Romans 6, “Death hath no more dominion over Him” (Rom.6:9b). The term also implies that Jesus Christ died. From a human perspective, He died because He gave witness to the truth. But the Scriptures make it very clear that He died to save His people from their sins. He was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). Hebrews 9:26 tells us that “now once in the end of the

world,” or *ages*, “hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” He would not die, He could not die, except as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

But notice also that our Lord is called “the first begotten of the dead.” This means that there are more to follow. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection! He said, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). And I would add the Apostle Paul’s words in Phil. 3:20-21:

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:
21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

What a lot of wonderful truth the Spirit of God has packed into six words!

Finally, our Lord is called, “the prince of the kings of the earth.” We can say that in these three titles we our Lord’s ministry past, present, and future. But the effect of all is the abiding blessing of the people of God in the present.

Robertson translated this phrase, “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (VI, p. 286). This is true of our Lord right now. There is no one who exercises authority greater than Jesus Christ. He is sovereign over all kings, all nations, all terrorists, over every single person on the face of the earth. But we don’t seem Him reigning as the Ruler yet. When He comes to earth again, then the whole world will know that He alone is “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

The Apostle Paul incorporated all of these truths about our Lord in Phil. 2:5-11. (Read.)

Here Scott is worth quoting again:

In these titles, therefore we have a tower of strength to the Christian and [to the] Church. We can see One, now in the heavens, Who has trod the path of faith and obedience without halting (Heb.12:1, 2); One Who has grappled with death, and him that had the power of it; Who overcame and is now great in His victory; One, too, Who is Lord and Master of all earth’s governing authorities (p. 26).

What the Devil offered to give our Lord if He would fall down and worship Him, now belongs to the Lord by His terrible death and glorious resurrection. And He has won a position over saints and sinners, and the Devil himself, which can never be taken away from Him.

And now it is not surprising to see in our text that “the salutation abruptly passes on to a doxology” (Scott, *Ibid.*). May it have the same effect upon us.

“Unto Him that loved us” – This is actually in the present tense. He not only loved us enough to die for us, but His love continues the same. As I have mentioned before, our security does not rest on our love for Him (because that is often a fickle love, or like the situation in Ephesus, they had lost their first love). But it rests in His love for us – an eternal, unchanging, and abounding love. Back of all that took place at Calvary, is the everlasting love of God, and the love of Christ. There is no other possible explanation for what Christ did in order to save us from our sins.

“And washed us from our sins in His own blood” – His blood is a reference to His humanity, and to the giving up of His life.” There is a difference in this statement in different MSS concerning the word “washed.” Some read “loosed.” Robertson preferred “loosed,” and so does Lenski who believed that it was more in harmony with the authority of our Lord as a Ruler. As a Ruler He has issued a decree that we have been “loosed,” delivered, set free, from our sins and all that is involved in our being sinners. The two verbs are very similar. The verb *to wash* is λούω; the verb *to loose* is λύω. But the resulting truth is the same whichever is the true original. If the Lord “washed” us, our sins are gone. If He *loosed* us, we are free from the bondage and the

penalty of our sins.

Note how the righteousness of God has been satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ for “us” and for “our sins.” We are not saved just because God loved us, or because of the love of Christ. It was because of Their love that God sent His Son, and that Christ came, to pay the penalty which should have fallen upon us. We are not primarily justified by the love of God and of Christ, but by the blood of Christ. Paul stated it this way:

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him (Rom. 5:8-9).

Note the word “us” here in verse 5, and it occurs once again in verse 6. It is the redeemed who are the special objects of God’s love. It was to redeem them that our Savior died. And, according to the next verse, they are the ones who have been made into a kingdom of priests.

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1:6 All that the Apostle John had to say about the love of God in verse 5, has resulted in our being *loosed* from our sins, and here in this verse, He is the One Who has made us into, not “kings,” but *a kingdom!* We shall “reign with Him,” but our Lord will be the King. Cf. Rev. 20:6:

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The Lord has “made us a kingdom.” This “book of the revelation of Jesus Christ” speaks of the day when: The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

This subject came up when the Lord was being tried before Pilate. This is what the Lord said on that occasion: My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

The word “kingdom” is used 158 times in the NT, and it has different meanings. There are literal kingdoms in this world, and probably nations that are not actually kingdoms, *i.e., governments ruled over by a king*, are included in this word. So at times it means *nations*. Also, the day is coming when the Lord Jesus Christ will rule as a King upon the earth. But today there is a spiritual kingdom of people, those loved by God and by Christ, who have been loosed from their sins, and who are willingly and joyfully subject to the Lord Jesus Christ even now. You and I are a part of that kingdom, *and we are priests* “to his God and Father” (NASB). We are priests *now*, as the Apostle Peter said, “To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

Do you know what those sacrifices are? In Romans 12:1 we have the basic sacrifice. What is it? Our bodies! See also Heb. 13:15-16. As evidence of this last one, communicating or giving, we have Phil. 4:18 as an illustration.

Christ is sovereign now, but He is not reigning now. If He were reigning you would not have war, nor crime, nor hunger, nor many of the things that are going on in this pleasure-loving, sin-filled world in which we live. But in the midst of this world where Satan now is “the god of this world,” our Lord is quietly, but very powerfully, gathering out of this world a people for His Name. This is the kingdom that meant here in Rev. 1:6, and it is the kingdom about which the Lord spoke to Nicodemus, according to John 3.

Now for all that the Lord has done for us, loving us, loosing us from our sins, bringing us together into His present, spiritual kingdom, where all are priests, where all have personal access to the very presence of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, “to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” “Him” in this verse is Christ!

But the glory also belongs to our heavenly Father, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we read this in Col. 1:12 and 13:

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

The Greek word for “dominion” is κράτος. This is a prayer of the Apostle John. Κράτος means *the power, the force, the strength*. Thayer says that it means “manifested power.” When we look at the world today, with the power that sin holds in the lives of people, we marvel that anyone is being saved. And they would not be except for the fact that the Lord has the power to accomplish what He ordained to be done before the foundation of the world. The Apostle John had “dominion” in mind when he wrote, “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world”(1 John 4:4b). And this “dominion” is what is behind the request that the Lord taught His disciples to pray in the request, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). When we look at the world, we are inclined to say, “It can never be!” But when we look at the Lord, then we know that it most certainly will be!

Don’t overlook the “Amen.” Thayer said in his lexicon,

It was a custom, which passed over from the synagogues into the Christian assemblies, that when he who had read or discoursed had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the others in attendance responded with Amen, and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own” (p. 32).

It was brought over into the Greek from the Hebrew, and from the Greek into the English – and it is the same word in all three, and probably the same is true in all languages. It means that what has just been said is asserted, or confirmed. It really seems that instead of expressing simply, *so be it*, when based upon the truth of Scripture, we know that *it certainly will be!*

This word “amen” appears six more times in this book: 1:7; 5:14; 7:12 (2x); 19:4; 22:20 (at the very end of the book)

Everything in this introduction to the book speaks of the total authority and absolute dependability of the content of the book and of the certainty of its complete fulfillment.

1:7 The Apostle John was not speaking of the rapture of the Church, but of the return of the Lord in glory to the earth.

“Behold, He cometh with clouds.” Robertson called this verb “cometh,” a futuristic present. But I wonder if it should not be considered simply as it is, a present tense verb. The coming of the Lord is so certain that we can speak of it as though it were happening right now! Clouds have often been a distinguishing mark associated with the presence of the Lord. That was true when Moses went into Mount Sinai to receive the Law. The Lord told Moses in Ex. 19:9,

Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.

When the Tabernacle was completed, this is what we are told that happened:

34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

36 And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys:

37 But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.

38 For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys (Ex. 40:34-38).

The same was true when the Temple was completed. This is what we are told in 2 Chron. 5:13-14:

13 It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

14 So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God (2 Chron. 5:13-14).

When the Lord Jesus was transfigured before Peter and James and John, and Peter had just suggested that they make three booths, one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, then this happened:

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid (Matt. 17:5-6).

Even when the Lord Jesus ascended back into heaven, we are told that “a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9b). And the disciples were told by the angelic beings who appeared to them as men, “This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11b).

It seems very clear that the Apostle John’s description of the coming of the Lord is a reflection of what we are told in Dan. 7:13-14:

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

And then this word is added in the 27th verse of the same chapter, Daniel 7:

27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Dan. 7:27).

This is not something that will be done in secret for “every eye shall see Him.” This is speaking of the coming of the Lord in Rev. 19.

The last part of verse 7 refers to Zechariah’s prophecy in Zech. 12:9-13:1:

9 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

12 And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives

apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart;

13 The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart;

14 All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

Zechariah 13

1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 12:9-13:1).

Therefore, the expression, “They also which pierced Him,” would refer primarily to the people of Israel, according to Zechariah’s prophecy. But how can this be when those people would have been dead for better than 2,000 years if these prophecies would be fulfilled soon?

To answer that question, please turn to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 25. Follow in your Bibles as I begin reading with verse 6, remembering that in OT prophecy a “mountain” is a symbol for a kingdom.

6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill.

11 And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim: and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands.

12 And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust.

Isaiah 26

1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.

2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in (Isa. 25:6-26:2).

Verse 8 obviously is what is quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54, and which speaks of a resurrection. There will be a resurrection when the Lord comes for the Church, and there will be another resurrection, both resurrections unto life, that will take place when the Lord comes to rule upon the earth.

But the grieving is not limited to the people of Israel because John went on to say, “and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.” Lenski said that he thinks that some of this grieving will be of the people of God when they see Him, overwhelmed in His presence that such a glorious One as He is, would suffer and die as He die for them.

November 20, 2001

And then again we have an “Amen” – “Even so, Amen.” Lenski said that “this seals the prophetic announcement. Yes, so it will be in truth” (XII, p. 51). The “even so” is a Greek *yes*; the “Amen” is, although Greek also, yet originally from the Hebrew. So for Gentiles and Jewish believers, there is total agreement that the coming of the Lord is not a false hope, but absolutely certain.

Robert Thomas wrote:

Verse 7 ends with a double affirmation of the certainty of fulfillment of the prophetic oracle just given. *Ναί* (Nai, yes”) is the usual word of affirmation in the Greek language, and it is followed by the Hebrew word of affirmation *אָמֵן* (cf. 1:6). Combined this way, the two words constitute the figure of speech called *synonymia*, whose function is to strengthen the certainty of what has just been prophesied (Bullinger). They are used in a similar way in 22:20 with the effect of saying, “It is so, amen” (Charles). It is absolutely fixed that the coming of Christ will happen as prophesied and will bring with it the resultant effects noted earlier in the verse (Thomas, Robert, I, 79).

1:8 It has been noted that since we have a change of speaker here (the Lord), this statement is the Lord affixing His signature to what has just been said. Lenski stated it this way: “This statement is sealed with Christ’s own signature” (XII, p. 51).

“Alpha and Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is like we would say, “A and Z.” Robertson takes this as a reference to God, but it seems to me that it is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking, as in verse 11. Of course we know that it refers equally to God since this is a divine attribute, and it speaks of the eternal and unchanging as well as the living nature of the Godhead. This occurs also in 21:6 with the added, “the Beginning and the Ending.” See also 22:13 where we have it also, with the added, “the First and the Last.”

See also 1:17 and 2:8. What our Lord was in the beginning (and He preceded the beginning) He will be in the ending without any change whatever. Those who try to make a difference between the God of the OT and the God of the NT, do not understand *the eternity of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.

William R. Newell, in his book on The Revelation, has this to say about “Alpha and Omega”:

Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, call attention instantly away from every *creature-claim*—God is *all!* The expression “from aleph to tau (first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet), was used by the Hebrew rabbis to signify *completely, entirely*. Men dream of “evolution”—that is a beginning *without God*. They also dream of “development,” that is, “progress *without God*;—even prating of “eternal advancement,” though they “die like gnats.” God, the I am, declares Himself to be the Alpha and Omega: not a beginning and an end, but the only One: “the everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth . . . I, Jehovah, the first and with the last” . . . I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no God” . . . “from the time that it was, there am I.” Take a tonic for spiritual anaemia from the forties of Isaiah (p. 19).

And so we should not be surprised to read what we read of God in verse 4, “which is, and which was, and which is to come.” And so our Lord is the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Consummator of all that He has purposed will take place. And to guarantee it further, we are reminded that He is “the Almighty.” See also 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22. Usually it does refer to God, but it is equally an attribute of Christ. The plans and purposes of God have not always fared well in the hands of the people of God as time moves from one generation to another, but above all that men do is a sovereign God seeing that His will is carried out and fulfilled in every detail. What comfort there is for all of us in this explanation of our living, eternal, and unchangeable God and Savior.

Walter Scott wrote that

“the Almighty” is not simply the witness of omnipotent power, but signifies Almighty in “sustaining resources,” and it will be found in the course of this book that the circumstances of God’s people make many a demand on this strong Name . . . *Almighty* God is a title full of strength and consolation. He is Almighty in sustaining His people, yet equally Almighty in judgment on His enemies (p. 31).

Now this concludes what we can call *the introduction, or the prologue* of the book of the Revelation. Every-

thing here is designed to assure us that there is nothing in this book which shall not be fulfilled, as utterly amazing as some of the prophecies are. But now we move on to:

II. The Things Which John Had Seen (1:9-20).

He would see much more than is revealed in this last part of chapter 1, but this vision of Christ sets the tone for the entire prophecy. It is a lesson to us that in all prophetic truth we need to keep our minds and our hearts focused upon Christ.

1:9 “I John” – This is the third time that the Apostle John uncharacteristically when we consider his other four books of Scripture, mentioned his own name. See 1:1, 4. He does it two more times after this: 21:2; 22:8. In a way, this links this prophecy written by John to the prophecy written by Daniel in the OT because we have “I Daniel” in Daniel 7:15; 8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5. But, as I have indicated with the Apostle John, his purpose was not to attract attention to himself, but a humble expression of himself as the writer in order to give further credence to what we are about to read in this latter part of chapter 1, as well as to what follows in this rest of this most unusual book.

The humility of the aged apostle is evident in his reference to himself as “your brother.” Two men are brothers who have the same origin, the same father and mother. I had five brothers. Two are in heaven; three are still living. But John was not talking about his human family. He was speaking of the family of God. And he, John, got into the family of God just like every other child of God. He was *born* into that family, not adopted, but *born*, born again, born from above! We ought to esteem the Apostle John very highly, as we are admonished to do for each other, but let us remember, as he would want us to remember, that he got into the family of God the same way that we did: by the new birth! The main difference between our human families and the family of God, is that our parents had to take what they got when we were born, but when we were born into God’s family, He was getting what He had chosen in eternity past, before the foundation of the world itself! What a wonderful word is that word “brother,” “your brother,” or “your sister.” John wanted to show his oneness with all those in the churches who were also in the family of God.

“And companion in tribulation” – He had participated, and was participating, with them in the trials that had come to them because of their relationship to the Lord and because of the way they had been serving Him. This is what it means to be a “companion.” “Tribulation” meant *affliction, persecution, trials*. It was especially difficult at that time in history under rulers like Nero and Domitian. They did not all suffer in the same way, but their suffering was real, and deep, and for the same reason. Even in the days in which the Apostle Paul had written to Timothy, he said, “Yea, and all that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The world not only hates our Savior, and hates the Bible, and hates the truth that we believe, *but the world hates our lifestyle!* And yet we can’t stop being what we are.

But they were not only “companions in tribulation,” but also “companions . . . in the kingdom.” While it is not perfectly clear what the Apostle John meant by “kingdom” and “patience,” it seems that in the mention of the “kingdom” he was speaking of the work of the Lord in which every believer is involved. And the Apostle John felt a special kinship with the seven churches as they sought to get the Gospel out to people in the world that they might be brought in to the kingdom of God. In the latter part of this ninth verse he made it clear that it was because he refused to remain silent as far as the Gospel was concerned, that he had been exiled to the isle of Patmos.

What about “the patience of Jesus Christ”? Lenski has some good insights into the relationship between these three words, “tribulation . . . kingdom . . . patience . . .” He said this:

Even the order of the three words is illuminating. Were it not for the kingdom, which the world opposes, there would be no affliction for the partakers of the kingdom; were it not for the powers of the kingdom, its partakers could not endure. . . Our very affliction shows that His grace has been active in us, our endurance also shows this (p. 55).

“Patience” is more than simply waiting. It is perseverance, steadfastness. And it all comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. So we suffer because we belong to the Lord and serve Him in His kingdom, and the Lord gives us the patience to persevere as the trials come upon us.

Now when the Apostle John wrote these words, he was not in the pastor’s study, as I have said before. He was in exile. He was on the Isle of Patmos. He was in a very real sense, a prisoner of war. And yet he was not altogether a prisoner of Rome, but he was on active duty for the Lord. The government of Rome might restrict his activity, his moving about, but his pen became his weapon, and he was using it to continue on in the conflict. The Bible not only teaches us the power of the spoken Word, but also the power of the written Word. And the written Word takes many forms – both OT and NT history (which emphasizes biography), poetry, prophecy, and letter-writing. But more about this later.

November 26, 2001

Patmos was a rocky island in the Aegean Sea off of the coast of the Roman province of Asia. It was between 30 and 40 miles from the mainland. It is about 10 miles long and 6 miles wide. It was a place where the Roman government exiled many of their prisoners, and they were punished with hard labor. How much they would have demanded of the Apostle John who probably was in his nineties, we cannot tell. But Rome did not intend for it to be a pleasant, comfortable place for its prisoners. Tradition has it that he was there about a year and a half, but we can’t be sure of that.

Why was he there? “For the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John was in trouble on two counts. He was preaching and teaching the Word of God because he believed it to be the Word of God. But he was also in trouble because he believed “the testimony of Jesus Christ.” You will remember that in verse 5 our Lord is called, “the faithful Witness.” The Apostle John was a firm believer in all that the Lord Jesus Christ taught, and he put it on the same level as that which God had previously given in the OT Scriptures. By this time the writings of Paul and Peter and James were in existence, and these were mainly an enlargement upon what our Lord taught. John believed it all, and because he would not remain silent about “the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ,” he had been arrested, tried, and sent out to the island called Patmos. The Apostle did not go into any detail about his arrest, or his trial, or the sentence that was handed down. He simply explained in the words of this verse *why he was there*. He knew that he would not have been there if it had not been the will of God, so why should he grieve over the circumstances that put him there. All of that was past. In the next verse he moved on into the present.

1:10 Here the Apostle John spoke of what had happened to him on “the Lord’s Day.” This is the first and only time that we have this expression in the NT. It is not the Greek expression which would have been used for the day of the Lord, but the Greek word translated “Lord” here is *κυριακός*. It is only used twice in the NT. The other reference is in 1 Cor. 11:20 where we read it is translated as “Lord’s” in the expression, “the Lord’s Supper. So although a few would link this with *the day of the Lord* (as Walvoord did), there seems to be no reason why we cannot take this as it is translated in the KJ, “the Lord’s Day,” referring to the first day of the week. The NKJ, the NASB, and the NIV all retain the translation that we have in the KJV.

Newell in his commentary seemed to think that the Apostle John spent that day in fellowship with other believers on the Isle of Patmos, but there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that that was the case. Instead it

seems more likely that the Lord took this moment on the day that the Apostle John had in the past met with the Lord's people, and ministered to them, but which at this time was denied to him, as the time when he was to receive a new and special revelation of Jesus Christ.

Earlier than this time about which we are reading here in Revelation 1, the believers in the church were meeting on the first day of the week, commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. See Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; John 20:19-26. So I believe we are right in taking that this vision of Christ was given to John on a Sunday.

But he said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Although this has been interpreted various ways, why do we need anything besides the obvious meaning, that the Apostle John had the Spirit come upon him in a way that he was brought into a state, or condition, in which the Spirit of God could and would communicate the truth to him. Isn't this what happened to Peter in Acts 10:9-16? Verse 10 tells us that "he fell into a trance." The Apostle Paul spoke of a similar situation in Acts 22:17-18; 2 Cor. 12:1-4. Also see Ezekiel 2:1-2; 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 40:2. Dr. Walvoord explained as far as the Apostle John was concerned, that he was "carried beyond normal sense into a state where God could reveal supernaturally the contents of this book" (p. 42).

November 27, 2001

After this happened to the Apostle John, he wrote, "And [I] heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." If the voice was like a trumpet, it means that it was loud enough to attract attention so that the Apostle John would not miss hearing it, nor would he fail to understand it.

Exodus 19:13, 16, and 19 in preparation for the giving of the Law. Trumpets were used when the children of Israel on their march from Egypt to Canaan were to break camp, and move on. They were used to call the people to war. Even on their feast days. At the beginning of each month the trumpets were blown. Cf. Num. 10:1-10. A trumpet will be blown when the Lord returns for us, according to 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52. Also when the Lord returns to reign, a trumpet will sound. Cf. Matt. 24:31. Here in the Revelation we have a similar situation in Rev. 4:1. It marked a very significant time when a trumpet was blown. It spoke of a new revelation from God, or of something that those who heard the sound were commanded to do. It was the sound of *the voice of God and/or of Christ*. It was the sound of divine authority.

1:11 Here is the message that was given like by the trumpet-like voice. Verse 12 makes it clear that this was the voice of Jesus Christ. And He is identified as the One Who spoke in verse 8 (although some MSS omit this title, and begin with, "What thou seest, write in a book).

The Apostle John was to do three things: see, write, and send. Therefore, this meant that he was to pay the most careful attention to what he was to see. He was to write it very accurately in a book, and to make sure that the message got to each of the seven churches of Asia. This command to write was repeated in each of the letters to the churches.

There were seven churches that were to receive the message of this book. They are mentioned by name. We don't know why just these seven were mentioned and singled out to receive this message. Perhaps it was because from them other churches, like the church at Colosse, could be reached. We have to say that we don't really know the answer to this question. What John had to do was what the Lord told him to do.

The letters which follow in chapters 2 and 3 are given in the same order as they are mentioned here.

1:12 John turned to see the voice, meaning, to see the One Whose voice he had heard which could best be described as sounding like a trumpet.

One important point about the details given of our Lord here regarding the vision that John had of Him, is that in the letters in chapters 2 and 3, in each letter the Lord is identified as being the One Who appeared to John here in chapter 1, because one detail taken from the vision is mentioned at the beginning of each letter. (Explain.)

Turning, he first saw “seven golden candlesticks,” or lampstands. We are told in the very last statement of this chapter that “the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (v.20b).

When the Lord spoke to His disciples in what we call, the Sermon on the Mount, among many other wonderful things He said this:

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

That is true of us individually, but it is also true corporately of local churches. And so we can see that if our lives are shining brightly, the light that goes out from a church where believers are shining, has to be intense.

We get an even better idea of what it means that we are the light of the world from what the Apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth. I am referring to his words in 2 Cor. 3:18-4:7:

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

This means that the light that shines forth from us is the light of the Gospel. And it does not shine forth from us externally (except for the fact that our lives do reflect the transformation that the Gospel has made in us), but it shines forth from our hearts! The external is a reflection of the internal. We must remember that our Lord also said that He was “the Light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). So if we are shining as lights in the world, we are shining forth with the Gospel, which in turn points people to Christ.

I am afraid that, in all honesty, we have to say that believers and churches today are really failing in this vital ministry to the world. We will learn when we come to what the Lord said to the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2 that if they did not repent and change their way of living that He would come quickly and remove their light. How important it is that our lives and the ministry of our churches be what the Lord has declared in His Word

that they should be!!!

These lampstands of gold suggest how precious the churches are to God and to Christ.

“Seven” is an important number in the book of the Revelation. From the seven days in which the heavens and the earth were created (actually six days of creation and the seventh day, a day of rest, Bible teachers have taken the number “seven” to indicate completeness. We know that there were more than seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, so for seven to have been chosen, must have some significance. Perhaps it is to indicate that the whole church was represented in the seven churches, and therefore the messages to the seven churches need to be a message to the whole body of Christ in every generation.

1:13 And standing with the lampstands surrounding Him was “one like unto the Son of man.” The Apostle John used this title of our Lord twelve times in his Gospel. Although John had never seen the Lord as He appeared to him in this chapter, yet John recognized enough to know that it was the Lord Who was appearing to him. The Lord appeared as a Man, and yet the Apostle John knew that He was more than a Man; He was the Son of God. Lenski said in his commentary,

Here He appears with His human nature glorified. That glory John had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration long years before; now he beholds it anew, more fully, more significantly revealed (p. 64).

Cf. also Dan. 7:13-14:

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Dr. Walvoord had this to say about our Lord’s appearance:

His being clothed with a garment to His feet is best explained by the clothing of a priest and a judge, like Aaron’s robe being designed “for glory and beauty” (Ex. 28:2). The golden girdle corresponds to that used by the high priest to bind his garments higher on the body than at the loins. Josephus explains that as being in keeping with the dignity and majesty of the high priest and as being designed to allow greater freedom of movement. The golden girdle corresponds to the girdle of the high priest which has golden thread in it, but here it is made entirely of gold. The somber presence of Christ in His role as judge and priest in the midst of the churches is a significant introduction to chapters 2 and 3 (p. 44).

The fact that the Son of man was “in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,” is evidence of His omnipresence. He could be with all of them at the same time, and therefore He would know the condition of each church, that is, what about them that pleased Him, but also that about them which displeased Him.

1:14 Here we have a description of our Lord’s head, and hair, and His eyes.

If John were seeing one who was a mere man, the white hair might suggest age, and the weakness that goes with age. But the Lord being the eternal Son of God would know nothing of age or weakness. And so we must take the white hair as portraying His absolute purity, a purity that never had been, and never will be, corrupted by sin. He was without sin. His only experience with sin was when He was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21), when “the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

Isaiah 1:18 confirms this interpretation:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

The Lord's eyes being "as a flame of fire" suggests His position as a Judge. And yet it is comforting to know that He also is the Great High Priest of His people. Nothing escapes His sight. His eyes are "in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). And His judgment will be a righteous judgment. Cf. John 5:22, 27, 30. This is often not true of man's judgment. But our Lord is never mistaken, and He is uniquely qualified to be our Judge, and the Judge of all, because He is the Son of man.

December 3, 2001

The fact that His eyes were "as a flame of fire," and that we have the Lord appearing here at a Judge, is confirmed by what we read about the Lord at His second coming as He is described in Rev. 19. Listen to how the Lord is described in that passage:

- 11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
- 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.
- 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.
- 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.
- 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 19:11-15).

This will be the judgment of the nations when the Lord separates the sheep from the goats. But before that time the Apostle Paul said that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:9-10. We have the judgment of believers also referred to in 1 Corinthians. See chapter 3, verses 10 through 15:

- 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.
- 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;
- 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
- 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
- 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

This should serve as a warning to us. We need to make sure that we are doing the will of the Lord and the work of the Lord, in the Lord's way, and not in our own way.

1:15 The idea of judgment continues here with our Lord's feet described as "fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." The Lord's eyes and His feet are combined in our Lord's letter to the church at Thyatira. See Rev. 2:18.

Reading again from Rev. 19, verse 15, we are told this:

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule

them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 19:15).

This speaks of the omnipotence of the Lord when He comes, as Matthew Henry said, “strong and stedfast, supporting his own interest, subduing his enemies, treading them to powder.”

And here again the Lord’s voice is referred to, not now as a trumpet, but “as the sound of many waters.” However the effect is the same. Lenski describes the meaning of this figure of speech with reference to the Lord’s voice in this way:

It is now described “as a voice (sound) of many waters,” i.e., full of elemental, resistless, overwhelming power like the sound of a roaring cataract or the crashing ocean breakers. The voice “speaks” in verse 10; it utters the Speaker’s will. None will ever be able to challenge and to stand against the elemental force of Jesus’ voice and His will (p. 67).

The rushing of a mighty river can be as overwhelming as the sound of a trumpet. Believers and unbelievers are often unmoved by the Word of God, but the day is coming when all will listen. Listen to these words of our Lord found in John 5:26-29:

26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;
27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.
28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,
29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

1:16 Here the Apostle John tells us about the Lord’s right hand, His mouth, and His countenance.

In the Lord’s right hand were “seven stars.” And we are told in verse 20 of this chapter that “the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” And notice that each of the seven letters is addressed to “the angel” of each church. How are we to understand who or what “the angels” are?

There is an interesting verse in Daniel’s prophecy that may apply here. It is found in Dan. 12:3:

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

People are likened here to stars.

Lenski covers the ground quite thoroughly with his comment:

To think of actual angels, guardian angels of the churches, will not do; for how would letters penned by John be sent to such angels? These cannot be messengers that were sent to John on Patmos by the seven churches; none such are mentioned in the account. To allegorize and to make personifications of the spirit of the churches is unwarranted. These “seven stars” are the pastors of the seven churches. They are distinguished from the churches as such (lampstands) and yet belong to them and in the seven letters are held responsible for the condition of their churches. The word ἄγγελος means “messenger” . . . (p. 68).

These “angels” were “in His right hand,” i.e., in the Lord’s right hand. This not only means that the Lord is sovereign over the leaders of the churches, but it means that their authority is derived from the Lord. They are to do His will. They are to speak His Word. “His power is back of all that they rightly do in His Name” (*Ibid.*) Matthew Henry said that “the ministers of the seven churches, who are under his direction, have all their light and influence from him, and are secured and preserved by him.” The Lord holds His servants in His hand. As in OT times we have our false prophets today. But the Lord holds in His right hand all true servants of the Lord, and they are responsible to Him for the way they conduct the work of the Lord.

Out of the Lord's mouth "went a sharp twoedged sword." This we know is the Word of God. Cf. Heb. 4:12-13:

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

And link this with Isaiah's statement about the Word of God found in Isa.55:10-11:

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

So the Apostle John was reminded of the power of the Word of God. He was on Patmos "for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ," here in seeing the twoedged sword proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord, He was reminded of the ultimate victory that the Lord would claim throughout the world. When he would see the vision of the Lord returning in chapter 19 he would learn that "his Name is called The Word of God." See 19:13.

"And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." When the Apostle John, along with the Apostles James and Peter, saw the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, we are told that "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). And that is the way the Lord appeared here to the Apostle John. He saw the Lord in His glory, the Son of man, but also the Son of God. No language is capable of describing the effulgence of the glory of God the Son.

1:17 John saw Him, and he felt the Savior's hand upon him, and then he heard his voice.

Perhaps this is what we will do when the time comes that we will see Him – John "fell at His feet as dead." Seiss says that the churches are lamps, the pastors are stars, but the Lord is like the sun. He is the One Who surpasses all others, even with their combined radiance. Neither lamps nor stars are needed when the sun is shining in its strength.

It was the Lord's right hand that was laid upon John. What about the seven stars, the angels of the seven churches? The Lord's had is great enough to hold the seven stars, and yet to tenderly touch the Apostle John, and still hold all of the saints in His hand. No one can pluck us out of His hand.

What gracious words the Lord spoke to John: "Fear not." We can probably take this as referring to how John felt as he looked upon the Lord in His glory. It was such an awesome sight that it would strike fear to the heart of anyone. People who glibly say that they will take their chances when the time comes that they will stand before the Lord, don't know what they are talking about. All of their boastings and their arguments will vanish from their minds when they see the Lord. But it will be a vastly different thing if men look upon Him while they are still in their sins. Then they will have every reason to be afraid.

The Lord not only told John not to be afraid, but He told him why he had no reason to be afraid. And all of the reasons had to do with Christ Himself:

1) "I am the first and the last."

1:18 2) "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen.

3) “[I] have the keys of hell [hades] and of death.”

The first of these three had to do with the Lord’s Deity. The second had to do with His saving work. The last has to do with His ultimate victory.

Concerning the first, we learned from verse 8 that the Lord is “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending.” Our Lord spans all of time, and everything in between. And what He was at “the first,” He remained the same at “the last.” And the same was true all through time, from the first to the last. He is the ever-living One, and the unchanging One. He is sovereign over all.

But in that span of time He died, died rejected by men, but died as the Substitute for all of those whom the Father had given to Him. But He arose triumphantly from the dead, never to die again. Death no longer has any dominion over him. He is “alive for evermore, Amen.”

The Lord has the keys of hades and death. Several writers have pointed out that death holds the bodies of the wicked; hades holds their souls. And the Lord holds the keys to both. Our Lord’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) shows that hades is a place of torment, but not the place of final judgment for the wicked, which is Gehenna. So the Lord is the Judge, and He will see to it that that the wicked will receive that which is coming to them. None can escape because He has the keys.

1:19 In verse 11 the Apostle John was told to *see* those things which were to appear before Him. Then he was told to write it all down. And finally he was to send what he had written to the seven churches which are mentioned in verse 11. The first vision was the vision of Christ. Now in this verse he was told to “write.” But it was not that he was just to write what he had seen, but also “the things which are” (chs. 2, 3), and all of the revelations that would be given afterwards (the rest of the book). And “the things which shall be hereafter” were to be accepted by John with the same certainty as what he had seen, and as the present condition of the churches.

1:20 We have dealt with this verse before because it gives us the information that we need to understand the ministry of churches with respect to the glory of God and to the world, and it also shows the Lord’s relationship to His churches and His delight in them.

One thing that we haven’t discussed as far as this verse is concerned, is the word “mystery.” We have to understand when we come to the NT in particular that the word “mystery” has a different meaning in Scripture from its common usage in everyday life. We speak of something as a mystery because it is difficult, or even impossible, to understand. In the Bible it speaks of something which had not been previously revealed, but which now has been revealed. So it is a distinctly NT word. There is truth in the NT that was not revealed, or fully revealed in the OT. It is used four times in the Revelation: here, 10:7; 17:5, 7. For a definition see Eph. 3:1-6. The church itself was a mystery. And a part of the revelation of the church is given here. This has to do with the seven stars which are in the hand of the Son of man, and the seven golden candlesticks, or lampstands, among which the Lord is seen.

And all of this is in anticipation primarily of what we are to learn about the seven churches of Asia in chapters 2 and 3. In each letter, as I have mentioned, the Lord is described according to some part of the vision given to us in chapter 1, with some minor differences in the last two letters.

But now we are ready to turn to the letters from our Lord to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
December 10, 2001

Chapters 2-3

In the outline I prepared for you, this is:

III. “The Things Which Are” – Our Lord’s letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (2:1-3:22).

In chapter 2 we have His letters to the churches at Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamos (2:12-17), and Thyatira (2:18-29). In chapter 3 we have our Lord’s letters to the churches at Sardis (3:1-6), Philadelphia (3:7-13), Laodicea (3:14-22).

Intro: Before we get to the letters themselves, let me make a few introductory remarks.

We note that our Lord followed a pattern in these letters which generally can be seen in all of them:

- 1) Each letter is address “unto the angel of the church of . . .”
- 2) Each letter identifies the Lord in some way in which He is revealed in chapter 1.
- 3) After these introductory words, the message to each church begins with the words, “I know.” These words are followed by what the Lord knew about each church, both that which pleased Him, and that which did not please Him. Then they were told what needed to be changed plus warnings if the churches continued to do that which was not pleasing in His sight, plus, in some instances, promises given if they responded positively to what the Lord had to say in the letter. Each letter varies on these points.
- 4) After the main message of the letter was given, then the Lord appealed to individuals in the churches with these words: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Cf. also Rev. 13:9. It seems that in this statement the Lord was indicating that each letter contained a message for all of the churches.
- 5) Finally, we have a promise “to him that overcometh.” Note again that this is singular.

There are some who believe that in these seven letters we have portrayed the seven periods of church history. But I believe that there is not much to commend this as a trustworthy suggestion. I don’t think that anyone can really say that church history has seven, and only seven, periods. No one can say, for example, with reference to the first letter (v. 4) that it was a problem unique to the first period of church history that they had left their first love. *That has been a problem throughout the history of the church. That is a great problem in the church today.* I believe that these letters are important to all churches throughout all of church history. They are messages that are greatly needed in the church today. So in that sense these letters can have an application to all churches in all periods of church history.

The supreme importance of these letters is to be seen in the fact that each one is stated as the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also as the words of the Holy Spirit. If you have a red letter edition of the New Testament, you can readily see that all of chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 are in red, indicating that they are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. But they are equally the words of the Holy Spirit.

So, as interpreting any portion of Scripture, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- 1) What does the letter mean?
- 2) How does the message of each letter apply to us today?

These are the two things that I am going to seek to do as we go through each letter.

Let me ask you again to consult a map of the area in which these seven churches were located. They were in the Roman province of Asia, known in the past as Asia Minor, the area now occupied by the nation Turkey.

Now let us turn to:

A. The letter to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7).

2:1 The KJ translators used the basic meaning of ἄγγελος, “the angel.” But its basic meaning is *a messenger*. And since we have no evidence in Scripture that an angel is assigned to each church, the preferred translation is *messenger*, or *pastor*. He is one who is commissioned to deliver a message.

In Luke 7:24 the word for angels is used in the Greek text, but clearly it refers to John’s disciples. And in Luke 7:27 the word angel is used of John the Baptist himself. So it is not usual for the word *angel* to be used of men.

24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? (Luke 7:24).

27 This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee (Luke 7:27).

Matt. 11:10 and Mark 1:2 are parallel passages to Luke 7:27.

So we prefer the idea that the Lord Jesus was addressing the pastor of the churches, who, in turn, were under a divine commission to present the Word of God to the people. The people to whom this letter was addressed are “the church.” There in the citadel of the great goddess Diana, as she was called, a church had been established after people in the city had been saved, drawn to Christ, and saved.

But the Lord Jesus did not say, “Preach,” but “write.” Undoubtedly he would have preached on this divinely given text (in much the same way that we would), but he was to write. A permanent record was to be kept of all that the Lord had to say to that group of believers. We have the letter because John wrote it down. And, as I have already suggested, it is very likely that the believers in Ephesus had access to the letters which were written to all of the other churches.

Notice how the Lord identified Himself, and be sure to note the tense of the two verbs which describe what the Lord was doing. He was holding, and continued to hold, all seven messengers to the seven churches. So it indicates that what the Lord was doing when John saw Him in chapter 1, He continued to do. And he not only walked among them in the vision, but He continued to walk among them. To hold them meant that they were under His control, and for Him to walk among them, meant that there was not a moment of any day but what He was there, observing what they were doing, what they were saying, what they were planning to do – every detail was open before the eyes of the Lord.

These are very simple truth, but exceedingly important truths. What peace we would experience if we only really believed the truth that we have here. We could translate them, “*is holding*,” and “*is walking*.” So nothing has changed from verse 20 of chapter 1 to the first verse of chapter 2.

2:2 “I know” – see vv. 9, 13, 19; 2:1, 8, 15. He would have to be omniscient to “know” all things about all churches, but He does, and so He is! James Moffatt, writing in *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, said,

Their disorder and difficulties do not escape [the Lord]. He will neither spare nor despair of the churches. He . . . knows not only who are His, but what they are, One Who is keenly alive to their plight and struggles . . . alike against inward corruption and the external pressure of the Empire, One to Whom their obscure provincial conflict is a matter of infinite moment [importance] (Vol. V, p. 349).

This word in this “pastoral” as one has called it (and the other six letters as well) would bring great encourage-

ment to the believers at Ephesus. What the Lord Jesus said here about Himself, applies equally to the Father as He taught His disciples not to use vain repetitions in their prayers because, He said, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Matt. 6:8b). The good He knows, as our Lord stated in verses 2 and 3, and He knows equally well, the bad (v. 4).

We have two words for work here in verse 2, “works” and “labor.” “Works” is the main word. It speaks not of what we think of when we think of work, but of *the course and conduct of their lives*. Thus “works” here has to do with their walk. And our Lord described it as “labor and “patience.” This spoke of the energy, the zeal, in which they were living. When the Greeks spoke of “patience,” they had an entirely different idea from that which we have. We picture a man pacing back and forth, waiting for his wife who is an hour late. Or I could turn that around – a wife waiting dinner on her husband who did not come home from work when he said he would, and the food was getting cold. That is not the idea in Greek. The Greek word for patience is ὑπομονή, which lit. means, *remaining under*. A better translation would be *perseverance*. A good illustration of this kind of patience is in the book of Acts where we are told what Peter and John were warned not to do, and what they did. This is what they were told not to do:

18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18).

They were *under* strict order not to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is what they said they were going to do:

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

You see, they intended to persevere even though they were *under orders not to*.

So when the Lord told the believers in Ephesus that He knew the godliness of their lives, how strenuously they were serving Him even though they were under intense opposition from the authorities, He was giving them high marks, but not the highest as we shall see in a moment.

The Lord went on with His commendation when he spoke of their righteous stand against “evil” men, men who claimed that they were apostles, but they were found to be liars. They claimed to be apostles. What was one major condition for a man to be called an apostle? It was that he had seen the Lord. Another evidence that a man was an apostle, was that the Lord was using him, people were being saved, their lives were changed because they were living for the Lord. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor 9:1-2 as he was defending his own apostleship. He said,

1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

Now the Ephesian believers had “tried them which say they are apostles.” “Tried” means that they had put them to the test, and had found that they were liars. They weren’t apostles. They did not have the credentials. They preached a different doctrine.

This explains what it is so necessary for the people of God to be trained in the truth. The Word of God itself is the test of faith. No person can be preaching the truth if they are contradicting the plain teaching of Scripture. Dr. Mitchell used to say that “false teachers prey on ignorant Christians.” And that is absolutely true. Well, these Ephesian believers were not ignorant. Paul had taught them. The Apostle John had taught them. Aquila and Priscilla had taught them. They were well fortified with the truth, and the Lord took special notice of all of this.

But the Lord had more to say, and the Apostle John had more to write.

2:3 “And hast borne.” This is not in all of the MSS, but it is in the Received Text. The idea in this word is illustrated by what Americans are doing today with the flag. It is flying everywhere. Perhaps the best illustration from today is when you see a car going down the street with a flag flying from the radio antenna, or from these plastic holders that fit on a window of the car. I’m sure that this was true of the Ephesian believers in their witness for Christ, and it would be a lot better for us if we were just as anxious to make the Gospel known as we are to fly the flag of the US of A. They were like Paul. They were not ashamed of the Gospel. They wanted everyone to hear the good news. They did not go underground. They humbly, but confidently, and in the power of the Holy Spirit took their stand for Christ.

But then we come to the word “patience” again. It simply means that in spite of the opposition, and regardless of severe it might be, *they persevered!* They did not stop. Their boldness did not change the difficulties that they faced, but only made it necessary for them to work harder. And they did! The verb “labored” in this verse is from the same root as the word verb translated, “canst not bear,” in verse 2. They stayed under the burden, were steadfast. And they did it for the sake of the Lord’s Name, *but they did not faint.* They kept going when they felt that they could go no farther. As it is sometimes said, “They grew weary in the work, but not weary of the work.”

We are verses 2 and 3, put our Bibles down, and say to ourselves, “Where in all of the world would you find a church like that church at Ephesus? It has to be the perfect church. Surely there is nothing about the church that the Lord would want to change.” But the fact is, there was one thing that was missing, and it threatened the entire testimony of the church at Ephesus. What was it?

2:4 “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love.” Robertson, commenting on the word “left,” and the tense which the Lord used, the aorist, was indicating that it was “a definite and sad departure” (VI, 299). Seiss called it a “fatal decline” (p. 70).

We can also say that it is possible for us to be so consumed with the work of the Lord that we don’t have time for the Lord. But what did the Lord mean by “thy first love”? He meant that they did not love Him like they did when they were first saved. And it also meant that they did not love each other like they did at the first, just after they were saved. This often happens when we are so busy serving the Lord that we don’t take time to be with Him.

When the Lord was asked what was the greatest commandment in the Law, what was His answer? Let me give the answer to you as John Mark recorded it in the Gospel which he wrote:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment (Mark 12:30).

Cf. Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27. This is what the Lord wants from us more than anything else – more than our service (although that is very important), more than our money. He wants us. The Lord gives us trials to remind us that we can’t live without Him. We take our burdens to Him in prayer, but what delights Him is that we have come. The Lord can tell when we are reading our Bible just to fulfil an assignment as compared with those times when we read the Word to learn more about Him, to seek Him for Himself, and not just because of what we want Him to do for us. One of the easiest ways to get away from a life of real fellowship with the Lord, is when our “busy-ness” consumes us.

When the Apostle Paul met with the elders of Ephesus for the last time, you will remember that he told them this: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . . (Acts 20:28). I don’t know how many of those elders were still

living when the Apostle John wrote the book of the Revelation. I feel sure that many of them were gone – possibly all of them. But the pastor and the elders and deacons, as well as all of the people, needed to here this complaint from the Lord: “You don’t love me the way you used to love me.”

It may have been also that they didn’t love each other the way they had in the past, especially just after they were saved. This is a good way to test where we are spiritually. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

When Peter had sinned, and the Lord sought to restore him, He asked Peter three times if Peter loved Him. See John 21:15-17.

Perhaps this passage in the book of the Revelation reminds you, as it did me, of the way the Lord lamented over His people in the days of Jeremiah. And it really tells us why the people of Judah were under the judgment of God. Please turn in your Bibles to Jer. 2:1-13, and follow, if you will, as I read. (Read.)

What is the answer to the spiritual state that is described here concerning the church at Ephesus? The answer is given to us in verse 5.

2:5 The Lord tells the pastor to tell the people at that need to do three things, and then He went on to tell them what the consequences would be if they did not do what He was telling them to do.

What were they to do? Three things. The Lord has given us two R’s; and I give you a third which is suggested by what the Lord said about the third thing that they were to do:

- 1) Remember.
- 2) Repent.
- 3) Return.

“REMEMBER.” The verb is a present active imperative which means, *remember and keep on remembering*. As you and I think back over our lives, can we remember a time, or times, when our fellowship with the Lord was so much better than it is now? If we can, then we have fallen, and we need to take the necessary steps to get back where we once were, and even higher! The Lord sees the problem when it begins to happen, and He often uses various means of awakening us to see that things are not now what they used to be.

What an important word is that word, “remember.” Please note that it is a command. It is the equivalent of THINK, or MEDITATE. It is a very important word in the Christian life. God always remembers, and He never needs to be reminded to do so. But spiritual declension can creep up on us so slowly that we are not really aware of what is going on. Can you remember a time when reading the Word was a greater pleasure to you than it is now? Can you remember a time when you looked for and took every opportunity you could find to get alone with the Lord so you could pray? But one of the main things to remember is what your fall, or my fall means to the Lord. THINK ABOUT IT ALL!

“REPENT.” What is it that we repent of? Isn’t it S-I-N? Isn’t repentance sorrow for sin, and going to the Lord, confessing that it is sin, and asking the Lord for forgiveness? And let us remember that true repentance means turning away from our sin with the intention that, by God’s grace, we would not come back to it again? Do you ever cry over your sins?

The last word is RETURN. That is, “do the first works.” “The first works” are works that are done with the “first love.” The Lord knows the difference when we serve Him because we love Him as compared with any

other motive that might move us to serve Him. To “do the first works” is to serve the Lord mainly because you love Him, and as an expression of your love for Him. And it means that you will serve Him the way He wants to be served.

What are the consequences of not remembering, not repenting, and not returning to the Lord? The Lord “will come quickly” (note that word), “and will remove thy candlestick out of his place” if there is no repentance. Does this mean that the church will cease to exist? It may, but not necessarily so. But it means that the testimony will be extinguished.

For the first ten years of my life I was in a church in Tacoma, Washington where as far as I know, I was brought to the knowledge of Christ as my Savior. But when I was 10 the people rose up and asked for the resignation of the pastor who was a faithful preacher of the Word. He just wasn’t as entertaining nor as charismatic as the man had been who preceded him. The church has a large building which will seat several hundred people, and it used to be packed with people. I met a pastor who preaches in that city of Tacoma, and I asked him how that church was doing. He told me that they are fortunate to have fifty people on Sunday morning. The building is still there. And services are still held. But the light has gone out.

Sometimes churches are full where people used to gather who loved the Lord, but the people have turned away from the Lord and turned away from the Word. A lot of social work may be going on, but there is no light. The lampstand is out! Oh, how careful we should be that our lives are pleasing to the Lord, and that we love Him with the love that He has shed abroad in our hearts.

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2:6 It is always good when a church, or an individual believer, loves what God loves, and when we hate what God hates. And, of course, the same applies to the Lord Jesus. The Lord hated “the deeds of the Nicolaitanes.” In verse 15, in the letter to the church at Pergamos, “the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” is mentioned. The believers in Pergamos tolerated their doctrine which they, too, should have hated. Doctrine always leads to deeds. Good doctrine leads to good deeds. Evil doctrine leads to evil deeds. If our doctrine is wrong, our practical living cannot be right.

We don’t really know who the Nicolaitanes were. Many believe that they were related to “Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch” who was one of the original deacons. It is believed that he became an apostate. There was such a group in the second century, and even Bishop Lightfoot said that this was a possibility. Whatever their origin was, it seems that they were the opposite of the legalists of the day. They were inclined toward asceticism, and were libertine in their behavior – that is, without self-restraint in morals. The Lord despised them, and it was to the credit of the Ephesian church that the believers there also “hated” their “deeds.”

But this only serves to emphasize the point that a believer can take a strong stand against error in any and every form, and profligate living, and yet be lacking in that which has such priority with the Lord: our love for Him.

The Lord’s message to the church at Ephesus comes to a close with this verse. In verse 7 we have the Lord’s appeal for them to go back spiritually where they had been before. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that He wanted them to go *up* spiritually to the height from which they had fallen.

2:7 Notice that the wording of this verse, the Lord’s appeal to the church, is in the singular: “He that hath an ear, let him hear,” and “to him that overcometh . . .” What are we to understand from this when the letter was not only for the church at Ephesus, but for all of the churches (as we see from the statement, “what

the Spirit saith unto the churches)?

The answer should be very apparent to all of us. Declension in a church does not start with all of the people, but it usually begins with one, or with just a few, and gradually spreads to the whole church. Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. They had just one man who was living in sin, but the Apostle asked them, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6). When Achan sinned at Jericho, the whole nation suffered defeat. So if a church is to recover from its declension, it must begin with individuals within the church. If even one person really hears what the Lord is saying to the church, it can mean a return to better days because others may soon join the one.

We all have ears, but not all of us really hear what the Lord says. That is why we need to pray that the Lord will give us ears to hear. A person who has hearing ears, is the person who is going to respond positively to what the Lord says. Here that begins with remembering, and then goes on to repenting, and ultimately leads to restoration. But it all begins with hearing! Beware of reading the Word just to be reading, while at the same time you are not hearing. And we must not make a habit of hearing for someone else. We need to be hearing for ourselves. What amazing things were done in the early church when the Lord had the ears of just a few – John and Peter and Paul, to name a few. They had ears to hear, and I trust that you and I have that kind of ears. It is possible for a person to be hard of hearing physically, but to have keen hearing spiritually. And that is what the Lord was talking about. This statement appears, as you all can see, in each of the seven letters.

Finally, the Lord addressed himself to those who would overcome.

This was a favorite expression with the Apostle John. We have it in his first epistle. See 1 John 2:13ff., 4:4, and 5:4ff. It is in each of the seven letters here in Rev. 2 and 3. See also Rev. 5:5;12:11; 15:2; 17:14 and 21:7. Here it is a present active participle, speaking of continuous victory. It implies that some will overcome; others will not! It is possible to be saved without being an overcomer. The Apostle Paul said this in his letter to the church at Corinth:

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:10-14).

So the emphasis in speaking about *overcoming*, is not whether a person is saved or not, but how he is living and what kind of rewards he is going to receive. If we are not interested in rewards, I want to say that we ought to be.

All of us who are saved, are going to be in heaven. All of us are going to be like Christ. And yet there will be differences to which that is the case. Some are overcomers; others are not. Some walk in close fellowship with the Lord; others do not. Even in Ephesus, the church seems to have been a very zealous, orthodox, serving church, but they were lacking in their personal devotion to the Lord. So, while there undoubtedly some who did not fall under the censure given by the Lord in this letter, most of them did! To overcome meant getting back to the Lord so that they would be able to do "the first works." They were to overcome their own lack of hearing the Word. They were to put the Lord first in their lives. This is the place of blessing for any individual in the church as well as for the whole church. We have the world to overcome. We have our own sinful nature's to overcome. We have the Devil to overcome. But, oh, what blessing awaits us in the glory if we are living the way the Lord wants us to live, doing His will, seeking always to please Him!

I don't know what all of this means. I do know that Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden of Eden so that they could not eat of the tree of life. See Gen. 3:22-24. But for those who overcome now, there is added blessing coming when we enter into glory.

Remember the story of the translation of Enoch? He walked with God here on earth, and walked right into glory with the Lord. Let us live here on earth in such a way that heaven will mean those special blessings which the Lord has promised to those who overcome. And remember what the Apostle John said about how we overcome:

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5).

The only people who can possibly be overcomers are those who know the Lord, and they overcome, as the Apostle John said in 1 John 4:4 because "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." May the Lord make us, and keep us, overcoming.

January 7, 2002

Now let us move on to the second letter –

B. The letter to the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11).

All that remains of the ancient city of Ephesus are ruins, but the city of Smyrna today is a thriving city. It is now called Izmir. When Lucille and I visited Izmir in 1970 we stayed in a very nice, modern hotel with all of the modern conveniences. In the lobby of the hotel was a rather large image of the goddess Diana. I don't know that anyone worships Diana today, but the image stood there as a reminder of the past. Neither do we know anything about the work of the Gospel in Izmir, Turkey. Probably the people are mainly Moslem. In fact, the World Book Encyclopedia says that minarets (towers attached to Moslem mosques) dot the area where the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel. Undoubtedly the Apostle John preached the Gospel there as well.

In the first century a church was there. And in this series of seven letters this and the church at Philadelphia are the only churches which are not rebuked in some way by the Lord Jesus, although it does not seem that the church at Philadelphia measured up spiritually to the church at Smyrna.. This letter indicates that it was a poor church from a material stand-point, but that it was rich spiritually. And this letter gives us the added evidence that it was a church which was suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

What the Apostle Peter wrote to believing Jews about suffering, was illustrated by what was taking place in the city of Smyrna at the time the Apostle John penned this letter to them from the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are Peter's words:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7):

Smyrna's sufferings for Christ and the Gospel were without question one of the main reasons that the work of

the Lord was prospering in that city.

2:8 The first line of this letter is the same as the first line of the first letter, with only the name of the location of the church different. I doubt if Lenski's suggestion is accurate that there may have been more than one church in these cities. I think that the singular "church" indicates that there was only one local church in each city.

The Lord identifies Himself in a different way in each of the letters. Here He called Himself, "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." The first is from 1:11; the second, from 1:18. "The first and the last" is another form of "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" (see 1:8, 11).

"The first and the last" speaks of the eternity of the Son of God. It speaks also of the fact that He is the Creator and Originator of all things, and that He, the same, is the Consummator and Finisher of all that He had ordained in the beginning. It is similar to what Heb. 1:2 declares of our Lord, that God had ordained that He would be the Heir of all things, and that He is the One Who made the ages of time. And so this expression would mean that the Lord lives to complete His plan, and that everything which takes place in between the beginning and the end, is significant and according to the divine plan.

For the Lord to identify Himself first, indicates that is the only way to have peace in the midst of the circumstances which each church faced.

2:9 The omniscience of the Lord is evident from the two times that the Lord said, "I know . . ." And it must have been very encouraging to the people in the church at Smyrna, just as it was to the believers in the church at Ephesus. (See 2:2.) The Lord knew the good that was being done by the church at Ephesus – "thy works." (Some MSS omit "works.") He knew their circumstances - "thy tribulation." And He knew all about their need – "thy poverty." There is nothing that the Lord misses. Cf. Prov. 5:21; 15:3; 22:12.

("But thou art rich.") The translators have placed this in parentheses to indicate that what was really the case with this church. Obviously "poverty" and "rich" are used with different meanings. They were poor in a material sense. This was often the case not only of the early churches, but it was true also of the Lord's people in OT times. *Affliction*, or "tribulation," always produces good spiritual results. This was the case with Joseph in the OT. His brothers hated him, sought to do him in, and were actually successful, but as Joseph looked at those events later, he said,

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God . . . (Gen. 45:7-8a).

And later, after Jacob had died, and his brothers were worried again about what might happen to them, Joseph comforted them with the insight the Lord had given him into their circumstances and all that they had done.

This is what he said:

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Gen. 50:19-20).

Joseph was rich both materially and spiritually. This is not always the outcome of our trials, but it was in His. Trials purify us. Trials have a way of making us think seriously about our own spiritual needs. The word the Lord used here for "tribulation" is the Greek word *θλίψις*, and it speaks of that which puts us under pressure, or distressing circumstances of any kind. The Devil tries to destroy the work of the Lord, but if the people of God, when under such pressure, are trusting the Lord in their hearts, He turns the losses into gains.

But the Lord knew something else. He knew “the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. The Lord Jesus said that it is blasphemy to claim to be a child of God when in reality a person is not a child of God. It was blasphemy because they were speaking of sacred things deceitfully in a proud and hateful way. The Apostle Paul has given us a word on this which we find in Rom. 2:28-29:

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Instead of being children of God, the Lord said that they were “the synagogue of Satan.” Evidently they were Jewish by blood, and connected with the synagogue, but being unregenerate, and working for the destruction of the church and the Gospel of Christ, that which claimed to be a work of God, was actually a work of the Satan. The word “Satan” means *an adversary, an enemy*. One of Satan’s most effective tools is to work through religious people, often religious leaders, in their opposition of the true work of God, so people will be deceived into thinking that the opposition comes from God Himself.

2:10 The Lord could not, and did not, promise them that things were going to get better. In fact, they were going to get worse. And here the Lord used the other common name for Satan. He is “the Devil.” This word means *an accuser, one who slanders*. And the Devil has no hesitation in resorting to lies. In fact, he is *the father of lies*. Listen to the way the Lord described the Devil in John 8:44:

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

As we read these words we probably can’t forget the treatment that the Lord received at the hands of the Jewish leaders. They had no real charges to bring against our Lord, and so they forged their own. But one interesting thing about liars is that they will contradict themselves. So it is obvious that they are not telling the truth. And yet, in spite of that, they are frequently successful in what they are trying to do.

And so the Lord said, “Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.” Perhaps we are to take this as meaning that up to that point none of the Christians in Smyrna had gone to prison for their faith. But the Lord said that it was coming.

This brings to mind more words from the Apostle Peter. I am reading from 1 Peter 4, beginning with verse 12, and going to the end of the chapter:

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:12-17).

The early Christians faced real opposition to their preaching of the Gospel which we are not faced with today.

It is not because the attitude of unregenerate men, even religious leaders, has changed toward the Gospel, but it is probably due to the fact that we are not as outspoken or zealous for our faith as they were. They were warned not to speak in the Name of Jesus, *but they did anyway!* But it was not because they were specifically trying to be obnoxious, but because it was their calling from God to make sure that every person heard the Gospel message.

“That ye may be tried” – I doubt if when the Lord used this expression that he was just talking about what their enemies would do to them. They would be “tried” by their enemies to be sure, and they knew that they would not get a fair trial. But God was testing them. And they would be examining their own hearts also. So there were multiplied trials going on in their lives. God never tempts us to do evil, but He tries us. He puts us in circumstances over which we may have no control, for the purpose of strengthening us, and making us even more faithful in the work to which the Lord has called us.

“And ye shall have tribulation ten days” – Nobody really knows what the Lord meant by the “ten days.” The best idea is that it would be a comparatively short time, and that it would be limited by God Himself. It would only last as long as it would take for the Lord to fulfil His purposes. It indicates that the Lord was in control. The expression speaks of the foreknowledge of God, but also of His sovereign power. It would not go on any longer that the Lord had determined by His divine decree.

“Be thou faithful unto death” – Faithfulness is expected of all believers until we die. In some cases it might mean martyrdom, as it actually did for many in Smyrna, but the word does not indicate that martyrdom will be experienced by all. We all are to be faithful to the Lord from the time that we first know Him until the Lord comes, or until He takes us to heaven by death. God is faithful to us, and by His grace we must be faithful to Him. What does it mean to be faithful?

The Greek word for “faithful” is πιστός; the Greek word for faith is πίστις. Therefore, to be faithful must include the idea of trusting God. That is what it means to have faith. And to be “faithful” is *to be full of faith, i.e., to be characterized as one who is trusting God.*

The word for “be” is γίνου, and it is a second person singular from γίνομαι, which really means, *to become.* So “be thou faithful” (singular) should be translated, *keep on becoming faithful.* This means that we are to concentrate on being faithful, to concentrate on trusting God so that we are continuously trusting Him more and more. We never trust Him as much as we should, but we are to trust Him more and more. As our faith grows, and we become more faithful, we become more trustworthy, more dependable, more reliable. Paul was describing what it means to be faithful (although he did not use the word *faithful*) when he wrote the words we find in Eph. 4:14 and 15:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

What made the men and women of Hebrews 11 faithful? It was that they were continually trusting God. None was perfect in trusting the Lord, but they continued growing in their faith. When Jerry Bridges wrote his book, *Trusting God*, he was dealing with the subject that leads to greater and greater faithfulness.

The Apostle John probably had in mind “the angel of the church at Smyrna” because he used a singular verb. That is why the KJV has “thou” (singular) instead of “ye” (plural). And the reason that the Apostle John used the singular was, not that the pastor was the only one who was to be faithful, but because he, in his position of leadership, was to lead the people of God into a life of trusting God, which produces consistency, dependability, faithfulness, in the lives of the Lord’s people. So the more we trust God, the more faithful we will be.

And “unto death” means as long as we live on the earth!

January 8, 2002

So a Christian is a person who throughout his life is one who is trusting God. And so we have verses like Proverbs 3:5 and 6:

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

And Heb. 11:6:

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

And Gal. 2:20, as it is rendered in the NKJV:

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (NKJV).

“Be thou faithful unto death” is a command; “and I will give thee a crown of life” is the promise that goes with the command. The promises which are given with commands are to be added incentives to obey the commands.

It seems that this promise has present as well as future aspects to it. The word for “crown” here is τὸν στέφανον, which is the victor’s crown which was given in civic games. It was plaited of different kinds of tender branches, and usually included flowers. It was a great honor to receive it. Here it is the greatest of honors because it is bestowed by none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

Somewhere I ran into the illustration that if you have a group of precious stones, you have a certain value, depending upon what stones you have. But if you give those stones to mount them into a crown, their value is increased immensely. They are jewels *at their best!* And so we can say, even though the idea here is not like a king’s crown, yet the words seem to picture for us *life at its best!* There is no better life than a life in which we can trust God. That is the life which we as the children of God are called to, a life which holds untold blessings now, and which will be experienced to the full when we are with the Lord.

The unbeliever has no such blessing, although God is the One Who gives all of us the blessings which we enjoy. But the unbeliever carries the burden of daily living on his own shoulders. He does not have the blessing of knowing that there is a God Who cares for him. He hopes he can deal with the problems of life as they come upon him. But the child of God knows the God Who cares for him, and he trusts the God Who cares for him, and he loves the God Who cares for him, and he worships and praises the God Who cares for him.

Do you remember that little verse which some of us memorized as children? It goes something like this, a conversation between a robin and a sparrow:

Said the robin to the sparrow, “I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so.”

Said the sparrow to the robin, “I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me.”

2:11 This letter ends in much the same manner as the first letter, and the remaining five letters – with an appeal to the one who has ears to hear, and then a promise to the overcomer. Everyone has ears, but not everyone has ears to hear. It is the Lord Who gives us “ears to hear.” And how thankful we can be if the Lord

has given us ears to hear what He says in His Word, and eyes to see what He has recorded in His Word.

But notice again that the Lord Jesus, Who is the Speaker here, said, “Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” How can it be that this is a letter from the Lord Jesus, and yet what the Spirit was saying at the same time?

That question is answered in what we call the Upper Room Discourse – John 13 through 16. Let me remind you of the words our Lord spoke in John 16:12-14:

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

The Lord Jesus speaks. The Holy Spirit listens to what the Lord has to say to us. He has made this known to the Apostle John and the other writers of Scripture to write it all down, and then as we read, or hear the Scriptures read, the Spirit of God gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. Natural hearing and sight are great blessings from the Lord; spiritual hearing and sight are infinitely better. This was a message for “the angel of the church of Smyrna, but it was for all seven churches in John’s day, and for all churches from that day until this, and for all churches until the Lord removes His church from the earth.

Every time we read our Bibles we need to pray that the Lord will give us eyes to see and ears to hear. If somehow we have lost the blessing that we once had in reading and hearing the Word of God, we need to be praying that the Lord would give us back our ears to hear and our eyes to see.

Now the promise to the overcomer: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

What is “the second death”? Please turn to Rev. 20 where we will find our answer. See Rev. 20:6 and 14, and 21:8.

“The crown of life” and “the second death” are direct opposites, and it is impossible for any of us now to know the difference between the two. “The crown of life” in its fulness which we will experience in heaven will be glorious beyond our ability to understand now. In a totally different way, “the second death” will be terrible beyond what we can know now.

There is a present-day emphasis even among some evangelicals that hell is not eternal. They believe that those who do not know Christ will be punished, but not eternally. I will agree that this is probably the most difficult doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of eternal punishment. But if words mean anything at all, this unspeakably horrible destiny awaits those who do not know the Savior.

“Shall not be hurt of the second death” is a very interesting and comforting statement for all who know the Lord. The verb “hurt” in the original Greek is the verb ἀδικέω which really means *to act unjustly, or unrighteously*. The idea is that if the Lord were to judge the righteous with hell, He would be acting unrighteously, which is to sin. We do not deserve to be saved, but once God has declared us righteous through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, then for Him to cast us into hell would be the greatest unrighteousness, or sin, on His part. But our justification in Christ is a divine guarantee that we will not “be hurt by the second death.” And to emphasize this truth, our Lord used a double negative which is translated “not.” The Greek is οὐ μὴ, an intensive negative meaning *never, not at all, under no circumstances, not the slightest possibility*. God is a just Judge, and He will not, under any circumstances, send any person to hell who has been justified by Christ. Cf. John 5:24. We who know Christ are totally secured from the judgment of the second death.

I am sure that there is a sense in which all believers are overcomers. There has to be. But special blessings are promised to those who sincerely and continuously make it their business to overcome.

January 21, 2002

C. The letter to the church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17).

Without going into a lot of detail about the city of Pergamos, we know that a little over one hundred years before Christ, Pergamos (or Pergamum, as it was called by some of the ancient writers) was taken over by the Romans, and it became the first capital of the Roman province of Asia. Originally it had been settled by Greek colonists, but later, when the Gospel came to Pergamos, there was a large population of Jews. Pergamos not only became the political center of the province of Asia; it became the religious center. There were four great temples in the city, each dedicated to the worship of a different god. When the Romans took over that area, the Roman emperors were worshiped also in temples while the worship of the heathen gods continued. As time went on Smyrna, about forty miles south of Pergamos, became the capital of Asia, but Pergamos retained the dubious distinction of being the religious center. The more one reads of the history of these cities, the more amazing it seems that the Gospel would ever have been accepted by the people, and churches established. But it shows the power of the Gospel. Each of the seven churches of Asia existed as a testimony to the glory of God. The modern name of the city is Bergama, a corruption of Pergamos.

2:12 This letter begins in the same way as the two previous letters, and as the four which follow – to the angel, or pastor of the church, with the Apostle John instructed to write (for the preservation of the message, and the writer of the letter identified from some part of the vision of the Lord which appeared to the Apostle John according to chapter 1. Here the Lord Jesus Christ is identified as “He that hath the sharp sword with the two edges.” Cf. 1:16. Since in chapter 1 the Lord appeared with this sword coming out of His mouth, this ties in with the description of the Word of God in Hebrews 4:12:

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

There is an allusion to this also in Isa. 11:4 where we read in that great Messianic passage that the Lord

4 . . . shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall He slay the wicked.

We also have the Word of God referred to in Eph. 6:17 it is called, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” And in Psalm 149:6 we have this statement concerning the people of God: “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand.”

The sword is a weapon of warfare. It is said that the ancient Roman sword “was tongue-like in shape” (quoted of Hastings by Swete, p. 18). The Word has come from God. It was given by the Holy Spirit. It is used by the Spirit, and we are to “take” the Word, and use it much in the same way that our Lord did when He was tempted by the Devil.

For the Word of God to be sharper than any twoedged sword, we must believe that it is sharper than any weapon of warfare, any false doctrine, anything that stands in the way of the spread of the Gospel. And it is a Word that proceeds out of the mouth of our Lord. Ultimately He, our Lord, has and wields the power of His Word.

2:13 The best MSS do not include the word, “works,” but simply state, “I know . . . where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat (throne) is.” It is significant that the Lord Jesus said that at this time, Satan

ruled on earth from Pergamos – not a distinction that the Chamber of Commerce would want to advertise. But it is this that enables us to characterize where Satan’s strongholds are today. Pergamos was, as I have pointed out, a center of heathen worship. It was also a university center. It had a library of some 200,000 books. While in the past our universities have been institutions which honored the Word of God, yet today they are centers of atheism and evolution, humanistic philosophies and psychologies, places of gross immorality, places where young people are started on a road of intellectual and moral and religious corruption and sin, centers for everything that the Devil has always sought to promote. Perhaps you have heard that recently in public schools students have been required to dress like Moslems, engage in their ceremonies, and students have even been required to memorize the Koran, while they are forbidden to post the ten commandments, or have Bible studies, or even post the ten commandments. Pluralism is the word for today, but if you go to those countries that are Moslem, you will not find that they are promoting a pluralistic society, but one in which only the Moslem religion is tolerated.

The Devil has been at work for a long, long time in our country, and he has done a very, very effective job. We act like we are free, but we, as a nation, are the bondservants of Satan and sin! And that which many have recognized as the chief characteristic of the church at Pergamos is described by the word *compromise*. We are told by our society that if we want to say that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, that is OK (for now), but we must not say that is true for everyone! So the church of Jesus Christ is under pressure to compromise. Many who would call themselves *evangelicals* have compromised on the doctrine of eternal punishment, saying that hell is not eternal. The church has compromised on the doctrine of total depravity. More churches teach that we still have the potential to turn ourselves to God and to Christ, and that faith comes from us. We can go on and on pointing out doctrines of major importance where churches are being pressured to *compromise, to tone down that which is the clear teaching of the Word of God.*

It is amazing that anyone in Pergamos had been saved, and just as amazing that there was a church in Pergamos. It was an amazing testimony to the grace of God and to the power of the Word of God. With all of the opposition that the Devil and his followers can put up, it is still true as the Apostle John said so long ago, that “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4b).

However, the Lord had words of commendation for the church at Pergamos. The first was, “Thou holdest fast my Name.”

Who said this? The Lord Jesus Christ said it. And this expression means that the Lord Jesus Christ was the primary objective of all that Satan was doing. We see this in the book of Acts where the apostles were told by the Jewish authorities not to speak or teach in the Name of the Lord Jesus. The Devil is always seeking to discredit the Lord. He is always seeking to prove that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God. The Devil has done a great job of trying to get people to believe that there is more than one way to God. In fact, he has done a great job of getting people to believe that there is more than one God. He appeals to the pride of man, and he has millions of Americans to believe that they can do anything that they really want to do. So Jesus Christ is humanized, and man is really deified.

The church at Pergamos had not compromised on this point. For the Lord to say that they were holding fast to His Name, meant that they had refused to give ground where the apostolic teaching about the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ was concerned. Let us remember that if we give ground to the Enemy regarding Christ, we are giving up all that we have. If Christ is not the Son of God, then we have to say that He is history’s great impostor. But He is the Son of God. He did die to save us from our sins. And He is the only Savior. He has made us new creatures. We have been born again, born from above. We do have a heavenly hope that not even the Devil can take away from us. Let us continue to *hold fast His Name*. The idea in this verb, *hold fast*, is that someone is trying to take something away from us, but we won’t let him have it. That is

what the Devil is trying to do. Let us pray that we will continue to hold it fast.

But there is a second word of commendation that the Lord gave to the believers at Pergamos. It is this: "Thou . . . hast not denied my faith." The actual translation of what the Lord said does not make particularly good English, but we want to know what the Lord really said. This is a literal translation of this statement: "Thou has not denied my 'the faith.'"

What is the ultimate authority for what we believe as Christians? I first heard the Gospel from my parents. And as a child they were my authority. Then I was raised in a church where I heard about the Lord Jesus Christ. The church supported what my parents had taught me, and so the church became a part of my authority. Then I went to a Christian university where I had teachers who taught me the truth. And then I went to Seminary where I spent four wonderful years compacted into two years and eleven months, and my teachers joined added authority to what I believed. But do you know what my parents, my church, my schools, and I don't know how many others had a part in bringing me to the convictions which I hold today – but do you know what they all went to for their authority. They all went to the Bible.

It is that Word which has come out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus, the Word which you hold in your hand, or which is resting in your lap. The Lord called this "the faith," and He said that it was His. So when we speak of the Bible as the Word of God, or the Word of Christ, we are not only saying that it came from God, and that it came from Christ, and not only are we saying that it tells us about God, and that it tells us about Christ, *but we are saying that it belongs to God, and that it belongs to Christ.* This is how the Lord spoke about the Bible in that wonderful eleventh verse of Isaiah 55:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:11).

We have the same emphasis in Rev. 3:8 that we have here in Rev. 2:13. Let me read it to you. It is in our Lord's letter to the church at Philadelphia.

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name (Rev. 3:8).

I would add to these words what the Lord said to Jeremiah in one of the worst hours in Judah's history. I am sure that many of you will recognize it. It is found in Jer. 23:28-29:

28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

29 Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

This word is "the faith," but let us remember that although God in His grace has enabled us to make it ours, yet it will always belong to Him!

But we are not yet through with verse 13. That which the believers in the church at Pergamos had done, was all the more wonderful because they had been faithful to the Lord's Name and to His Word "even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Rev. 2:13b).

What is the meaning of the word "martyr"? It is a word which is brought over into English from the Greek. The Greek word for martyr is μάρτυς. It comes from the Greek verb μαρτυρέω, which means, *I witness*. So the Lord Jesus was calling Antipas, "my faithful martyr," or *my faithful witness*.

I have looked in vain to find out anything about Antipas except what is recorded here. All the Bible dictionaries tell me is that he was a member of the church at Pergamos, and that he died as a martyr. Well, the Bible tells me that much. But since a martyr is a witness, what was his witness. That will tell us why he was

put to death. Verse 13 indicates that Antipas died because he held fast to the Lord's Name, and because he would not deny "the faith." And to commend the church, the Lord Jesus pointed out to them that the church had remained faithful to the Lord and His Word even in days when the penalty for remaining faithful to the Lord's Name and to the Lord's "the faith," *was physical death!* We don't really know who Antipas was, or who his parents were, or when he was saved. We don't know how old he was. But what we do know is far more important than any of those details. We know that he chose death rather than to deny His Lord, or to deny the Lord's Word. And so the Lord called Antipas, "my faithful martyr."

May the Lord make us people like that! Antipas demonstrated that he loved the Lord, and that he loved the Word, more than he loved life itself. He would rather die than to face the prospect of being without the Lord and being without the Word.

It would be wonderful if we could move on from this point to the next letter, but unfortunately we cannot. The Lord had more to say to the church, not by way of commendation, but by way of condemnation.

2:14 Solomon, in writing Ecclesiastes, said,

9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us (Ecc. 1:9-10).

These words surely apply to what Balaam attempted to do. In the first place, there will always be those who hate God, and who hate the people of God. And as there have been many attempts in the past to hurt, and even to destroy the Lord's people, so we can expect that there will be other attempts in the future.

The story of Balaam is a story which is told very clearly in Numbers 22, 23, and 24. Balak, who was the king of Moab, feared for the safety of his own people because of what he had heard had happened to other nations whom the children of Israel had attacked and conquered as they made their way from Egypt to Canaan. Three times Balaam sought to curse the people of God, and each time the Lord blessed them instead. Finally, Balak dismissed Balaam, and the two men parted. But there is a sequel to the story which is reported here in this second chapter of The Revelation. We read about it in Numbers 25, but Balaam's name was not mentioned in connection with it. But here we are told what Balaam did. He counseled Balak to get the children of Israel to worship their gods. Balak did as Balaam suggested, and the result was that the Lord killed 24,000 of the Israelites as a result. See Num. 25:1-5, 9.

It seems that it was the custom of the Israelites, from the worship of the golden calf on, in worshipping heathen gods, to continue to worship the Lord, possibly feeling that the Lord would excuse the bad if they continued to do the good. But that always brought judgment from the Lord. It was the way of compromise. And we learn that no amount of good could justify the children of Israel in giving themselves to idolatry. So even though Balak did not have his wishes granted by Balaam cursing the children of Israel, the same objective was accomplished by the compromising practices of the Lord's people. Numbers 31, verses 15 and 16, seems to indicate also that a part of the counsel of Balaam was for the children of Israel to intermarry with the Moabites. This is probably a part of the meaning of Numbers 25:1. So it was an attempt at a complete breakdown of the Laws of God regarding their separation from the people of the world.

2:15 Evidently Balaam-ism was back, but with a new name: "the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." The church at Ephesus was commended because her people hated the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord also hated. See Rev. 2:6. And then it is generally thought that the reference to Jezebel in the letter to the church at

Thyatira was also directed at the Nicolaitans because she, too, sought to seduce the people of God “to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20).

This was all in direct violation of the decision of the Council at Jerusalem which is detailed in Acts 15 where the Gentiles were told, quoting Acts 15 29,

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

The article in the ISBE gave this word of explanation as to why the early church was so vulnerable to such restrictions:

Such a restriction, though seemingly hard, in that it prevented the Christian communities from joining in public festivals, and so brought upon them suspicion and dislike, was yet necessary to prevent a return to a pagan laxity of morals. To this danger the Nicolaitans were themselves a glaring witness, and therefore John was justified in condemning them. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul gives warning against the same evil practices, basing his arguments on consideration for the weaker brethren (compare 1 Cor 8). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

This exhausts the material in Scripture which deals with the Nicolaitans. But from early church history we have the following information:

NICOLAITANS

Reference to them is frequent in post-apostolic literature. According to Irenaeus (Adv. Haer., i.26,3; iii.10,7), followed by Hippolytus (Philos., vii.36), they were founded by Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch, who was one of the seven chosen to serve at the tables (Acts 6:5). Irenaeus, as also Clement of Alexandria (Strom., ii.20), Tertullian and others, unite in condemning their practices in terms similar to those of John; and reference is also made to their gnostic tendencies. In explanation of the apparent incongruity of such an immoral sect being founded by one of "good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (compare Acts 6:3), Simcox argues that their lapse may have been due to reaction from original principles of a too rigid asceticism. A theory, started in comparatively modern times, and based in part on the similarity of meaning of the Greek "Nikolaus," and the Hebrew "Balaam," puts forward the view that the two sects referred to under these names were in reality identical. Yet if this were so, it would not have been necessary for John to designate them separately. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

What we do learn from all of this is that intermarriage with unbelievers and idolatry in any form is hated by the Lord, and must be hated by the church. We are never justified in compromising with the world's lifestyle, nor with the world's religions, in order to influence the people of the world, nor in order to have a more congenial relationship with them. Compromise is always a major hindrance to the testimony of the church. Today's church needs to learn that lesson. The use of the world's methods to attract people to the church, always hurts the church, and it keeps the people of the world from seeing what their real need is.

What did the church need to do?

2:16 “Repent”! It is an aorist, which Robertson calls “the tense of urgency” (VI, 306). The Greek verb is μετανοέω, and it basically means *to change one's mind*. But the word indicates that that which calls for repentance, is SIN! When anyone tries to do the work of the Lord in man's way, or seeks to live for the Lord according to human wisdom, that person's thinking has been corrupted. The use of the word in the NT suggests that this change is to be made to bring one's thinking into conformity with the Word of God, to do it with great sorrow for the past, and to do it with every intention of avoiding such thinking in the future and the

behavior that such thinking produces. The Apostle Paul called this *the renewing of the mind* in Romans 12:2. Sometimes when people become Christians, because they have been accustomed to using such vile, profane language, they practically have to learn to talk all over again. But it is always the case that people need to learn to think differently. Cf. the message given by Isaiah is Isa. 55:6-9:

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:6-9).

This is why the first nine chapters of the Proverbs place such an emphasis on seeking the wisdom of God. All that we need to know is given to us in the Word of God. But the church of Pergamos shows us that a church can be dedicated to the Bible as the Word of God, and yet stray from the word when it comes to life and godliness. It is no wonder that the Psalmists are continually asking the Lord to teach them.

The command to “repent” is followed by a solemn warning. And this warning applies to the church, not to the Nicolaitans. The Lord will take care of the Nicolaitans in His own time, but His primary concern was for the church. The Lord will fight against those who compromise with the truth. As Dr. Walvoord said in his commentary on The Revelation, “There is no alternative to impurity and compromise with the truth except that of divine judgment (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 70). And that is never a happy situation. It can go as far as it did with Ananias and Sapphira, resulting in physical death. The Lord never takes lightly any departure from His Word.

2:17 Twice before in this chapter we have had this appeal: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” See 2:7, 11.

The message to the church at Pergamos, with its commendation and condemnation, was a message that needed be heard by all of the other churches, and by every one in every church today. And we need to pray constantly that the Lord will enable us to hear with our ears what the Spirit has recorded. He has been given to guide us into all truth, but many Christians do not seek His guidance, or, if they have it, they do not follow it. The first step to salvation is hearing, and the way to godliness is sustained by continually hearing the Word of God. It is so easy to read, but not to hear. Pray that the Lord will enable you to hear. How different our lives would be if we would always “hear” what we read.

In another sense those who have ears to hear are those who are truly saved. And it should be of the greatest importance to us to know what is pleasing to the Lord, and what is displeasing, so that we can devote our time and energies to doing what pleases Him.

What is the promise? It is to the overcomer. The Apostle John spoke of overcoming the world in chapter 5 of his first epistle, verses 4 and 5:

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

The Lord by His death has provided for us that we may not only overcome the flesh, but also the Devil, and the world. Apart from Him, we will not overcome, and do not want to overcome. But often the allurements of the world are very strong. Temptation is high. But by the grace of God and by faith in the Son of God, we can and

do overcome.

But do we lose out because we separate ourselves from the world, and turn our backs on the passing pleasures of this life? What an example Moses is to us accord to Hebrews 11:24-26:

- 24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;
- 25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;
- 26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

So we don't lose, as Jim Elliott said, "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose."

Two blessings are promised. First, the Lord said, "To him . . . I will give to eat of the hidden manna." Manna reminds us of the miraculous way that the Lord fed the children of Israel in the desert for 40 years. Our food as believers is the Word of God. Our Lord told His disciples when they came back from the city with food, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32). The Lord must have had in mind present blessings because the person who lives for the Lord, and turns away from the ways of the world, and worldly associations, is one who gets special delight from the reading of the Word. The Word is our "hidden manna."

There have been many different interpretations as to what the Lord meant by the white stone and the new name. One which seems very reasonable in the light of Scripture is that white stones were often given as a judges verdict of acceptance instead of rejection. And the new name can probably point to a deeper understanding of God and of Christ as a result of the life of fellowship with Him in which the world has not part. Cf. 3:12.

As an illustration, cf. Rev. 14:3. The more we walk in fellowship with the Lord, the deeper becomes our understanding of the Word. And even in singing, the trials of life cause us to sing the hymns of the church with new understanding and with more heart-felt worship for the Lord our God.

Life with the Lord is so much greater than a life spent in the world, that there is really no basis for comparing the two.

January 28, 2002

D. The letter to the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29).

Thyatira was located between Pergamos and Sardis, but not upon the main trade route between the two cities. It became a wealthy place, but never a large city. Going back before the time of the Romans, it was the holy city of the worship of the ancient Lydian sun god, Tyrimnos, a large temple was erected there for the people to conduct their worship. The article in the ISBE also gives us this information:

Another temple at Thyatira was dedicated to Sambethe, and at this shrine was a prophetess, by some supposed to represent the Jezebel of Rev 2:20, who uttered the sayings which this deity would impart to the worshippers.

Thyatira was known for its trade guilds. They would correspond to our labor unions except for the fact that they were closely tied in with the religions of Thyatira. They conducted pagan feasts, and a part of the celebration would be sexual immorality. And so the guilds were strongly opposed to the Gospel and the church for their stand on moral purity. It is thought that Lydia, whom the Apostle Paul met, and under whose ministry she was saved, was a member of one of the guilds in Thyatira. Paul met her in Philippi, and Luke described her in

Acts 16:14 as “Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God.” This may have meant that she had become a proselyte of the Jews, but the purple that she sold was a purple dye, and we know that there was a dyers guild in Thyatira. But we must say about Thyatira, as I have said about the preceding letters here in Revelation 2, that it was a miracle of God’s power and grace that a church could be established in such a center of pagan religions.

2:18 The letter begins like the others, the only difference being the name of the town where the letter was originally sent. There was a pastor there. John was commanded to write the letter that its message might be preserved. And then the Lord was introduced with the words, “Thus said he . . .”

The Lord is identified as “the Son of God, Who hath His eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.” This is taken from the vision of Christ in chapter 1, the first from the latter part of verse 14, and the second from the beginning of verse 15. Our Lord is identified here as “the Son of God”; in chapter 1 He is called “the Son of man” See verse 13. This is the only time our Lord is called “the Son of God” in this entire book, but it is implied in verses like 1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; and 14:1. The reference to “eyes like a flame of fire, and . . . feet . . . like fire brass” “prepare the reader for the severe tone of the utterance which follows” (Swete, p. 42). This is the longest of the seven letters, so there is much to indicate how important it was. The Lord’s eyes were not only seeing all that was going on in Thyatira, but they were burning with indignation, and His feet were capable of stamping out any and every thing that was displeasing to Himself. So there is an ominous ring to the beginning of the letter.

2:19 However, characteristically the Lord indicated that He knew the good things that were going on in the church of Thyatira. There is more praise given to the church at Thyatira than was given to the church at Ephesus.

Notice “works” head the list, and “works” ends the list. This has led some expositors to think, and I believe rightly so, that the words in between (love, service, faith, and patience – service follows faith in some MSS) were meant to describe the nature of their works.

When we think of “works,” we usually equate them with “service.” But “works” in the Bible can include the occupation that a person has, or an individual act which a person does. But it can also apply to the conduct of a person’s life. So it can be very close to what the Scriptures mean when they talk of a person’s walk. After all, it is our daily conduct, what we are and how we live, that gives meaning to any service that we can render to the Lord or to people. So we must conclude that there was much godliness in the church at Thyatira. They were motivated by love, love for God and for Christ as well as a love for people. High on their list of priorities was a desire to minister to the needs of others, caring for the poor, lifting up the fallen, encouraging those who were downcast. This is what “service” implies. But what they did with a firm faith, or trust in the Lord, not in themselves. And “patience” is another word for *perseverance*. They kept doing what they did in spite of seeing some of their efforts fail, and in spite of the opposition that might be aimed at what they were doing.

The punctuation in the last part of this verse keeps us from seeing what the Lord was saying. He had said that He knew what they were doing, how they were living, and that in what they were doing He could see that they were motivated by love, concern for others, faith, and patience. But then He added that He had noticed that lately their works had surpassed in number what they had done at the first. It was just the opposite of what the Lord had told the church at Ephesus about their love.

So this was a very, very strong commendation coming from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

But beginning with verse 20 and going down through verse 23 we have the strongest possible language which was addressed to those who were teaching false doctrine, which, in turn, was leading many into immorality and idolatry.

Let us all recognize that sometimes our strong points can become the very places where we get into trouble. If we are right in thinking that love and service and faith and patience were the words which described their works, they need to recognize that there are necessary limits to our love. There are limitations on the people to whom we are to give our help. We are not to trust God to do that which is contrary to His Word and His will. And no patience is to be exercised toward those whose lives and teachings encourage that which is abominable in the sight of God. Lenski said about the situation in the church at Thyatira, "How can a church that has so much to its credit be guilty of what is her³ charged? One answer is that, while this church was active in works, it was not bound completely to the Word. It had many works; it is not praised for its faithfulness to the Word (*Revelation*, p. 114).

Now let us see what was troubling to the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:20 The word in Greek which is translated "nevertheless," is the simple Greek word for *But* – ἀλλά. One lexicon indicates that this word "*serves to introduce a sentence with keenness and emphasis*" (my small lexicon, p. 6). It is very evident that the Lord wanted everybody in the church of Thyatira to notice what He was about to say.

The word translated "sufferest" is an interesting word. It is a second person singular (because the Lord was charging this sin against the church as a whole), and the present tense indicates that this problem had been going on for some time, but nothing had been done about it. It means that the church permitting this to continue, that no one was saying that it should stop. The verb ἀφίημι means that they had even become resigned to it. But what was the Lord talking about?

It was that they were allowing "that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." It is not profitable to try to find out if there was actually a woman by this name in the church, because we simply do not know that. But what we do know is that the Lord was connecting her with the Phoenician wife of King Ahab in the OT "who sought to force upon the northern kingdom [of Israel] the worship of Baal and Astarte and (2 Kings 9:22) the immoralities and magical practices connected with it . . ." (Swete, p. 42). It seems incredible that any group of the Lord's people would stand still, or even turn their backs, and let such a wicked thing go on. Obviously the Lord was indicating that the woman who was responsible for this was a rank unbeliever! It was forbidden by Scripture that a woman could teach and usurp authority over men, but this woman was doing it, and getting away with it – I might add, she was getting away with it with the people, *but not with the Lord*. One of the major tactics of the Devil is to move in among the people of God, and to do his fiendish work from the inside. It was a tragedy that she was there, but an even greater tragedy that she was allowed to stay there. The Lord was blaming the whole church for what was going on.

This certainly is evidence that it is the responsibility of everyone in the church to be on the lookout for false teachers and false teaching. The church today would be in far better condition if the people of God in the churches had raised their voices in protest at the slightest sign of any departure from the Word of God, regardless of where it was coming from. Evidently this woman had become very popular with some in the church, and so the rest would rather turn their backs to what was going on than to do anything about it. So the Lord said that "you" (collectively, all of you, are to blame! The church at Ephesus had a similar problem, but they had done something about it. I wonder where the pastor was in all of this.

This woman claimed that she was a prophetess. We need to beware of those who make great claims for themselves. Such an expression of pride ought always to be a warning to the church that things are not right.

2:21 But although the people had not done anything about it, the Lord had been dealing directly with her. He had given her “space to repent.” The Greek says *time to repent*. But she did not repent. God is always gracious and merciful, even to the worst of sinners, but there comes that time when His patience toward sinners is exhausted, and judgment will follow. The Greek speaks that she was to repent ἐκ (out of) her fornication. This preposition indicates that she was to forsake all of her teaching and all of her practices which were so abominable to God. She knew that what she was doing was wrong, but she kept doing it anyway.

It seems that we have statements like this in the Bible so that we will know that God is always righteous in His judgments. We know that the Lord had been dealing with this woman, but we don't know how the Lord has been dealing with Bin Laden, or Bill Clinton, or Hilary Clinton, or Arafat, or even many of the people who were killed in the Trade Center Buildings. You and I pray for people who are not saved. It may look to us like the Lord is not doing anything in answer to our prayers, but this is a passage which teaches us that He is. In our reading of the book of Exodus we have the opportunity to see how God was dealing with Pharaoh. God gave him plenty of time to repent, but he never did. He lost a son because of his refusal to repent, and finally he and his army were destroyed in the Red Sea. That whole tragedy could have been averted if he had only repented and turned to the Lord. But God was saying that their time was up. That is what Daniel read on the wall for Belshazzar. Time is up! Hebrews 10:31 tells us that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The Trade Center disaster was a call to all America to repent, but we are not repenting. We are continuing on in our sin. Fornication is one of our national transgressions, and it looks like we are getting away with it. But we are not! It is just that time is not up for us nationally yet, but that time will come!

In verses 22 and 23 we have a final warning. This woman's time had run out, but the Lord was giving her one last opportunity to repent.

2:22 The Lord is the One Who gives us life, and He is the One Who takes life away. But we learn from Scripture that there is such a thing as “sin unto death.” See 1 John 5:16-17. And isn't it interesting that the bed, which is the place where most fornication is committed, is also the place where most people die? How simple it is for God to turn the place of sinful pleasure into the place of death. The Bible tells us that “marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4).

When the Lord told Jezebel that He would cast her into a bed, He expressed it in such a way as to indicate that what He was going to do, was imminent. It is not clear just exactly what the Lord was saying that He would do, and many expositors back away from trying to explain what it means. One thing for certain is that God was talking about *judgment* – not the final judgment, nor even the judgment of the Great Tribulation (although those words are used here). But it seems that it was physical death, and such death that would involve great suffering. Those who follow a false teacher will face the same judgment that the false teacher suffers. One thing that false teachers do not take into consideration is that they are dealing with the living God to Whom the truth of His Word is very, very precious. No one can add to it, or take away from it, with facing the certain, and sometimes, very awful judgment of God!

But notice the grace of God in the final statement of this verse: “except they repent of their deeds.” The prospect of a change is held out to the very last.

2:23 The children of Jezebel are not the physical children which result from her fornication (although there may have been such children), but the primary emphasis here is upon those who have accepted her

teaching and have followed her in her sins. While physical death is a possible meaning here, yet the ultimate death is eternal. Some who have been misled for a time, would not be considered Jezebel's children, but those who inherit her character and sinful habits, going deeper and deeper into sin, are her children.

“And all the churches shall know . . .” This is further evidence that the seven letters were all for all of the churches. We cannot be reminded too often that God is the One with Whom we have to do. He not only sees what we do, but He knows our hearts. And so it behooves us always to walk as in His presence.

The Lord is the One Who “searcheth the reins and hearts.” The Greek word translated “reins” is the Greek word for *kidneys*. It means that He knows us inwardly as well as outwardly. He hears the words we speak, but He also knows the thoughts that we think. Man is inclined to be satisfied if he appears good outwardly, but God looks upon the heart. That is why David prayed as he did in Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of my mouth...” Sin is usually committed under cover, in secret places, in the darkness of the night. But the eyes of God see just as well in the darkest night as in the brightest day. Fausset said that the word “searcheth” mean “accurately following up all tracks and windings” (VI, 665). When God investigates, His findings are true. And He said (and this applies to churches as well as to the world outside) that He would “give unto every one of you according to your works.” Remember the definition of “works” that we had in verse 19.

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2:24 False teachers are amazingly successful, but, as in Thyatira, not completely victorious. There were those in Thyatira who had not followed Jezebel. They had not accepted her teaching, and had not taken up her practices. And so here the Lord was addressing them. How many had succumbed to Jezebel, and how many had stood fast for the Gospel and for the Lord, we do not know, and so it is useless to speculate. What we do know is that the Lord always built upon the faithful. The Devil can do a lot of damage, but he can never destroy the church of Jesus Christ. So the Lord was speaking here to “as many as have not this doctrine,” *i.e.*, the teaching of Jezebel.

“And which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak.” This must be a reference to the practices which Jezebel was encouraging. There has been much discussion about what the Lord meant by “the depths of Satan.” Some feel that He said this in irony, pointing out that they called it “the depths of God,” or the deep things of God, but He was saying that it was not God, but Satan, who was behind Jezebel's teaching.

However, we know today that there are those who claim to worship Satan. And it is most likely that the same was true in the first century. It often has been in the past. Lenski has an excellent comment on this point:

We take the words just as they read. The adherents of this woman spoke of “the deep things of Satan” and said that one must know them, realize what they are (γινώσκω) by experience and experiment. This justified their fornication, adultery, and eating at idol feasts. They looked down upon the innocent Christians who refused to experiment and refrained from these things. These superior heretics claimed that they killed the flesh by indulging the flesh, claimed to plunge into filth to prove that it could not harm them, that the innocent Christians were only weak and afraid when they refused to do the same (pp. 119, 120).

And then Lenski applied that attitude to what is going on today:

This sort of teaching and experiment is advocated to this day. To know the world one must plunge into the world. To prove that one is immune one must make the test and subject oneself to infection. To probe the depths of Satan one must go down into the depths. What does one know about them if one does not do these things? Only in this way can one become strong and superior (p. 120).

Lenski's response to this nonsense was this:

The folly and fallacy of such reasoning is obvious. To realize what fornication is I do not need to commit fornication; to know what murder is I do not need to kill a man. The same is true to all “the depths of Satan (*Ibid.*).

I had a professor in seminary who helped me a great deal on this subject. He told us in class that if you want to learn about sin, read your Bible. There we have sin exposed for what it really is. To experience sin is to be blinded to the real nature of sin, and can only lead to shame and despair and regrets which, although they may be forgiven, can never be erased from the mind and conscience.

How different from the false teacher are the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 2: 7 through 12, but note especially verses 9 and 10:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God (1 Cor. 2:7-12).

Back in the 50's and 60's there was something going on in Hollywood which many people thought was a real work of God. Hollywood celebrities were claiming that they were being saved, and they got on the circuit of Youth for Christ and other organizations, and were speaking to youth groups throughout our country, telling their sordid stories of lives of sin. It was not unusual to hear Christian young people who had been kept from sin, raised in godly homes by godly parents and attending godly churches, express the feeling that if they had experienced what those Hollywood people had experienced, perhaps people would listen to them, and they could be traveling all over the country telling how the Lord had delivered them. The Devil is very subtle, very clever, making the true Christian feel like he doesn't really know what is going on in the world. Needless to say, that “movement” died out, and many of those entertainers went back to the old ways of life.

We only need to remember the Lord Jesus Christ to know that “He Who knew no sin” knew more about sin than any sinner (which includes all of us) has known.

But let us get back to our text.

Addressing those who had been faithful, and who had not followed Jezebel and her doctrine which was straight out of hell, the Lord said, “I will put upon you none other burden.” This is probably a reference to the decision of the Council of Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15. The issue was that there were certain Judaizing teachers who were saying that in order to be saved you had to be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to place this problem before them. Their decision is stated in Acts 15:22-29. But note especially the language of verses 28 and 29. (Read Acts 15:22-29.)

Verse 25 really should not be separated from verse 24, because it is a part of verse 24.

2:25 We had the verb *to hold fast* in verse 13 of this chapter. It means to exercise all of the strength they had in the Lord to hold on to the truth which they had been taught. Nobody can accept false doctrine without discarding true doctrine, the doctrine of the Word of God. The Devil and his emissaries are constantly trying to take the truth away from us. We must not let them take any of it! While the Lord Jesus was still on earth, He said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). There is only one Gospel. There is only one Savior. There is only one Book which is the true revelation from God. Jezebel and all false teachers would snatch the Gospel away from us. They would take Christ away from us. They would have us believe that our Bibles are not enough. But in addition to what the Bible teaches, they would take away from us the precious Word of God. The main responsibilities of every generation of Christians is to know the Word, and the Christ of the Word, *and then refuse to let anyone take them away from us*. And this is the Lord's will for His church in every generation – "till I come."

Some day the battle for the Bible will be over. But that will not be until the Lord comes. Until then we must hold it fast. We do that, not only by staying by the doctrine of the Word, but by living out the truth in our daily lives.

Now we come to the promise.

2:26 Those who keep the Lord's works will be the overcomers, the victors. We keep the Lord's works when we depend upon Him and what He is doing in the world, in our hearts, and out through the lives of those who know Him. False teachers do not exalt the work of Christ. They exalt their own works, and tell those who follow them, not what Christ has done and what He continues to do, but what they must do to meet their own needs. And it often seems like the false teachers are the ones who have the greatest following. But the day is coming when the Lord will reign, and we shall reign with Him, and "power" (ἐξουσία - authority) will be given to the people of God "over the nations." Ultimately Christ will be the Victor!

2:27 The word for "rule" is the Greek verb for shepherding. He Who would have used a shepherd's staff to save them, and a shepherd's rod to defend them, will use a "rod of iron" to break them. Men are like vessels of clay, fragile, and easily broken. Once broken, they cannot be put back together again. As is the case now, the Lord does the work, but often it is through His people that the work is done.

The Lord was speaking here of His Messianic rule upon the earth. Rev. 20:6 says that we shall "reign with Him a thousand years."

2:28 "And I will give him the morning star." It probably should be printed, "the Morning Star," because our Lord is the Morning Star. He gives us Himself! Cf. Rev. 22:16.

Note what Peter said in 2 Peter 1:19, an epistle devoted to warnings against false teachers. In that verse we read this:

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

There is very probably a connection between this expression and what the wise men said when they came looking for the Christ Child. Cf. Matt. 2:1-2:

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

You will remember that Herod heard about the wise men, and he was greatly troubled by what they were saying

about the "King of the Jews." He called for the chief priests and scribes to find out where the King was to be born. They told him that it was in Bethlehem. So when the wise men left, he told them to come back to him after they had found the child because he wanted to go also to worship Him. As the wise men left, this is what Matthew said in his account:

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

In the ISBE there is an interesting article on Morning Stars. It is in their article on Astronomy, and is as follows:

7. Morning Stars: In ancient times there were two methods by which the progress of the year could be learned from observation of the heavens. The sun was "for seasons," and the change in its place of rising or of setting supplied the first method. The second method was supplied by the stars. For as the Hebrew shepherds, such as Jacob, Moses, David and Amos, kept watch over their flocks by night, they saw the silent procession of the stars through the hours of darkness, and knew without clock or timepiece how they were progressing. They noticed what stars were rising in the East, what stars were culminating in the South, what were setting in the West, and how the northern stars, always visible, like a great dial, were turning. But as the eastern horizon began to brighten toward the dawn, they would specially note what stars were the last to rise before their shining was drowned in the growing light of day. These, the last stars to appear in the East before sunrise, were the "morning stars," the heralds of the sun. As morning followed morning, these morning stars would be seen earlier and earlier, and therefore for a longer time before they disappeared in the dawn, until some morning, other stars, unseen before, would shine out for a few moments, and thus supplant the stars seen earlier as the actual heralds of the sun. Such a first appearance of a star was termed by the Greek astronomers its "heliacal" rising, and the mention in Scripture of "morning stars," or "stars of the twilight" (Job 38:7; 3:9), shows that the Hebrews like the Greeks were familiar with this feature of the ordinances of heaven, and noted the progress of the year by observation of the apparent changes of the celestial host. One star would herald the beginning of spring, another the coming of winter; the time to plow, the time to sow, the time of the rains would all be indicated by successive "morning stars" as they appeared (Vol. I, p. 308).

Thus, it seems that for the Lord to be the Morning Star was an indication that soon afterwards He as "the Sun of righteousness" would arise "with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2). Such is a major part of the hope that we have in Christ.

The letter and chapter 2 end with the familiar appeal.

2:29 "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Thus we know that not everyone will hear the message. But those whose ears are opened by the Holy Spirit, will hear, and will believe the message and by God's grace take the necessary steps to bring their lives into conformity with the Word of Christ.

February 4, 2002

E. The Letter to the Church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6).

History shows that the Roman province of Asia was inhabited by people of many different nationalities. At the time that the Apostle John wrote this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the area was characterized by what then would have been considered as great advances in civilization. The people were industrious, but idolatry was rampant, and along with it, there was gross immorality. One student of history said that he was filled with awe at realizing how those early churches were raised up as lights in the midst of such circumstances. Only by both the grace of God and the power of God would such people turn from darkness to light, and then ban together in churches for the purpose of making the Gospel of Jesus Christ known in their communities.

Sardis was located about 30 miles south and a little east of Thyatira. That doesn't sound very far to us today, but we have to remember that travel was very much slower in those days and so communities which were relatively close to each other still did not have much contact with each other. In 17 A.D. Sardis was practically destroyed by an earthquake, but through the kindness of Tiberias Caesar, the taxes of the people were remitted, and the city was rebuilt. So our Lord's letter to the believers in Sardis was revealed to the Apostle John not long after that great disaster.

But we can take from the letter here addressed to "the angel of the church at Sardis" that it was not a strong church. Numerically it was very small. And the Lord, Who in the preceding letters, had commended the churches for whatever was pleasing to Him. In this letter gave no commendation, unless it would be in verse 4, but it is a letter filled with just the opposite: *condemnation*.

This should make us realize that regardless of the corruption of a society in which a church has been established, and regardless of its size, every church is held to the same high standards that are so clearly established in the Word of God. Undoubtedly the believers in Sardis experienced a lot of opposition, and even persecution, but trials usually strengthen a church instead of weakening it. God's grace is sufficient for His people in the worst conditions, and so a church's location can never be a sufficient excuse for spiritual weakness.

3:1 The Lord was evidently seeking to impress this upon the pastor and the people of the church at Sardis when He identified Himself as the One Who "hath [present tense] the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." Cf. Rev. 1:16, 20.

Now we know that there are not "seven Spirits of God." There is only one Holy Spirit, and He is One of the Members of the Godhead. The Bible teaches that the Godhead includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are equal in Their Deity although they are distinct Persons. *Why, then, did the Lord Jesus say that He had "the seven Spirits of God"?*

I think that it has reference to the fact that He was writing to *seven* churches! Although the Holy Spirit is one Person, yet as each of us in our experience deals with the Holy Spirit, we could speak of as many Holy Spirits as there are believers. He is not divided up among us, but He dwells in each of us in the entirety of His Person. This is one of the distinguishing marks of a Christian, that he, or she, has the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul told the believers at Rome,

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom. 8:9).

And then Paul went on in the next verse to say that "the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10b). So we not only have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (and He has come to us to abide forever), but He is our life. He is the One Who enables us to obey the Word, and so to live lives that are pleasing to God. So there is no excuse for our weakness and unfaithfulness. The Holy Spirit is the power behind the most godly Christian, but his power is just as available to the weakest believer.

Now when you get a group of believers together in a church, you have what we might call a concentration of the presence of the Holy Spirit. No church has a corner, so to speak, on the Holy Spirit. The church which had done such a great work in Smyrna, was just as able to do the same work in Sardis. The Holy Spirit does not go from one believer to another, nor does He go from one church to another. The Holy Spirit is present with every believer all of the time, and that applies to churches as well, church where the Lord Jesus Christ is honored as the Son of God, where He is recognized as the only Savior. His ministry is to glorify Christ. The Holy Spirit ministers to us on behalf of Christ. And it was the Holy Spirit Who delivered this letter from the Lord Jesus to the Apostle John for John to give to the pastors of these churches.

Now let us talk about “the seven stars.” We are told in 1:16 that the Lord Jesus has the seven stars in His right hand. And we are told in verse 20 that “the seven stars are the angels,” or *messengers*, or *pastors*, of the seven churches. The Lord Jesus has the ministry to the churches in His right hand.

Now I am sure that we all believe in the sovereignty of God, and I hope that you believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, that it is the Lord Who by His Spirit brings the conviction of sin to our hearts, and it is the Lord Who enables us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord saves us, and He keeps us saved. *But let us also remember that the Bible teaches human responsibility.* The wisdom of God is given to us in the Bible, but we need to read it. We need to pray that the Lord will help us to understand it. And the commandments of Scripture are addressed to us. We need to find out what those commandments are, and, not in our own strength, but by the grace of God, do what the Lord tells us He wants us to do, or not do, as the case may be!

Many of us are memorizing 1 John. Let me read four verses (out of many) in the epistle which speak of the importance of our obedience. These verses are found in 1 John 2:3, 4, 5, and 6:

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

Now these words apply to me just as much as they do to you, and, if anything, more so. The pastor is a shepherd, as all of the elders are. And we are to lead, not just by our teaching (although the teaching is very important), but we are to lead by example. We are to walk, or live, as Jesus lived, because that is what we want to see happening in the lives of our people. So you can begin to see why these letters were addressed to the leadership of the churches. One pastor does not have more access to the Spirit of God, or to the Lord Jesus Christ, than other pastors. Now I am not talking about pastors who don't believe anything, and who have never experienced the saving grace of God. Just because a man has the title of Pastor, is no proof that he is even a Christian. And just because a building has the word “church” on it, does not mean that it is a church in the Biblical meaning of the word. But we all are responsible to obey the Word, and we all have the Holy Spirit to enable to obey the Word. So, if we are not obeying the Lord, who is to blame? Not the Lord Jesus. And not the Holy Spirit. I am, and you are. And if things are like that in our lives we need to seek the Lord's forgiveness, and to plead with Him to enable us to make the changes that need to be made. We can't do it without the Spirit of God, but He is with us constantly to give us the will and the power to be obedient.

As with the other churches, the Lord knew their “works.” But He knew that their works in the past were different from their present works. And remember that “works” is a word which not only refers to service, but to their lifestyle, the way they were living. Perhaps their past works had been motivated by their love for the Lord, but now it had become more of a routine. It is easy to forget that in life we are to live for the Lord, and that in our service we are to be serving the Lord.

Evidently things formerly were better in the church of Sardis than they were toward the end of the first century. They had “a name.” It used to be a church about which people would say to others, “If you want to hear the Word of God, that is the place to go.” Or they would say, “The pastor at Sardis will never disappoint you. You will always hear the Word from him!” But when the Lord wrote this letter, He told them that they were “dead.” He didn’t mean that once they had been saved, but now they had lost their salvation. If the Lord had meant that, He wouldn’t have written the kind of a letter that he wrote to them. No, the Lord meant what He meant when He directed Paul to write the way he did to the church at Corinth. He was charging them as living like people do who don’t know the Lord, *walking as men!* Dr. John Walvoord, who was the President of Dallas Seminary for many years, said in his commentary on The Revelation,

This searching judgment of Christ as it relates to the church of Sardis is one to be pondered by the modern church, which often is full of activity even though there is little that speaks of Christ and spiritual life and power (p. 80).

And then he quoted William Barclay with whom I do not always agree, but this is a good quotation. He said that a church

is in danger of death when it begins to worship its own past . . . when it is more concerned with forms than with life . . . when it loves systems more that it loves Jesus Christ . . . when it is more concerned with material than spiritual things (*Ibid.*),

And then the Lord began to tell them what they needed to do.

3:2 First, “be watchful.” This basically means, “*Wake up!*” But it also includes the idea of being on your guard.

I have just about completed the reading of a book that is very different from any book that I have ever written. The author was a pastor in England back in the 1700's. He only lived to be 49 years of age, but he had unusual insights into the Scriptures and the Christian life. One thing that he emphasized in his chapter on the morning Bible reading and prayer, was that before we start out on our day, we should try to anticipate where we might possibly meet with temptation during that day. That is the kind of an exhortation that the Lord Jesus was making here. If things are not as good in my life as they once were, we need to ask ourselves what brought about the change. Where did we begin slipping? Did Bible reading become just a formality, just a habit? Or did I get so busy doing good things which crowded out my time with the Lord? Have I formed the wrong kind of friendships? Has making money become an obsession with me?

The word “be” before “watchful” means *to become watchful*. It meant that they weren’t watchful, and they needed to wake up and see what was going on in their lives. The Apostle Peter knew what happens when you go to sleep, and so years later he wrote these words:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

And just as surely as you and I plan to be more watchful, the Devil will do all that he can to stand in our way.

But there was a second thing that the Lord told the pastor and people of the church at Sardis to do.

“Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die.” I doubt if it is ever true that everything is bad in the life of a true Christian. But even what remains needs to be strengthened. John Swete, in his commentary on Revelation, pointed out that such an exhortation was

especially suitable in an address to the Church at Sardis; twice during the history of that city the acropolis had fallen into the lands of an enemy through want of vigilance on the part of its citizens . . . ,

and a similar disaster now threatened the Church of Sardis from a similar cause. But more than vigilance was needed; the Church must set herself to work for the establishment of any faith, love, or works of piety that were left . . . , but more generally, whatever remained at Sardis out of the wreck of Christian life, whether persons or institutions: all must be preserved and set on a former basis—a principle of reconstruction worthy of the notice of Christian teachers who are called to deal with corrupt or decaying branches of the Church (p. 49).

So it is not something new that a sick church needs, but it needs to get back to the basics of the doctrines, the teachings, of Scripture, and to live as we are taught to live by the Word of God.

The reason the Lord gave for such exhortations: “For I have not found thy works perfect before God.” This meant that their works were not what the Lord wanted them to be. They did not satisfy Him. It was a reminder to the church at Sardis, and to us today, that we live for the Lord, and we serve the Lord, and He is the One Whom we must please. We can have the commendation of people, but their commendation means nothing if the Lord is not pleased. The Lord is not only concerned about what we do, but why we do what we do, and the spirit in which we do His will. Again referring to the Apostle Peter, he said along this line,

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

And our Lord said in what we call His Sermon on the Mount,

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

3:3 Another important thing to do when we need spiritual restoration is to remember not just that what we have, we have received, nor with what joy we received what the Lord has given us, but “how”! The perfect tense is used here to indicate that what we have received is *a trust from the Lord*. We are not only responsible before God to believe the Word, and to obey the Word, but to pass on the Word just as we have received it.

This idea was stated by Paul in his second letter to Timothy. This is what he said;

1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:1-2).

A church is very shortsighted which does not realize its responsibility to the generations to come.

This was true also of even the families in Israel:

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:4-7).

Parents were to teach their children, and then the children were to teach their children, and so on and on from one generation to another.

We are not to try to improve upon the Word. We are not to take away from it. We are to hold it fast, to keep it as it is, “and repent”! We are to repent when we fail personally, and sometimes whole churches need to repent. There have been many churches established in our country for the preaching of the Word and for the spread of

the Gospel, which today seek to destroy everything that is taught in the Word of God – or at least the basic teaching of Scripture. There is a great need for repentance in our churches today. Maybe there is a need for repentance in our lives because we have not been faithful to the trust that was committed to us when we received the Word of God.

I doubt if the last part of verse 3 speaks of the return of the Lord. Instead, it speaks of judgment from the Lord. Have you noticed that when a church, or a denomination, turns from the Scriptures, their numbers begin to dwindle? That is one way the Lord has of stopping the erosion of His work. Read verse 5 of chapter 2. Also verse 16 in the same chapter. We need the blessing of the Lord, and we must want the blessing of the Lord. But His blessing always comes on *His terms*, not ours! We must do God's work in God's way if we want His blessing. But we also must realize that a continued departure from the Lord and His Word ultimately leads to judgment. We don't know how far the light may shine from our united testimony here at Trinity, but we need to be praying that the light will grow brighter and brighter, not less and less. These letters to those seven churches in the first century, contain messages that are really needed by the church in the twenty-first century.

February 5, 2002

3:4 Even in a church where generally speaking the spiritual needs of the people was predominant and overwhelming, there were those who had been faithful, and had not defiled their garments.

In Rev. 19:8 we are told this about the Lamb's wife:

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

We know that sin defiles us, first of all, in our hearts, on the inside where no one but God can see what is going on. But if it is not confessed and forsaken and cleansed, it begins to show itself outwardly, in our behavior. So those who had defiled their garments. They had not succumbed to the temptation of the world around them, and especially to the idolatry which quickly leads to immorality. The Lord knew who these people were. And He promised them that they would walk with Him in white. While this has its application to the future, yet it also applies to the present. And it points out, what the Apostle John emphasized so strongly in His first epistle, that our primary concern every day should be that we are living in personal fellowship with God and with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember 1 John 1:5-9:

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (John 1:5-9).

“For they are worthy.” There is no suggestion here that we make ourselves worthy. To be worthy is to be qualified to walk with the Lord. But He is the One Who makes us worthy. He saves us, and He keeps us. When we sin, He cleanses us. And so, while those who were worthy had kept themselves by living to please the Lord, it is always God who works in us to make us willing to do His will, and then He gives us the strength to do it to do it. So all of the glory belongs to God, and not to us – none of it!

3:5 If I understand verses 4 and 5 correctly, verse 4 has to do with the present; verse 5, with the future and the eternal glory that will be ours. Swete indicates that Phil. 3:20 and 21 may be in view here. “White” is a symbol of purity, and of victory. And then he added, “The promise is that of a life free from pollution,

bright with celestial gladness, crowned with final victory” (p. 52). What a glorious day that will be! No longer will there be any possibility of broken fellowship with the Lord, nor even of temptation. Sin will be a thing of the past. As the Apostle John said, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). But, for the present, let us remember that the Apostle John added, “And every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). So, while our glorification is certain, we are responsible before God to use the means He has given us, the Word and prayer and Christian fellowship, under the blessing of the Spirit of God, to purify ourselves. The writer of Hebrews said in chapter 12, verse 14, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

And then the Lord added, “And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” This statement has given expositors trouble in the light of the many passages which speak of the eternal nature of salvation. What does the Bible teach about “the book of life”?

It is only mentioned in two books of the Bible: Philippians and The Revelation. And it is mentioned only once in Philippians Phil. 4:3

3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

But we do have a passage like Luke 10:17-20:

17 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Hebrews 12:23 is similar to the Luke passage – reading verse 22 with it:

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22-23).

However, Rev. 17:8 tells us when names were written in the book of life. This is what that verse says:

8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

This ties in with two other verses:

1) Ephesians 1:4:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

2) 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

So those who are written in the book of life are the elect. And our verse in Rev. 3:5 simply indicates that those who overcome, who are faithful to the Lord, will not be blotted out of the book of life. It does not say that anyone will be blotted out, but is simply another confirmation that all of those who are truly saved, and saved eternally. People may belong to a church, and it appears that they are truly saved, but some fall away. It does not mean that they were saved, and then lost again, but it means that they were never really saved.

Other verses which speak of the book of life are Rev. 13:8; 20:12, 15; 22:19.

The Lord will confess before the Father the names of all of those who are written in the book of life. Cf. John 6:37,

37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. Also, cf. John 10:27-30:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

On the other side, which would apply to the church at Sardis, and to most other churches where unfortunately we see people falling away, cf. 1 John 2:19:

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

3:6 The appeal of the Lord is the same as in the four preceding letters, and also in the two that remain. How thankful we should be that the Lord has given us ears to hear. And it should be our constant prayer that the Lord would continue to give us hearing ears, and seeing eyes, and responsive hearts to all that He has given us in His Word about what we should be and how we should live.

February 11, 2002

F. The letter to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13).

If the Apostle John went from Sardis to the south and west for approximately 28 miles, he would come to the city of Philadelphia. It was a city with magnificent temples and very attractive public buildings. And so, like the other cities of that area, there was much paganism. But there were many Jews in Philadelphia also, and the fact that they were quite numerous was evident from the fact that they had a synagogue. The city got its name from the king who founded the city, Attalus II, who reigned in the area a little over one hundred years before Christ. Because the king was so fond of his brother, Eumenes, the king was nicknamed (as we would say today), Philadelphus, which means *brotherly love*. The city is still very prosperous today, but it now carries the name Ala-shehir, which is thought to be a corruption of Allah-shehir, which means *the city of God*.

We don't know anything about the establishing of the church there, but it seems quite certain that the Apostle John ministered there. How often, or how long, we do not know. Sir William Ramsay, in his book, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, said that it was a missionary city from the beginning, not because of the Christian influence, but because of Hellenists who crusaded for the Greek language and culture, and who succeeded. In the days in which the Apostle John ministered there Greek was the prevailing language.

Again, let it be noted that the founding of a church in such a pagan center, was a tribute to the great power of the Gospel of Christ. And it was the Lord Who made it a truly missionary city. But let us now turn to the text of the letter.

3:7 For the first time in these letters, the Lord departed from the actual wording of the vision in chapter 1, and of the attendant statements that are made about Him in that chapter. He called Himself "holy" and "true," and the One Who had "the key of David." And yet as Jesus Christ these expression applied to Him in all of their perfection and glory.

Jesus Christ is “holy.” This identifies Him as Deity. But Lenski pointed out that this word “holy” is a word which was raised to new heights, particularly in the NT. To the Greeks “holy” originally meant that which is lofty and should be venerated [respected and honored]. In the Bible the Holy Spirit has elevated the word to mean that which is morally pure. As it relates to Christ, it is absolute in its meaning; as it relates to us, it is relative, but, hopefully, increasing. Christ has been eternally holy. When He became a Man, He continued to be the Holy One. Bearing our sins, He was our sinless Substitute. And when He returned to the Father He was the spotless Son of God. He did no sin. He knew no sin. In Him was no sin. He was without sin. He is utterly incapable of sin because He is God. Anyone who denies this is antichrist even though he may have a lot of theological degrees after his name, and might be the pastor of a very large church. The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle,

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22).

But our Lord is also “true.” The article “the” is used in the Greek both before “holy” and “true.” Neither one of these could be used of any of us. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy One, and He is the true One. He is the Genuine Son of God. There is no other like Him. Swete says,

He is all that He claims to be, fulfilling the ideals which He holds forth, and the hopes which He inspires (p. 53).

Lenski says this:

“The Genuine One” is an independent designation and includes all that our Lord is: in all that He is, He is genuine, in nothing is there mere empty claim or pretense (p. 138).

How thankful we should be that we know this about the Lord Jesus Christ!

But this is not all. “He hath the keys of David.” Here we have the beginning of the quotation of Isa. 22:22, which tell us:

22 And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

In this passage the Lord was speaking of Eliakim who was an overseer of the household of King Hezekiah of Judah. And, as such, he was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ was the antitype of Eliakim. And here the Lord Jesus was laying claim to what was a prophecy in Isaiah 22. The key of David is the Messianic line, and “the key” is the authority to open and close the door or doors which the key fits. In our passage in The Revelation, this speaks of the Lord who alone has the authority to open and to close the door of salvation to whomever He chooses. This speaks of the wonderful doctrine of salvation.

Just yesterday I was reading again those three wonderful chapters in Romans: 9, 10, and 11. In chapter 9 where the Apostle was speaking of the doctrine of election and referring especially to Jacob and Esau. And Paul wrote these words:

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger (Rom. 9:11-12).

Then the Apostle Paul raised the question which doubtless had been directed at him many times (because man has a natural aversion to the doctrine of election). This was the question followed by Paul’s answer:

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy (Rom. 9:14-16).

Now, going back in our text to the two attributes of our Lord that He mentioned, that He was “holy” and He

was “true,” He is perfectly “holy” so He cannot do anything wrong, and He is the One and only “true” One, and so there is nobody who is qualified to do what He can do – a power which displays itself in salvation. We do not determine our own salvation. Salvation is the working out of the divine purpose. And it was perfectly illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. When he was going to Damascus to arrest all of the Christians whom he could find there, *he wasn't seeking the Lord! But the Lord was seeking him! He didn't find the Lord; the Lord found him!* And in a moment of time the Lord with His key opened the heart of Saul of Tarsus and his attitude toward the Lord Jesus underwent an immediate transformation.

Do you remember the story of Lydia in Acts 16? In verse 14, speaking of her, Luke in writing that book said, “whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14b). And it wasn't long after that that the Lord opened the doors of the prison where Paul and Silas were being held, but what is more important than that, He opened the heart of the Philippian jailor and made him fall down before Paul and Silas, asking them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” That was not to the credit of the jailor, but all to the glory of God.

You and I are saved today, not because we initially sought the Lord, but because He sought us and drew us to Himself. Even the faith which we exercised in believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, was a gift from God. When the Lord opens a person's heart, that person can't close it. On the other hand, if the Lord leaves his heart closed, that person is not going to open it. By nature man's heart is what – open or closed? Closed! And he can't open it, and neither can anyone else. *But the Lord Jesus can, and He does it every time a person is genuinely saved.*

But let us move on in our text.

3:8 “I know thy works.” Since their works are not qualified in any way, Swete said that this is “unqualified approval” (p. 54). And it means all the more because it comes from the One Who is “holy” and “true.” The Lord never engages in flattery. He always judges righteously.

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” Not only does the Lord open the hearts of individuals, but there are times when the Lord sees fit to do a special work in a city, as apparently He had done in Philadelphia. If there is going to be a special work of God, He is the One Who opens the door.

As you know, the city is trying its best to get us out of this building. And they may succeed. No one knows what the outcome will be. But if the Lord wants us here, nobody is going to get us out! The Lord is the One Who works through us, and He is the One Who determines where that work is going to be done. We are trying to cooperate with the city as much as we can, but our hope is not in human beings down at city hall. Our hope is the One Who holds the key.

The Lord had opened the door for them because they did not have the strength that it would take to open the door. And the Lord has ordained also that it be this way. In 1 Cor. 1:27 Paul said the “God hath chosen . . . the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” And He has purposely done it this way so that we would not be able to glory in which we have done, but give all of the glory to the Lord! And yet we have a responsibility in this. There were things that the believers in Philadelphia could not do. They could not open doors. They could not save anyone. They didn't even save themselves. But (and these two things can only be done by the grace of God, and we need to seek grace from God to do them), we, like the church in Philadelphia, need 1) *to keep God's Word* and 2) *not deny our Lord's Name*.

The verb “keep” is very prominent in the first three chapters of The Revelation. Cf. 1:3; 2:26; 3:3, 8, 10 (2x). It is the church's responsibility, and the responsibility of everyone in the church *to guard*, lit., *to keep our eyes*

upon the Word of God. We believe it. We live by it. We refuse to be turned away from it. We proclaim it even though its message is not what the people of the world want to hear. And a major part of doing this is that we do not deny the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that He is the Lord, and that He is Jesus, and that He is the Christ, the Messiah. We believe in His absolute Deity, in His perfect humanity, and that He was sent by the Father on a mission into this world to be the one and only Savior. We don't believe that He is just a son of God; we believe that He is *the* eternal Son of the living God! And we refuse to say that He is not all of these great truths. The church at Philadelphia may have been comprised mainly of servants and the lower class of workers, but they were a mighty group of the Lord's people. They were doing what many churches with more people, and people who are influential, have not done. How the Lord loves to take a group of people who are nothing and less than nothing in the eyes of the world, and then to use them to do a mighty work where many are brought into the kingdom of God, people who show by their lives that God has done a work of salvation in their hearts.

But we are not finished.

3:9 At this point the Lord went on to tell them what He would do. Notice the I will's of our Lord.

Evidently the main source of opposition to the church in Philadelphia came from the Jewish synagogue. As I have mentioned, we know from history that there were many Jews in this city. Notice the expression, "which say that they are Jews." But the Lord said that they were *not*! He did not mean that they were not Jews by birth. But he was referring to the fact that it was very common for Jewish people to think that because they had Jewish blood in their veins, that they were by birth the people of God. This is what the Lord was speaking about with the Jews in the conversation He had with them which is recorded for us in John 8 where we are told that they said to the Lord, "We be Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). But then the conversation continued this way. The Lord was speaking as we read:

37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God (John 8:37-47).

Those were very strong words coming from the Lord Jesus Christ, but sometimes it take strong words to wake people up.

The Apostle Paul was dealing with the same subject in Rom. 2. The Jews despised the Gentiles because they were not Jews. And the issue the Jews always raised was that of circumcision. Paul told them that their circumcision became uncircumcision if they did not abide by the Word of God, and, of course, they would not

live by the Word if they were not truly saved. Finally the Apostle Paul said this:

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28-29).

Now I believe you can understand why the Lord Jesus said here in Rev. 3:9 that those Jews who had opposed the church were “of the synagogue of Satan.” The Devil had blinded their eyes so that they did not really know what it means to be a child of God. They denied our Lord’s claim that He was the Son of God. They did not believe that they needed a Savior. They were Jews. They were sons of Abraham which meant to them that they were the sons of God. Paul said that if they claim to be Jews, meaning what they did by that claim, that they were liars.

It is clear at this point that the open door which the Lord had set before the church was an open door of ministry to the hearts of many of the Jewish synagogue. The Lord was going to open the hearts of many, not necessarily all, to the truth of God’s Word and to the necessity of salvation through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord would open their hearts to the truth that the Lord Jesus is the Holy One of God, and that He is unique in that. They would be brought to understand that there is salvation in none other, for, as the Apostle Peter said as he preached the Gospel in Jerusalem,

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

For them “to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved them,” did not mean that they were going to worship the members of the church at Philadelphia, but that they were going to worship with them because they had trusted Christ themselves and wanted to be in the church, not in the synagogue.

Lenski said about the latter part of verse 9,

The wording is not all figurative. But we must not imagine that the Christians sat on benches or on chairs in their services; they sat cross-legged on the floor in Oriental style. So also did the bishop or the speaker on the higher platform except when he stood up to read (Luke 4:16). To drop to the knees and to bow the head to the ground or the floor is still the Oriental attitude of worship. The fact that Jews, those vicious haters of Christ, would come to the humble church at Philadelphia, the members of this church would scarcely have believed. The Lord here promises this wonderful victory. It is his special gift to this faithful church (p.143).

Before we leave this verse, I want you to notice why these Jews did what they did in acknowledging their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to be seen in the words, “Behold, I will make them . . .” It is actually the verb *δίδωμι*, meaning *I give*, or *I am giving*. The Jews who came did not all come at once, but one came, and then another, and still more came. They were the Lord’s gift to the church. But the fact that the Lord gave them means that they did not come of their own accord, but the Lord Jesus was drawing them, constraining them to come.

Remember those two wonderful verses in John 6 having to do with salvation: first, v. 44, and then 37:

John 6:44

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:37

37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

It must have been that the Lord used the lives of the Christians to awaken the Jews to realize that there was something different about them, and then by the faithful witness of the Christians to the truth of the Word of God, that the Jews heard, were transformed by the power of God, and were drawn to Christ first, and then to the people who knew Christ.

This letter gives us a true picture of how people are saved. Our job as the people of God is to hold fast to the truth and to live according to the truth; it is God's work to draw to Himself those whom He intends to save.

Let me close my comments on this verse by reading to you Isaiah 55:6-11:

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:6-11).

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11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:6-11).

February 18, 2002

3:10 Here the Lord commended that church at Philadelphia because her people, as the Lord said, "hath kept the word of my patience." Lenski did an excellent job in his commentary in pointing out that the patience here, was not the patience of the church, but *the patience of Christ*. But we must also remember that the Greek word for patience here means *a remaining under*. The word in Greek is ὑπομονή, and it is formed from the preposition, ὑπό, which means *under*, and the verb μένω, which means *to remain*, or *not to leave*.

Many of us are memorizing the first epistle of John. There is one verse in 1 John which uses this word three times. But it is not clear in the English that it is there three times because each time it is translated with a different word, and all of the words that are used are good translations. The verse I am talking about is 1 John 2:4, and this is what it says:

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:24).

Now there is also a verb which combines ὑπό and μένω, and, as you might expect, it is ὑπομέω. It means *to persevere, to endure bravely and calmly in the face of trials and misfortunes and opposition*. So to be patient in Greek, is not just *to wait* for something to happen, or for someone to come, but it means that while you are waiting, you persevere, you keep on doing what you have been doing. Peter and John were manifesting patience when they were told "not to speak at all nor teach in the Name of the Jesus" (Acts 4:18). But this is how they responded to the authorities:

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

In what way were they being patient? They were patient by trusting the Lord to protect them, but, in the meantime, they were going to keep doing what the Lord had called them to do.

We have another example of patience in the OT, in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I am amazed at what they told Nebuchadnezzar after what he had decreed and what he told these three young men. I am

sure that you remember the story. Nebuchadnezzar in his pride had made a golden image of himself, and he decreed that which the musical instruments were blown, everyone was to fall down and worship the image. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had refused to do it. When the king heard that they had not bowed down to the image, this is what he did:

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:13-18).

That is what the Bible means when it speaks of patience – keeping on living for the Lord and serving Him in the face of great opposition which could lead to affliction and persecution, or even death!

But here in our text the Lord was speaking of “the word of my patience.” Was there ever a time when the Lord was faced with whether or not He would continue to do the Father’s will? He was faced with that constantly during His public ministry, wasn’t He? And Heb. 12:1-2 gives us a statement of *the patience of Christ!* I will read those verses to you, along with verse 3:

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:1-3).

Now, for the church at Philadelphia to keep the patience of Christ, meant that they had stood faithfully by the Lord even though it meaning suffering for themselves. This is what the Lord told the disciples while they walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Listen to the words which He spoke to them:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:18-21).

Let me give you one more passage before we move on. It comes from the pen and heart of the Apostle Peter:

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (1 Peter 4:12-14).

So, what did it mean that the church at Philadelphia had kept the patience of Christ? It meant not only that they had gladly accepted the reproach of Christ that the world had place upon them, but they guarded the truth that was involved in the humiliation of the Lord – which meant that they joyfully proclaimed the Gospel even though it was not only foolish in the eyes of worldly people, but a message which the world hates.

This is one of our greatest problems in the spread of the Gospel, isn't it – that we will offend people, or lose some friends, or cause people to retaliate against us in some way.

The second part of this verse is the Lord's promise of deliverance from "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." This appears to speak of a particular period of time ("the hour") of "temptation," or trial, during which people will be tried, or proven, as to whether or not they are in the faith. And the fact that this is a period "which shall come upon all the world," appears to point to the period of the Great Tribulation which is described in great detail in this book. Such a promise would not only apply to the church at Philadelphia, but to all believers who faithfully stand for the truth. Any time of trial for the church has the effect of sifting those who merely profess to know the Lord, as compared with those who really do. And so this appears to point to a pre-Tribulation rapture of the church. It would not necessarily include all of the church at Philadelphia, meaning that all were saved, because there probably were those in that church, as there are in most churches, who were identified with the church, but who not know Christ in salvation..

The promise of verse 11 certainly points to the imminent return of Christ.

Whatever may be the full meaning of this statement, it surely is an encouragement for believers to stand faithfully by the Lord and by the Gospel at all times. And this is emphasized also in verse 11.

3:11 The word "behold" is like underlining what follows, and putting it in bold print. It indicates something that is of special importance. And it emphasizes several truths:

- 1) The Lord is coming.
- 2) He is coming quickly. It may be that some 1900 years have passed since the Lord spoke these words to the Apostle John, but even that long time is but like two days, and much, much less, as compared with eternity.
- 3) The Lord is going to give rewards (crowns) when He comes. And the implication is that we should live to show that we are seeking a crown. The word for crown here is *στέφανος*, the wreath or garland that was given to victors in the games. This same word is used in 1 Cor. 9:25 where the Apostle Paul wrote of those who were, as we would say today, working for the gold. This is what he said: "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."
- 4) What the church at Philadelphia was admonished to do was to "hold that fast which thou hast." See also 2:13, 25. And so let me emphasize again the battle that the people of God face in every generation. There are always those who are trying to take the truth of God's Word away from us, or to add to it, or to take away from it. The church must always stand for the truth as it is written, and not allow any additions, nor any deletions, but to hold it fast as it is. In writing 1 John the Apostle John said, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (1 John 2:26). The Lord is coming, and our battle with the Enemy will continue until He does come.

February 19, 2002

3:12 And again the promise is given to "him that overcometh." Note the singular. "The discourse turns, at

the end of each address, to the individual members of the church” (Swete, p. 57). The church at Philadelphia was like all of the other churches of Asia, and like every other church which has ever been established for the fellowship of the saints, and for the preaching of the Gospel. But not all will overcome because not all are saved. And not all who are saved will be overcomers. But for those who do overcome, great blessings are promised.

Lenski, in dealing with the question as to what the Lord was referring here to an earthly sanctuary (the word he preferred to temple), or a heavenly sanctuary, reminds us that the promises to the overcomers in each letter refer to heaven. The earthly sanctuary of Israel was made according to the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. Those who overcome will be made (by the Lord Himself) pillars in “the temple of my God,” said the Lord. A pillar is for support. It speaks of strength. And certainly is a picture of permanence. Psalm 1 speaks of believers being like “trees planted.” That, too, speaks of strength and permanence, but what we have here in Rev. 3:12 is even much stronger, but probably the two are related. All weakness and instability will be a thing of the past.

“And he shall go no more out” speaks of the fact that there will be no more broken fellowship. All of our lives here on earth have at times been marred by a failure to walk with the Lord. It is a shame but our fellowship has been in and out, and our love for the Lord has been hot and cold. We don’t know just how the present will fit into eternity, but the overcomer’s place in heaven is held out that all believers will strive now, but the grace of God to be overcomers. What a blessing it will be to experience uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord!

Like pillars often had inscriptions of different kinds engraved upon them, this will be the case with those who become pillar-like in glory. They will have, the Lord said, “the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name.”

When the Apostle John wrote his first epistle, he said, speaking of what we will be like when the Lord comes, “And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” And the wide variety of interpretations that are given of this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, indicate that there are many details in this book which godly men have had difficulty in putting it all together. So we must take what is revealed, study it all prayerfully and carefully, and seek to understand it along with what other books of the Bible have to say about “things to come” (John 16:13).

But these overcomers will have the name of God on them, indicating that they belong to God (and that raises the question as to why that would be necessary in heaven because we all will belong to Him). And “the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem” comes second. And then the Lord says, “My new Name.” We know that the Lord is revealed by His Names, and evidently there will be added truth that we will learn about the Lord when we get to heaven. But there will be nothing contradictory to what we know now, just a greater fulness of our knowledge of the Lord.

Whatever may be the full meaning of what the Lord said here, it will be more glorious than anything that anyone has ever experienced here on earth. And it should make all of us strive to be overcomes.

2:13 May the repetition of this verse in each of the letters never cause us to overlook the importance of having ears that hear. Instead, may the repetition make us realize, in an ever-increasing way, how important it is for us to “hear,” to know and to understand, what the Spirit of God has given us of the words of Christ to the churches. The reason: because each of them has its application to us.

With this in mind, let us go on to the seventh and final letter in this series.

G. The letter to the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22).

Laodicea was located forty miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was during the Roman occupation of the area which became known as Asia, that Laodicea “suddenly became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous especially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there (cf. Rev. 3:18) . . . It was a city of great wealth, with extensive banking operations” (ISBE, III, P. 1836). Today it is in ruins.

However, even this little information that we have about the ancient city of Laodicea, indicates that a church can be adversely affected by the city in which it is located. Money and the power that goes with it gives the citizens of a city and even a whole nation a false sense of security, and a greatly mistaken idea of the things that are really important in this life. And it seems that this is what had happened to the church in Laodicea, and it ought to make us wonder if this is not one of the main reasons why the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is so anemic in America. This letter is certain one of great importance for us to pay attention to. The city was built on a plateau, and there was a stadium there which indicated the importance of sports in the city.

So it was a city which had everything. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 66, but it was rebuilt soon afterwards by funds from the city itself, and without any assistance from the Roman government. So the city was in most respects characterized by self-sufficiency. And this feeling had gotten into the church. As our Lord said to them in His letter, *they had need of nothing*, and one gets the impression from reading the epistle that they didn't even need the Lord! It must have been shocking for the church to hear the words of the Lord when they had an entirely different idea about themselves from what the Lord had, and what He expressed in this letter. It ought to cause us to think seriously about the work of the Lord here at Trinity, and what kind of a letter the Lord would write to us.

The church is mentioned also in Paul's epistle to the church at Colosse. See Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16. It may have been founded by Epaphras. When Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he had not been to either Colosse nor to Laodicea, but people in these cities knew him and were well acquainted with his ministry. So there is no question but they had a good foundation. However, when the Apostle John penned to them this letter from the Lord, spiritually the church at Laodicea was in great need even though outwardly it looked as prosperous as the city was.

But let us go to the letter now to see what the Lord had to say about them.

3:14 Again, let me say that it was really a miracle of God's grace and power that there was a church in the city of Laodicea. But there was a church there! And the Lord cared for it, and sought to make it what He wanted it to be.

They had a pastor. The Apostle John probably knew him personally. And again John was commanded to write. As we have seen before, this was an indication of the continuing value of what the Lord had to say to the believers at Laodicea.

The Lord Jesus Christ identified Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”

Not many of us are accustomed to think of “Amen” as a Name of the Lord Jesus. But here we have the proof that it was His Name. The word is found in Rev. 1:6, 7, and 18, and it probably comes to 3:14 from 1:18. This ought remind us of the many times it is recorded in Scripture that the Lord said either “verily, verily” (as He did

twenty-five times in the Gospel of John), or just “verily” (as it is in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, especially in Matthew). All of them are the translation of the Greek word, ἀμήν. Swete says that this speaks of our Lord “whose character and nature are in themselves a guarantee for the truth of His testimony” (p. 59). He not only sees the outward behavior of His people, but He knows the inner condition of their hearts. It probably was not very pleasant for the church to hear this letter, but, coming from the Lord, they could not deny anything that He said because He always spoke the truth. “The faithful and true Witness” was probably given by our Lord to explain what He meant when He said that He was “the Amen.” In the Hebrew of Deut. 7:9, the words, “the faithful God,” are lit. *the Amen God*. The same is true of Isa. 65:16, but there it is translated twice, “the God of truth. So for our Lord’s Name to be “Amen” speaks of the faithfulness of His character. And so as the Lord went on to say that He was “the faithful and true Witness,” He was explaining what He meant by saying that His Name was “Amen.”

Then the Lord referred to Himself as “the beginning of the creation of God.” This has been used by those who deny the Deity of our Lord to show that He was the first Person whom God created. However, that could hardly be the meaning after the titles that He had just claimed for Himself. And so that is not the meaning of this phrase. It means that He is the Creator. He caused creation. He was the Originator of creation.

We have already been told in Rev. 2:18 that He is “the Son of God.” And that is true also of John 1:1-2. Then John 1:3 and a part of 1:10 tell us that our Lord is the Creator. This statement here in Rev. 3:14 is similar to what the Apostle Paul had to say about our Lord as Creator in Col. 1:15-17, leading on into what he said about the place that the Lord has in the Church in Col. 1:18. It may even mean that the church of Laodicea was having trouble with the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, which, of course, would affect His involvement in creation. He could hardly have been the Creator if He were just a man.

Lenski made a good statement regarding the Lord’s use of the title, “the beginning of the creation of God.” He said,

This is He Who here speaks to the Laodiceans in order to bring them back into full, saving, blessed connection with Him in Whom the whole universe centers, apart from Whom whatever we may be as creatures of God, or may have of His creation, is nothing (p. 153).

And this shows how very important it is, not only to believe in creation, but to believe in God the Father, in Christ, and even in the Holy Spirit, as the Ones Who brought man and the whole universe, the heavens and the earth, into existence by Their wisdom and power. If a person is wrong about creation, it is hard to see how he can be right about salvation. The doctrines of creation and salvation stand together in the Word of God.

And so it seems clear that the church of the Laodiceans was having some trouble regarding the truth of the Deity of our Lord. And let me make a general statement of truth here also. It is that *if a church is not living according to the Word of God, it will be especially vulnerable to false doctrine*. That is undoubtedly why the Lord repeated over and over again to Israel in the OT the importance of keeping the commandments. And we have the same emphasis in the NT. Our knowledge of the Word and our personal obedience to the Word of God, are our greatest safeguard against those who would deceive us and draw us away from Christ and from faith in the Word of God.

February 25, 2002

3:15 In every one of the letters the Lord said, “I know thy works.” Cf. 2:2, 9, 13, 19: 3:1, 8, and here in v.

15. It is a statement which should not surprise us because God knows all things. Lenski called this knowledge of the Lord Jesus, “infallible and complete.” It was not hearsay with the Lord, but firsthand knowledge with Him about the church at Laodicea, as it was about the preceding six churches. Thus in each case we have a totally accurate description of the spiritual condition of the church.

When the Lord addressed the churches, if there were things about the church that pleased Him, He mentioned it first. If not, He would refer immediately to that which was not pleasing to Himself. This was the case with the church at Laodicea. There was really nothing about the church that delighted the Lord. His words against them are strong, stronger (we probably should say) than His words to any of the other six churches. And they begin here in verse 15.

Probably most people had a very different idea about the church at Laodicea. Maybe it was like the church at Sardis to whom the Lord said, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (3:1). Others may think well of us, but if they knew the true condition of our hearts, they might be shocked. Outwardly things look good, but inwardly what God sees, and what we often know is there, the true condition can be very, very different. This ought to cause everyone in any true local church to take care about what is done, and how it is done. A teacher might be teaching something that the leaders of the church would be displeased with because it was contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and he might feel that he was getting away with it. But nothing escapes the eyes of our Lord. Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). And we can add to that what Samuel was told when he felt that Jesse’s oldest son was the Lord’s choice to be the king of Israel:

7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

So the Lord not only sees the outward circumstances, but he know the condition of the hearts of men. In fact, the outward reflects the inward. And this is something that we all need to remember. There is a lot of hypocrisy in all of us. If we can’t find it in our hearts to be what we ought to be, we try to act like we ought to anyway. And it is good that we don’t always act the way we feel. But when we realize that we are not hiding anything from the Lord, this ought to prompt us to seek His help and blessing so that we might be what we ought to be. Then, and only then, will our works be acceptable to God.

Obviously there was not a church in the seven which did not need to hear the Lord’s words, “I know thy works.” And if they needed it, so do we, and so let’s take those words into our hearts and in our memories.

What did the Lord know about the Laodicean church? It was “that thou art neither hot nor cold.” And then He added, “I would that thou wert cold or hot.” The rest of this particular statement is in verse 16.

3:16 (Read the verse.)

They were neither cold nor hot, but they are lukewarm – the only time this word is used in the NT. But the Lord said that He would rather that they be either cold or hot – but not that which is in between. A better translation of the last part of verse 16 is this: “I am *about to* spew thee out of my mouth.” The Lord meant by this statement that when His people are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, it makes Him feel like we do when we are sick at our stomach’s and vomit out whatever is in us.

What are we talking about here, cold and hot?

Let me tell you how Spurgeon described it. He said,

The condition described in our text is . . . one of mournful indifference and carelessness. They were not cold, but they were not hot; they were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers; they did not oppose the Gospel, neither did they defend it; they were not working mischief, neither were they doing any good; they were not disreputable in moral character, but they were not distinguished for holiness; they were not irreligious, but they were not enthusiastic in piety nor eminent in zeal (Vol. 20, p. 422).

It seems that the Lord was describing the kind of a situation where you see a person who claims to be a

Christian, but then you look at his life and wonder if he is or not. Lenski believed that the word “cold” meant unsaved. The “lukewarm” describes what they were, so it would seem that he was not saying that they were not saved, but that they had become very “indifferent and careless,” as Spurgeon said. It seems to me that the Lord was talking about the kind of a situation that prevailed in the church of Corinth, where he spoke of them as “carnal,” believers who were living like mere men, with too much of their interest in the world and the things of the world. They had lost their fervor, their love for the Lord. When the Apostle Paul told the believers in the church at Rome that they needed to be “fervent in Spirit,” he was using this same family of words. The whole verse is, “Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” The same idea is in Acts 18:25 where Luke was referring to Apollos, and said that “he was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord . . .” He need more grounding in the truth, which Aquila and Priscilla gave to him, but we can say that he was “hot” in his service for the Lord. That was not the case in Laodicea. The whole church was characterized as being “lukewarm.” They may have been “hot” at one time, but the fire had died down.

When the Lord said that He wished that they were either “hot” or “cold,” if we are right in thinking that “cold” means unsaved, the Lord was not wishing that they would all be consigned to hell, but He was expressing the fact that there might be more hope for them to become what they ought to be if they were in an unsaved condition where the Gospel could be preached to them again, and they would become what every Christian should be. We can see how sickened the Lord was by the condition of the church in Laodicea.

That says that the Greek word translated here “spue,” which means *vomit*, expresses *the idea of rejecting the church with extreme disgust*. The Lord did not say that he was going to vomit them out, but this was his way of expressing how very, very displeased he was with that group of the Lord’s people.

It is to be hoped that a passage like this, written for all of the church in all generations, that we would see how important it is that we live according to the Word, and walk in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, if we are to be pleasing to the Lord. We need to take the Word seriously, and to obey it continuously. We need to be spiritually minded, constantly growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the next verse we see why the believers at Laodicea were not concerned about themselves.

3:17 “Because thou sayest . . .” Most of us are familiar enough with the first epistle of John to remember, as we come to this verse, that the Apostle John said over and over in that letter, “If we say . . .” or “He that saith . . .” And he always followed it with something that was not true. Believers can claim to be living in fellowship with the Lord, and yet be walking in darkness, but John said that in such a case *they are lying*. After reading the statement that he made in 1 John, we get the impression that it is easy for us to be deceived about where we are spiritually.

Notice this expression even in the other letters in these two chapters: Rev. 2:2, 9, 20, 24; 3:9, and here.

Now we come to that same expression here. They were “lukewarm” in the eyes of the Lord, but in their own sight they were OK, and there was no reason to be so concerned. But look at what they were saying, and the Lord knew that what they were saying expressed exactly how they felt about themselves. Let us look at what the Lord told them that He knew they were saying.

“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” The church at Laodicea interpreted financial prosperity as the evidence of the blessing of the Lord. “Increased with goods” in the Greek is in the perfect tense, and so it should be translated, “I have gotten riches,” meaning that this was the result of their own doing. So they took the credit to themselves rather than giving the glory to God.. “And have need of nothing.” The

Lord did not mean that they were saying that they didn't even need the Lord, but He did mean that there was no recognition in their hearts of how desperately they needed the Lord, and how they needed to be drawn back into fellowship with Him. It is often the case that the believer, or the church, which has the most in a material and financial way, is the most needy when it comes to true spiritual life. I have mentioned to you before the statement I read or heard someone say years ago right along this line. He was speaking about how affluent the church in America had become, and he went on to say that we can no longer say, like Peter and John said to the cripple at the temple, "Silver and gold have I none." But then he went on to say, "Neither can we say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk'" (Acts 4:6). He was not saying that we still have the power to perform miracles like Peter and John did, but that the church today, while it is materially strong, is spiritually weak! We are thankful to the Lord for the way He provides for us, but let us remember what the Lord said to those two brothers who were having trouble with each other over their inheritance. The Lord said,

15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

Note how different the church at Smyrna was from the church at Laodicea. See Rev. 2:9. Laodicea was materially rich, but spiritually poor; Smyrna was materially poor, but spiritually rich. It doesn't mean that if the Lord is blessing a church in a material way, that it will be spiritually in trouble, but it does mean that we must be careful not to put our trust in uncertain riches, as the Apostle Paul said in 1 Tim. 6:17-19:

17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

In verse 15 the Lord said, "I know"; here in verse 17, speaking of the church He said, "Thou . . . knowest not." Actually the Lord said, "Knowest not that thou," making "thou" emphatic, meaning *you more so than anyone else*. What didn't the Laodicean believers know? They didn't know five things about themselves:

1) That they were "wretched." We need to judge ourselves as well as other people by what the Word says about them, or what we may be inclined to say about ourselves. Now a rich Christian can certainly be a happy Christian, but not if his trust is in his riches instead of the Lord, or if his riches makes him feel that he doesn't need the Lord as much as other people do. This word "wretched" is only used here and in Rom. 7:24. But we have a supporting comment in 1 Tim. 6:10 (reading verses 6-9 with it):

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

The word "wretched" describes a person who basically is unhappy. He doesn't appear that way, but that is what he is.

2) "Miserable" – meaning pitiful. This is a person who is not to be envied, but to be pitied, because he is entertaining hopes which can never be realized. Our hope needs to be in the Lord, not in things, nor in the money to buy things.

3) "Poor" – In classical Greek this meant *to be reduced to begging*. Paul meant that spiritually they were on skid row. They were spiritually poor. They had not real love, or joy, or peace, and so on.

4) "Blind" – This is a word which in the Word describes the unsaved. What a tragedy it is when believers have no more spiritual perception than the people of the world do. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4.

5) "Naked" – Robertson quoted a man by the name of Beckwith who wrote, "The figure completes the picture

of actual poverty” (VI, 322). Nakedness is often connected with shame. Those who crucified our Lord took His robe from Him as a part of the way they were seeking to humiliate Him.

How different was our Lord’s description of them when compared with what they were saying about themselves! And we have no question as to which evaluation was right.

But the Lord Who has begun a good work in the hearts of those who truly belong to Him, will not give up on them until His work is finished. And so there is hope as we come to verse 18.

3:18 The Lord is the Good Shepherd Who always seeks His wandering sheep, finds them, and restores them. There is great tenderness expressed in these words of our Lord Jesus Christ Who is “meek and lowly in heart,” and Who desires that all of His people find true rest in their souls. Too long this church had taken counsel from their own hearts, and from the world around them. Now the Lord calls upon them to seek their guidance and their wisdom from Him.

“Thee” and “Me” are emphatic. And Robertson said the “from me” means “from my side” (VI, 322). So our Lord’s words were not only an appeal for the church to listen to Him, but to come back to Him. And they were to come, not to discuss nor to dialogue with the Lord, but to listen and to obey. What they needed to know they would not get from the world they were inclined to follow, but it had to come from the Lord. Today the Lord calls us back to the Word because no Christian nor church gets into the trouble they had in Laodicea unless they had been neglecting the Word.

When the Lord spoke about *buying*, Matthew Henry made the comment that it seems that the Lord was unsaying all that He had said, until we realize that what the Lord has for us is bought “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). But Matthew Henry made this comment:

Something indeed must be parted with, but it is nothing of a valuable consideration, it is only to make room for receiving true riches. "Part with sin and self-sufficiency, and come to Christ with a sense of your poverty and emptiness, that you may be filled with his hidden treasure."

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

The cost is to give up that which you cannot keep to gain that which you cannot lose, as Jim Elliott used to say. Cf. what it “cost” Paul to live for the Lord Jesus Christ as he related it in Phil. 3:7 ff.

What did they need?

1) “Gold tried in the fire.” It seems that the Laodicean church had compromised with the truth and had not been holding fast to the Word because of the trouble that it might mean to them because of persecution from the world. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). “Gold tried in the fire” ought to remind us of 1 Pet. 1:6-9:

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (Peter 1:6-9).

No one likes persecution, or trials of any kind, but trials produce true riches in our lives. Trials produce a godly boldness, a confidence in the Lord, that really cannot be gained in any other way. Evidently in Laodicea they had been seeking to avoid the reproach of Christ, and the reproach of the Gospel. They had been hiding their light under a bushel, and the Lord was calling upon them to let their light shine, and to trust Him for whatever

the consequences might be. Through it all their faith would be strengthened, they would be laying up treasure in heaven, and, best of all, they would find a new and deeper love in their hearts for their Savior Who had never stopped loving them in spite of the terrible way in which they had grieved him.

But the Lord made another point when he spoke of “white raiment.” Cf. 3:4-5, and remember the Lord’s word about their nakedness, their shame, in 3:17. “White raiment” is clean clothing. Their sin would be cleansed away, and their appearance would be transformed. Cf. 4:4. And also the former blindness would be taken away. The Greek word for eye salve is κολλούριον, and, according to Robertson, this was the “name for a famous Phrygian powder for the eyes made in Laodicea” (VI, 323). “The entrance of the Word giveth light” (Psa. 119:130). It is the Word that gives us spiritual sight and understanding. “That thou mayest see” is lit. translated, “that you may see and keep on seeing.”

So this meant that the Lord was prepared to make right all that was so wrong in the lives of the Laodicean believers if they would only come to Him to have their need supplied.

And then the Lord gave more encouraging and comforting words in verse 19.

3:19 Why had the Lord spoken so severely to the church at Laodicea? It was because He loved them. It ought to be an alarming thing to anyone who turns away from the Lord, and nothing happens to them. It can be evidence that that person does not belong to the Lord. Cf. on this subject of chastening Heb. 12:5-11. (Read.)

“Be zealous” is a verb which suggests that what the Lord has done will cure their lukewarmness. It means *to boil*. “And repent.” The Lord was making it very clear what they needed to do. Repentance is not just for sinners who do not know the Lord, but there are times when believers need to repent of their sins, and, as in this passage, times when whole churches need to go before the Lord together to repent of their sins. True repentance is described in Prov. 28:13: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” *True repentance means saying to God what He says about our sins, the same thing, with no intention of ever going back to the same sin, or sins, again.*

And then follows a most wonderful verse, a verse which is often applied to unsaved sinners, but in the context we can see that it was given to the church at Laodicea, emphasizing that it is addressed to each individual in the church. How it should move our hearts to see how the Lord desires fellowship with us! He stands at the door of our hearts, knocking, and calling to us, waiting for us to open the door and to invite Him to come in that He may dine with us, and we with Him. **THE KEY TO THE SOLUTION OF EVERY SPIRITUAL PROBLEM IS THE RESTORATION OF PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** And this is not to be just an isolated event, nor even something that we occasionally do, but this is to be the way that we live.

Now comes the promise to the overcomer, the one who really learns the lesson of verses 18, 19, and 20.

3:21 Note the words, “with Me.” I am reminding of that verse toward the end of our Lord’s prayer in John 17, verse 24. This is what the Lord prayed:

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

What did the Lord overcome to sit with the Father on His Throne? He overcame all of the forces of the Evil One. He paid and overcame the penalty for your sin and mine. And He overcame death itself when He was triumphantly raised from the dead. And we will know when we get to heaven, more than we know now, that we have become overcomers because He has overcome all for us. This letter makes it very, very clear that the

path to becoming an overcomer is through the blessing of personal fellowship with our Lord.

3:22 These words which are found in every one of the seven letters to the seven churches. And they all are extremely important. We need ears to hear all that the Lord has said in His Word. Only He can give us such acute hearing. But if there is one letter in which these words are especially important, it has to be the letter to the church at Laodicea. He met them at their lowest point, and raised them to unbelievable heights. Fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth is a privilege that none of us deserves, but, as wonderful as it is, it is only a foretaste of the fellowship that we will enjoy with the Lord all through eternity. By the grace of God, let us not fail to enjoy the Lord now in an ever-increasing way.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
March 4, 2002

Chapters 4-5

Beginning with chapter 4 we come to the fourth and longest section of the book. In the outline it has this heading:

IV. “The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter” (Rev. 4:1-22:5). This heading is taken from Rev. 1:19 where the Apostle John appears to have given the major divisions of the book. It includes in chapters 4 and 5 a scene in heaven. From chapter 6 through chapter 18 we have The Great Tribulation described. In Rev. 19:1 and going through 22:5 we have the events following The Great Tribulation, beginning with the marriage of the Lamb and His second coming to the earth and leading finally to the establishing of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Chapters 4 and 5 give us:

A. The throne in heaven (Rev. 4:1-5:14).

1. The worship of the one God Who sits upon the throne (4:1-11).
2. The book with the seven seals (5:1-14).

Before we begin this section, I want to spend a few minutes on what the Bible teaches about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two important passages to consider when we are seeking to learn about the coming of the Lord. One is in Matthew 24 and 25. The other is in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

We know that the prophecy given in Matthew 24 and 25 was given by our Lord while He was here on earth. He spoke, as did some of the OT prophets, of the time which He called, “great tribulation.” See Matt. 24:21. (Read.) Isaiah spoke of this time as “the day of the Lord.” Cf. Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11). Jeremiah called it “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). And Daniel spoke of it like the Lord did, as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” (Dan. 12:1).

Now in Revelation 19 we see that the coming of the Lord takes place after the Tribulation. See Matt. 24:29-31. The Lord’s teaching is resumed in Matt. 25:31, and it is apparent both in Revelation 19 and in Matthew 24 and 25 that the Lord’s coming will be to the earth.

When we turn to 1 Thessalonians 4, we have an entirely different situation. There the Lord comes in the air, believers are caught up to meet Him, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” This is what the Lord spoke of in the words recorded for us in John 14:1-3. We are going to be with Him.

Now one major difference between these two events is that the coming of the Lord as predicted in 1 Thess. 4 can take place at any time. The Lord could come today. And I say this because, for example, the Apostle Paul in writing to Titus told him to be “looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). The verb “looking” is in the present tense, and it means that we are to live day by day in the expectation that we can see the Lord at any time. I doubt very much if the Apostle Paul would have used that verb in that tense if he had been speaking of the Lord’s return to earth to set up His kingdom. But there are some people who believe that the two events are the same. But if that is the case, then we can’t really be looking forward to His coming for us today because the event predicted in Revelation 19 cannot take place until the end of the Great Tribulation.

What is the purpose of the Tribulation? It is twofold. First, it is punishment for the whole world because of its sin. Second, it is to turn Israel to her Messiah. That is why it is called “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” *I personally believe that one of the most important principles of Bible exposition is to translate the Bible literally unless we have an indicated reason for doing otherwise. I can’t see where Israel ever became, or will become, the church. And so I don’t agree with those who speak of Israel as “the church in the OT,” or who speak of the church in the NT as “spiritual Israel.” Israel is always Israel, and the church is always the church.*

Obviously not everyone agrees with me. There are many of the Lord’s people who believe that the Lord’s coming is imminent, but that the book of the Revelation is mainly history. So when the Lord comes, they believe that there will be a judgment of the wicked and the righteous, the wicked will be sent to hell, and the righteous will enter the kingdom, and then the eternal state will come.

We all have to admit that we can’t put all of the pieces together. We see now as through a glass darkly. So let us exercise grace toward one another, and pray that the Lord will give us all greater understanding. But, as I have mentioned about election and the death of Christ, there are always problem passages we have to deal with in every doctrine. What we need to do is to take the plain teaching of Scripture as our basis, and deal with the problem passages as the Lord gives us greater understanding. But I believe that we need to be looking for the Lord momentarily. Cf. Phil. 3:20-21 where Paul said “we look for the Savior.” A. T. Robertson’s comment on that word “look” is that it “vividly pictures Paul’s eagerness for the second coming of Christ as the normal attitude of the Christian colonist whose home is heaven” (IV, 457).

Now this is a good place for us to recognize that the book of Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways since the Apostle John wrote it, and it is always a good idea when using a commentary to find out what the position of the author is.

First, there are those who treated the book as though it were an allegory, much like, we might say, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. This was especially true of earlier writers like Origen and Augustine. Those who looked at the book as an allegory were inclined to make everything symbolic. Augustine looked upon this book as a record of the total conflict between the Church and evil. But this is a very shaky way to interpret the Bible at any point, because one man will treat a symbol in one way, and others will treat the same symbol in other ways. So the meaning is largely a matter of personal opinion.

Second, there were, and are, those who consider the book of the Revelation as history. They would say that it has already been fulfilled, that it records the history of the church right up to the second coming of the Lord. But I have read to you that the Lord said that this would be a time different and worse than anything that had ever taken place, and we know that there never have been judgments on the earth like those predicted in this book where great numbers of people throughout the whole world died under the judgment of God. Any person who believes this would have to rely greatly on symbolism, as opposed to a literal interpretation of the book.

Closely connected with this was the view that this book taught church history, and it is credited by church historians as the view that has given rise to what is known as Postmillennialism – that Christ would come after the Millennium. This was especially popular during the Reformation.

And then there is the view that is called the Futurist interpretation. This is our view of the book. And it has been the basis for the pre-Tribulation rapture of the Church, and also of a literal interpretation of the one thousand year reign of Christ which immediately follows the Tribulation. So most who hold that the book of the Revelation deals with things that are yet future, are both pre-Tribulational and pre-millennial.

There is another large group of the Lord’s people who do not believe in a future millennial reign of Christ, but

they believe that Christ is reigning now, and so His coming will rapidly bring all things to a conclusion, and bring in the eternal state.

So many different views have made some people feel that they should just leave this book alone, and spend their time on books where there is less controversy. But it is a very sad thing when people make a decision like this. It is a part of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit directed John in the writing of it. We are promised blessing if we read it. And it is the only book which gives us the kind of details we find in it regarding the days ahead. And I believe that the Lord Jesus was indicating that it is a book dealing with the future when we go back to what He told the Apostle John to write. I am referring to Rev. 1:19 – that the things which John had seen, referred to chapter 1, and especially the vision of Christ, that “the things which are” referred to the seven churches and what was written to them in chapters 2 and 3. And then that the rest of the book was in the Lord’s mind when He called it “the things which shall be hereafter.” So He was speaking of future events, in many respects, terrible events in the Tribulation period, but culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. So let’s read it, and re-read it, and pray as we read it, asking the Spirit of God to give us understanding. It is a book that falls into the category of the way Paul described the Word of God in 2 Tim. 3:16 and 17. *It is a book which is specifically designed to change our lives, to make us more holy, to make us more like our Lord.*

After Peter had spoken of prophetic truth, a part of his conclusion was this which we read in 2 Peter 3:11:
11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

Now let us turn to our study of Revelation 4. I have called it:

A. The throne in heaven (4:1-5:14).

1. The worship of the one God Who sits upon the throne (4:1-11).

4:1 At this point, the word “church” and “churches” which has been so prominent in chapters 2 and 3, is not mentioned again until we get to 22:16. The word “churches” is found 1:11, and then *fifteen times* in chapters 2 and 3. So it seems that we are safe in assuming that the church, the body of Christ, is not involved. This is an argument from silence, or from the absence of the word, as in this case, which is not always a strong argument. But it may be more significant than it appears to be when we first think about it.

We can’t say that verse 1 teaches the rapture of the church, but it is interesting to notice the similarity between this verse, and what will happen when the Lord comes for the church. We are not the ones who determine when that will be, nor did John determine that suddenly a door would be opened into heaven. And when the Lord comes, a trumpet will sound, and here we have a voice like a trumpet calling him to come up to heaven. John was to view the events from heaven. Paul had a similar experience which he related in 2 Corinthians 12, and he did not know whether it was in the body or out of it. That must have been the way it was with the Apostle John – although we can probably safely assume that his body remained on the isle of Patmos, but “in spirit” he was transported to heaven. John, of course, was a part of the church, and so we have a situation which was very similar to what will happen to us when the Lord comes.

I don’t think we can make a big issue out of this, but at least there is a description here of what happened to John which could typify the rapture of the church when the Lord comes.

4:2 After hearing the invitation John said, “And immediately I was in the spirit.” Here the KJV translators used a small “s,” but in 1:10 where they have the same expression, they capitalized the word “Spirit.”

Why they made it different, we don't know. But probably the "s" should be small in both passages because it describes the supernatural condition into which a prophet was taken when he was to receive a revelation from God. And what he saw first when he was in this condition was "a throne . . . set in heaven. And he saw that someone was sitting on the throne. But as we shall see in the next verse, although he described the one on the throne, John did not go on to give us an anthropomorphic description of God. Instead it is a description of the glory of God.

4:3 We can certainly say that the One sitting on the throne was God the Father because in chapter 5, verse 7, we read that the Lamb, Who is Christ, came and took the book with the seven seals out of His right hand.

God is described in appearance like a jasper and like a sardine stone. The jasper is only mentioned in this book of the Revelation. Cf. 21:11, 18, 19. Verse 11 gives us a description of it. Reading Rev. 21:10 with it, this is what we learn:

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (Rev. 21:10-11).

This may be why some have said that the jasper stone may have been a diamond. Anyway, it was glorious, and probably recognized the moral perfection of God.

The "sardine stone," or sardius, as it is sometimes called, is a red stone, or orange-red. It is hard to assign any real significance to the stones except for the fact that they reflect the glory of God.

The green rainbow being round, not a half-circle like we usually see, would have been an evidence of the faithfulness of God, keeping His promise, but a reminder of a previous judgment in which the whole world was destroyed except for eight people.. And it was like an emerald.

4:4 Like so many things in the book of the Revelation, the identity of the twenty-four elders has been explained in a variety of ways, chief of which is that they are representative of angels, or of Israel, or of the Church, or of a combination of Israel and the Church. They sit upon *thrones*, not just "seats." Some statements in the letters to the churches seem to point to the church. Rev. 3:4 gives us the promise of our Lord when, in the letter to the church at Smyrna, the Lord promised that those who had not defiled their garments "shall walk with Me in white." See also Rev. 3:5. In Rev. 19:7-8 we are told that at the marriage of the Lamb, His wife would be dressed in white.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

So this would seem to point to the church also.

And then the crowns of gold are not the diadems of kings, but the victors crown of the overcomers. See Rev. 2:10 and 3:11 where it is also the victor's crown, the overcomers. And the fact that those in the church will have been glorified at this time, also points to the church.

The fact that there were 24 divisions in the Levitical priesthood has many commentators thinking that these elders might be representatives of Israel. Lenski said that he believed they are a combination of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. But I think that in all honestly we have to say that we really don't

know. I don't think that there is enough evidence to say so who they are. They are mentioned again in Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4. Just the word "elders" is found also in 5:5, 6, 11; 7:11, 13; 14:3. So counting the reference here in 4:4, we have a total of twelve times that the word *elders* is used in this book of the Revelation.

It seems at first by reading Rev. 5:8-10 that they might give us some help in identifying both the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders until we learn that there is a textual problem, at least in the translation. The word "us" is not in the better MSS of verse 9. In fact, in copies of the KJV which use italics to show words that are not in the original text, "*us*" was in italics. And as far back as 1901 when the original American Standard Version was translated, the verse was translated like this:

9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood *men* of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,

10 and madest them *to be* unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth (Rev 5:9-10 - ASV).

So they changed the "us" to "men" but put *men* in italics to show that it was not in the original. And so this does not help us either except to indicate that the Lord by His death did not redeem the four living creatures, nor did He redeem the twenty-four elders. So this means that they cannot be saints. Instead, it appears that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are a part of this glorious picture of the glory of God Who was sitting upon the throne.

Actually verse 9 could be translated even from the KJV more accurately like this:

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast redeemed to God out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And has made unto our God a kingdom and priests: and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

And so these verses don't help us at all in identifying the twenty-four elders or the four beasts, or living creatures. Instead, the description of the four living creatures in verses 7 and 8 of this chapter indicate that they are seraphim, angelic beings, when we compare verse 8 with the vision that Isaiah had of God, and which is recorded for us in Isaiah 6.

Since the four living creatures seem to be seraphim, I wonder if the same might not be true of the four and twenty elders. *If there were elders in Israel, and elders in the churches, might there not also be elders among the angels in heaven?* Perhaps our attention ought to be directed toward the word "elders" instead of the number "twenty-four," although numbers are very prominent in the book of the Revelation.

The Greek word for elders is πρεσβύτερος from which the Presbyterians have taken their name, indicating that their church is governed by elders, or presbyters. There were also elders in Israel. Those who were members of the Jewish Sanhedrin were called elders. And from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we know that elders were appointed by the apostles, or their co-workers, such as Timothy and Titus, to head up the work of the church. And their work had to do with the Word of God – not only teaching it, but also the application of the Word to daily life. Their responsibility also was to protect the people of God from false teaching. And they were to maintain order in the churches. The same was true of the elders in Israel. They were responsible to maintain obedience to the Law and the Levitical order which had been given by God. They failed miserably in what they were supposed to do, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Probably all of them except for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea were unregenerate men.

We know that angels were charged with the worship of God, and justifying God in the judgments which He would pour out upon the earth. That is what we see both the living creatures and the elders doing when we get into chapter 5

The “white raiment” might give us some trouble with thinking of them as angels, when “white raiment” was associated with the church, for example, in Rev. 3:4. But we should remember that when the women went to the tomb where the Lord had been buried, they were greeted by an angel who had come down from heaven, and we are told that “his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matt. 28:3). So that shows that angels have white garments.

4:5 John’s attention is turned back to God’s throne as “lightnings and thunderings and voices” proceed out of the throne. Swete said, “The thunderstorm is in Hebrew poetry a familiar symbol of the Divine power and glory” (p. 69). This was similar to what happened when the Law was given as we read in Ex. 19:16: 16 And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

Obviously the purpose was to instill in the hearts of the people of Israel the fear of the Lord. And it would have been the same for the Apostle John. Dr. Walvoord made this comment on verse 5:

The awe-inspiring scene described by John in this verse is in keeping with the majesty of the throne and the dignity of the twenty-four elders. The lightnings, thunderings, and voices which proceed from the throne are prophetic of the righteous judgment of God upon a sinful world. They are . . . a fitting preliminary to the awful judgments which are to follow in the great tribulation as God deals with the earth in righteousness (p. 108)..

But John also saw “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” This certainly is reminiscent of what we saw in 1:4 and 3:1. They are mentioned again in 5:6. Trench preferred the translation, *torches*. But one obvious point is that the Holy Spirit is light. Seven is a number which speaks of completeness, or fulness. So it would seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit was present in heaven. And that would argue that we are past the time when the Church had been removed from the earth.

The Holy Spirit is pictures as seven Spirits in 1:4 and 3:1, but not there as “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, *i.e.*, the throne of God. Walter Scott has this to say about this particular revelation of the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit here is not viewed as saving men through the reaching of the Gospel, nor in any of His varied services in the Church, but is here witnessed in moral keeping with the throne itself. Everything inconsistent with the absolute purity of the throne must be judged; hence the Spirit is here viewed in connection with the righteous character of the throne (p. 124).

And then He quoted someone who said, “Those seven [speaking of spiritual perfection] lamps of fire will search out and expose all contrary to the holy nature of God” (*Ibid.*).

This may be evidence of that the church is no longer on the earth, and that the Holy Spirit Who had ministered to the churches, had been withdrawn. In 2 Thessalonians the Apostle Paul wrote about the time when the Restraining One, as we could call the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way. This is what Paul said:

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness

(2 Thess. 2:7-12).

The NKJV translates verse 7 like this: “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He Who no restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.” When the church is removed, the work of the Holy Spirit in restraining sin will stop, which will open the way for lawlessness as never before. It will not be a good time to be upon the earth.

4:6 Notice the emphasis upon “the throne,” the throne of God, in this chapter:

- 1) In verse 2: “Behold, a throne . . . and One sat upon the throne.”
- 2) In verse 3: “A rainbow round about the throne.”
- 3) In verse 4: “And round about the throne were . . .”
- 4) In verse 5: “And out of the throne . . . and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.”
- 5) In verse 6: “And before the throne . . . and in the midst of the throne . . . and round about the throne.”
- 6) In verse 9: “To Him that sat upon the throne.”
- 7) In verse 10: “Him that sat upon the throne . . . and cast their crowns before the throne.”

So very clearly the emphasis in the chapter is upon not only the throne, but especially upon Him Who sits on the throne – showing the absolute sovereignty of God, a preparation for the judgments to come, and that He is holy and worthy of the worship of all of His creatures.

Now “before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.” Could this be a symbol of purity because of its connection with the mirrors that were built into the laver where the priests washed as they approached the presence of God? But it also could symbolize peace because it is in contrast with Isa. 57:20-21:

- 20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.
- 21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked (Isa. 57:20-21).

Lastly, we come to the “four beasts.” There seems to be agreement among those who expound the original Greek text that “beasts” should be translated, *living creatures*. They are mentioned here in 4:6, then in 4:7 (4x), 8, and 9, in 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5, 6, 7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4 – a total of nineteen times.

They are “full of eyes before and behind.” Thayer in his lexicon said that eyes are metaphorically “the faculty of knowing” (p. 210). Heb. 4:13 says, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” In Prov. 5:21, where Solomon was warning his son to stay away from the immoral woman, he reminded him that “the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings.” Prov 15:3 tells us that “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” So, while this verse is not speaking of “the eyes of the Lord,” yet they are passages which help us to understand what is meant by the fact that the four living creatures are “full of eyes before and behind.”

For these living creatures to be “full of eyes” means that they had been divinely endowed with great knowledge, a knowledge which would confirm that God was just in the judgments that He will bring upon the earth. Ottman said that this is the meaning of the statement that they were “full of eyes” – that they were “endowed with the highest order of intelligence.” Also that “they have access to the immediate presence of God; they are attendants of the throne, and take part in the administration of government; they are superhuman, but *created* beings, holding the most exalted position, and in possession of the most exalted privileges (*The Unfolding of the Ages*, p. 125).

They are mentioned in the following verses in Revelation: 4:6-9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4.

4:7 Here the four beasts are described. They represent God’s creation. Scott in his commentary made this

comment:

Hengstenberg quotes an old Jewish saying: "There are four which take the first place in this world. Man among the creatures, the eagle among birds, the ox among cattle, and the lion among the wild beasts" (p. 126).

Ottman, in his book, *The Unfolding of the Ages*, said that these living creatures are not only the representatives of creation, which is under the complete control of God, but they are also associated with Him as the executors of judgment upon it. They are created intelligences, acting in perfect harmony with the general character of God's government, and for the accomplishment of His purposes. God intends, and has intended from the beginning, to bring all things in subjection to His Son. [The living creatures] are identified with this intention, and they apply their energies to the execution of it (p. 123).

4:8 Now we learn that they are seraphim with the appearance which has just been described in verse 7. The fact that they have six wings identifies them as creatures like those in Isaiah 6.

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Again there is an emphasis on their eyes. Here it is said that they are "full of eyes within," which Thayer said means, "all around." So they have eyes "before and behind" (v. 6), and here "within," or *all around*. This must have given them a strange appearance, and yet a glorious appearance. But it indicates a genuine understanding of the character of God, His ways, and His judgments. And they are in full agreement with God in the execution of His judgments upon the earth. We may think that the wickedness of man on the earth is going unnoticed, but all is open to the eyes of the Lord, and all is open to the living creatures that are described here, and the same is true of the elders – all twenty-four of them!

This verse would indicate that one of their chief ministries is to glorify God in His holiness. It is like Isaiah 6 where it is said that the seraphim "cried to one another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3). Thus the seraphim in Isaiah 6 as well as here in Revelation 4, are prepared to justify the Lord in the judgments that are to come upon the earth. As terrible as the judgments will be, the Lord will do nothing but what people deserve. And that has been true of the judgments of the Lord throughout the history of the world.

And be sure to notice that in praising the Lord for His holiness, they "rest not day and night," *i.e.*, this is going on in heaven continuously.

The other day in reading Psalm 113 I was impressed with the first three verses which say this:

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD.

2 Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.

3 From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised (Psa. 113:1-3).

As the sun rises and sets around the world, a constant stream of praise ascends to the Lord from the hearts and lips of His people. We never praise the Lord as much as we should, but He sees to it that His praise is constantly coming from His people as well as from angelic beings. He is truly holy in all that He is, and holy in all that He does. Some see in the three times the word "holy" is repeated, a reference to the Trinity. This is the view of Franz Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 193).

Archbishop Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 332, said this in commenting upon the holiness

of God, that the emphasis is twofold. That God repels “from Himself every possibility of sin and defilement,” and that He wars “against these,” *i.e., sin and defilement*, “in every one of His creatures.”

ALL OF THIS IS TO PREPARE US FOR THE JUDGMENTS TO COME AND THAT GOD IS JUST AND HOLY IN ALL THAT HE DOES.

March 11, 2002

4:9 The beasts were continuously saying what we read about in verse 8, but then, in addition to that John saw them give God “glory and honor and thanks” as He sits on His throne, the One “who liveth for ever and ever.”

“Glory” speaks of worship, and focuses attention on God’s Person Who alone is worthy to be worshiped. “Honor” has to do with the Lord’s position over all of His creation. He alone is worthy of that position. And the living creatures in giving Him honor place themselves in humble submission under His rule and will. “Thanks” means that they recognize that God is the source of all of the blessings that they receive. And the fact that they add “who liveth for ever and ever,” means that throughout all eternity and all of the ages of time, God is worthy, totally worthy, of “glory and honor and thanks” from all of His creatures. No situation can possibly arise where any of these would be withheld from God.

The lesson is obvious for us. If creatures in heaven are constantly rendering to God “glory and honor and thanks,” then He is due that from every creature upon the earth. But how sad it is, and what evidence of the depravity of men, that the majority of people never given Him “glory and honor and thanks.” May we as His people make sure that we are not failing to give Him “glory and honor and thanks.”

4:10 When the elders see and hear what the four living creatures are doing, they likewise fall down before the One Who sits on the throne, humbling themselves before God, “and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever.” They were giving Him glory. And then they cast their crowns before Him, giving honor and acknowledging His greatness over them. But they not only were honoring the Lord with what they *did*, but they went from that to honor Him with what they said.

4:11 Notice that the living creatures gave God glory, honor, and thanks; the elders gave him glory, honor, *and power!* The difference seems to be because the elders were worshiping God because He had “created all things,” and that He had created them for His own “pleasure.” Because of sin God has largely been denied that “pleasure.” The word translated “pleasure” is in Greek τὸ θέλημα σου, *Thy will*. *God created man that man would do His will. Adam’s sin was a violation of God’s will, but the day is coming when the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. That is what gives pleasure to God. And the amazing thing is that God’s will was also designed for man’s pleasure, but man who walks in the darkness of sin, which has blinded his eyes, persists in having his own way, doing his own will, even though it makes his search for happiness totally futile and meaningless.*

But the God Who created all things by the word of His “power,” will make sure that His will is ultimately fulfilled in every detail. We see what a masterful work Satan has done in getting the people of our generation to reject any idea that God created this universe and all that is in it, and that He sovereignly rules over every creature in all of creation. But that is going to change. However, it will only be realized at this point by the exercise of terrible judgments upon the earth which we are going to learn about in the chapters which follow. The elders know this, and declare that God is worthy of all of the glory, honor, and power that ultimately will be given to Him.

March 18, 2002

Now we come to chapter 5. Let me refresh your mind on the outline.

IV. “The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter” (Rev. 4:1-22:5).

A. The throne in heaven (4:1–5:14).

1. The worship of God Who sits upon the throne (4:1-11).

And now we are ready for the second point.

B. The book with the seven seals (5:1-14).

After this in the notes I said: “The book is held in God’s right hand. Christ alone, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and as the Lamb, is worthy to open the seven seals. Then He is worshiped as God was worshiped in chapter 4.

5:1 We have seen that the emphasis in chapter 4 was on the “throne,” and, of course, upon the One Who was sitting upon that throne. Here in chapter 5 the emphasis is upon “the book,” or *the scroll*. It is mentioned eight times in the first nine verses. Only in verse 6 is it not mentioned.

But we have another emphasis in this chapter which will become increasingly important as we go on through The Revelation. In chapter 4 it was upon God sitting upon His throne. In chapter 5, standing in the midst of the twenty-four elders is One Who first is described in verse 5 as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, but in the next verse He is described as “a Lamb.” And the description in verse 6 clearly indicates that the “Lamb” is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called the “Lamb” more times than by any other title in this book of the Revelation – *twenty-eight times* – four times in chapter 5; twice in chapter 6; four times in chapter 7; once in chapter 12; twice in chapter 13; four times in chapter 14; once in chapter 15; twice in chapter 17; twice in chapter 19; four times in chapter 21; twice in chapter 22. And so we have “Lamb” twenty-eight times in eleven of the twenty-two chapters! These are very important facts.

The “book” which John saw was “in the right hand of Him that sat on the Throne.” “The right hand” signifies authority and power. And being “in” God’s right hand suggests divine control. This is the teaching of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, *i. e.*, that all judgment is under the sovereign control of God, and exercised only in accordance with divine wisdom. Nothing ever is out of God’s control. The judgments of God are always exercised in His time and in His way. When God has used nations to judge His people, and they have dared go beyond the will of God, then those nations themselves fall under the judgment of God. These are very simple truths, but it is important to have them well in mind as we start through a book such as this book of the Revelation with all of the terrible judgments that it speaks about.

The book was probably a scroll, but unlike most scrolls, it was so full that it was “written within and on the backside,” or we would say, front and back. But it was not open. Instead it was sealed, not with just one or even two seals, *but with seven seals*. And this indicated that it was to be opened one seal at a time.

5:2 After seeing the book in the right hand of God sitting upon the throne (and yet remember that John only saw God by the display of His glory), he immediately notice also one whom he called “a strong angel.” And this strong angel has “a loud voice,” a powerful voice that could be heard throughout heaven. And it is interesting to note that, although this angel was strong, he did not claim to be able to open the scroll with the seven seals. But he was concerned that someone “worthy” should be found who could open the seals.

The word “worthy” means *morally qualified, fit, one who has the right, one who is good enough*. Evidently this angel had been made aware of the fact that the opening of the seals would release some terrible judgments

upon the earth, and he was greatly concerned that it be done, not just by anyone, but one who was “worthy.” The order of the words does not mean that the book could be opened without loosening the seals, but that opening the book could only be done by loosening the seals one by one.

5:3 The Greek does not say “no man,” but simply *no one*. And so it would include angels as well as men, starting with angels and even with the saints who were then in heaven. Then the angel spoke of those who were on the earth, which would have been both men and women, young people, and children. No one, saint or sinner, could possibly qualify. Then “under the earth” usually refers to those who had died. We are not to take from this that there was a special place for the dead, but the language simply indicates that among all of the angels of heaven, and among all of the living upon the earth, and those who had lived upon the earth, no one, not a single person could be found who was *qualified*, “worthy,” to open the scroll with the seven seals. Not even the Apostle John himself was “worthy.”

5:4 At this point the Apostle John began to weep. He who had been on the receiving end of the revelation of so much truth, and who obviously was a man with a great passion for knowing God and knowing His Word, wept at the possibility that the scroll was there, and he was not going to find out what message it contained.

Let me digress for just a moment to ask what is the degree of hunger that we have to know the truth of God which we hold in our hands. Does our desire to know God, and to know Christ, and to know the Holy Spirit, and to know that truth of the Word from Genesis to Revelation have the effect upon us that Solomon said that it ought to have? Do we not only set aside time every day to read the Word in a prayerful, thoughtful, loving way after asking the Lord to enable us to understand it? And when we find that we have some spare time during the day, are we prepared to get back to the Book of books so that we can learn a little bit more? Do you search your Bible like you would look for treasures of silver and gold? We all need to read again the first three or four chapters of Proverbs, and ask ourselves if what Solomon wrote to his son about seeking wisdom, the wisdom of God – if that is descriptive of us. That apparently is how that “strong angel” felt, and how the Apostle John felt! And so the strong angel shouted hoping that someone worthy would hear him, and the Apostle John wept because no one responded.

5:5 But at that moment one of the twenty-four elders spoke up and told the Apostle John not to weep, because he knew that there was One Who was worthy. And he said that this One had “prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” And he even had His Name: “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David.”

The elder’s statement is introduced with “behold,” which indicates the supreme importance of this announcement. It had to do with “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” with one who was a descendant of David.

This mention of “the Lion” goes back to Jacob’s predictions concerning his sons and their offspring which we read about in Gen. 49, beginning with verse 8. I won’t read the whole passage, but just verses 8, 9, and 10:

8 Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be (Gen. 49:8-10).

The lion is known as the king of the beasts. Solomon had this to say about the lion, and I am reading from

Prov. 30:30: “A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any.” He is the Victor. And that brings me to the verb, “hath prevailed.” The Greek word is ἐνίκησεν, and it the aorist form of the verb, νικάω, which means *to overcome*, or *to conquer*. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Conqueror. He is the Victor. This is the word that is used in Revelation 2 and 3 when our Lord spoke of the overcomers. His victory was predicted in Genesis 3:15.

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Cf. also Rev. 3:21; also John 16:33:

33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

When we get down to Rev. 5:9 and 10 we see what the elder had in mind when he said that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed . . .” (Read Rev. 5:9-10.)

As “the Root of David,” the elder was recognizing that the Lord was not only of the tribe of Judah, but that in that tribe He was of David’s family, and thus with rights to the Throne of Israel. This title comes up again in Rev. 22:16. (Read.) See also Isa. 11:1. All of this gives a Messianic emphasis to what the elder was saying. This is in line with the emphasis of this book of the Revelation.

Our Lord Himself spoke of the place the Father had given to Him in judgment. You will find this in John 5:22-23:

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him (John 5:22-23).

So the only person in all of heaven and earth who was “morally fit” (Amplified NT) to open the seven seals was the victorious Lord Jesus Christ, with the victory that He won at the Cross. And this ought to be a source of great comfort to us. Judgment is not in the hands of any man. Many have tried to conquer the world, but no one has succeeded but our Lord, and we can certainly know He will always, under every condition, do what is right!

5:6 The Apostle John looked, as he had been told to do, and in the middle of everyone, he saw, not a Lion, but a Lamb, with the evidence that it had been killed, “as it had been slain.” “The Lamb” points to what the Lord was at His first coming; the Lion, to what He will be at His second coming.

On the Lamb, cf. John 1:29, 36; Isa 53:7; 1 Pet. 1:19.

Scott said in his commentary:

In His lion-like character He crushes every opposing force, and establishes His universal kingdom on the ruin of all opposition (p. 134).

But we know as the Lamb our Lord is portrayed as the Savior. It is important to see this because one major reason that the Lord revealed these things to the Apostle John, for him to write and for people to read, was that when people who were still in their sins would read it, they would be saved. See Rev. 22:17. So do not hesitate to encourage unbelievers to read the book. It could very well be that this book would be the instrument that the Lord would use to draw them to Christ.

March 19, 2002

“As it had been slain” – Thayer in his lexicon said that ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, a perfect passive participle from the verb σφάζω, means “to put to death with violence” (p. 609). It is used again in v. 12. The point is that the Lamb had been slain, but now He was alive again. And the perfect tense of the participle would emphasize that the results of His past work continued on into the present, and then on into the future.

The Lamb had “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.” The word for “horns” is κέρατα which means that they were the horns of an animal which would be used both for defense and offense. And so they are mentioned here as symbols of the power of the Lamb, and “seven” would add the idea of *the fulness of power*. The “eyes” speak of wisdom, and, again, the number “seven” speaks of *the fulness of wisdom*. But these are attributed to “the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” On the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Christ in His earthly ministry, cf. Luke 4:16-22a. Scott, in his commentary said that the “seven” in connection with the Holy Spirit speaks of “the plentitude of His power” and His “diversified activity” (under 1:4, p.24). Of course the Lord had all of this in Himself, but this is used of the Lord with reference to His humanity, as is the title, “the Lamb.” The Lord became a Man, while never ceasing to be God, in order to offer Himself as a Substitute for people, human beings.

5:7 At this point, the Lamb approached the throne, “and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the Throne.

We can’t make a great deal out of *the time* when this happened because we are dealing with a vision which the Apostle John had been given, but when we consider the language of verse 7, speaking of the Lamb as having been slain, but at that time living again, it would seem that *the time* indicated would be when the Lord returned to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. It was at that time that He was fully qualified to open the seven seals of the book that God had held in His right hand.

5:8 Notice here the moment when the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders “fell down before the Lamb.” It was “when He had taken the book.” Scott’s comment on this verse is worth reading. He said,

That supreme moment to which the ways of God all tend, for which creation groans, Israel yearns, and saints hope and pray, has come. The first action is the transference of the reins of government to the slain [but risen and glorified] Lamb (p. 137).

As the four living creatures and the twenty four elders “fell down before the Lamb” and prepared to worship Him as they had worshiped the One Who was on the throne, we have evidence that they firmly believed in the Deity of the Lamb. To worship the Lamb if He had not been Deity, would have been sinful.

Swete believed that only the elders had harps and bowls, but the language of verse 8 seems to indicate that both the living creatures and the elders had harps and bowls. The harps were for the accompaniment of the singing, and the bowls, which were golden, had a fragrance which was probably like incense, representing “the prayers of the saints.” This probably means “the saints” who were still on the earth. If so, they would have been, when we think of the time represented by the judgments, the prayers of suffering saints who had not yet entered into glory, but who were anticipating that moment when they would be with the Lord.

5:9 As we come to verse 9 and 10 of this chapter, we come to the change which I suggested to you from the Greek text when we were seeking to identify the four living creatures, and the twenty four elders, in chapter 4. Let me read these two verses to you again as they appear in the original American Standard Version. Tremper Longman, who is professor of OT at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, said of the New American Standard Version, that it is “the most literal translation” that we have, and therefore, “it is a highly

regarded study Bible.” The original New International Version is also recommended by Dr. Longman, but I am sure that he would warn us against the most recent revision of the NIV, so stay with the one published first in 1978. Dr. Longman’s book is entitled, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind*.

But the point in verses 9 and 10 is not that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders were worshipping Christ for having redeemed *them*, but because the Lord had a redeemed company “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” And that they were the ones who, according to verse 10 in this chapter, who had been made a kingdom of priests unto their God, and that they were the ones who would “reign on the earth.”

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders express their total agreement in the worthiness of the Lamb to “open the seals” of the scroll which the Lamb had taken out of the hand of God Who is upon His throne.

The song that they sing is called “a new song.” The word for “new” in the Greek, is *καινήν*, which means, not that the living creatures and the elders had never praise our Lord before, but there was *a new quality* to this new song because it followed the death [and resurrection] of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus the confirmation, the fulfillment, of the promises of salvation which had come down to men on the earth from the beginning of time. It can be illustrated by the fact that we can praise God and Christ and the Holy Spirit now for the prospects before us when we are finally with the Lord, *but think of the difference there will be in our singing when we are actually in heaven, with the Lord, and like the Lord, knowing that we will always be with the Lord*. That is what is indicated by “a new song.”

And Trench, in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* (p. 221) pointed out that as a secondary notion, the new, in this sense, includes praise. Even now, when we have gone through a time of trial and testing, we sing the old hymns in a new way. Our experience has given us greater confirmation of the existence of God and of His faithfulness to us, and it shows up in the way we sing.

Trench went on to point out that we have several “new” things here in this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Showing that “the new” is “commonly better than the old,” he went on to say:

Thus everything is new in the kingdom of glory, “the new Jerusalem” (Rev. 3:12; 21:2); the “new name” (Rev. 2:17; 3:12); “a new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1, cf. 2 Pet. 3:13); “all things new” (Rev. 21:5) (*Ibid.*).

“Redeemed” means, according to Vine, that God has not just delivered us from judgment, but that the Lord has redeemed us for Himself. The cost was His blood. This does not mean that we are worth what He paid, but that our condition was so wretched and so humanly impossible, that nothing short of the death of Christ could possibly have met our need.

In the song there are four terms to describe the redeemed, and them move from Jew to Gentile, and then from Jew to Gentile again. It appears on good authority that “kindred,” or *tribe*, points to Israel individually. “Tongue,” or *language* speaks of the Gentiles individually. “People” is used of Israel collectively as a nation. Finally, “nation,” includes all of the Gentiles collectively. Nations, heathen, and Gentiles are used synonymously in Scripture.

And when all of the redeemed are put together, what a host of saints they will be – none worthy of salvation, but all chosen and precious to God and to Christ!

5:10 Lit. this verse should read, “And You made them to our God a kingdom and priests.” Cf. also 1:5-6 and

20:6. So the importance of this truth is seen in the fact that it is mentioned these three times in the book. And the verb “made” emphasizes *the results of the action*. *What Christ has done for us is eternal!*

The word “kingdom” expresses what Christ is to us, our King, the One Who rules over us, the One Who is sovereign in every detail of our lives. “Priests” expresses what we are to God. Priests minister to God on behalf of people, and this is primarily a ministry of prayer, of intercession. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:5 and 9. “Reign” suggests what we will do with Him, our Savior and our King. As it is expressed in the text, the reigning is still future, and will not take place until Christ returns to the earth.

5:11 After the living creatures and the elders had completed their song, they were joined by “many angels” who stood around the throne, and around the living creatures, and around the elders. The Apostle John mentioned how many there were: “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” This means that there were so many of them that it was impossible to number them all. In Dan. 7, verses 9 and 10, we have a similar expression:

9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened (Dan. 7:9-10).

In our text these “many angels” had gathered around the throne for one purpose: to worship the Lamb! And this we have in verse 12.

5:12 In verses 9 and 10, here in verse 12, and then in verse 13 and even in verse 14, we see that the Lord is to be worshiped *with words*. They may be sung, or simply spoken as in prayer, but we bring words to the Lord to worship Him.

And notice: in verses 9 and 10 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing that in their sight the Lord Jesus is worthy, worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll. In verse 12 which we come to here, this vast, innumerable company of angels say that the Lamb is worthy. And then in verse 13, while they did not use the word “worthy,” yet their praise expresses the fact that all creatures throughout the universe join in declaring that the Lamb is worthy.

What did the angels say? That the Lord as the Lamb was worthy “to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing” – seven great and powerful words. No one but a Member of the Godhead could be exalted with such words of praise. But let us remember that “the Lamb” is there in heaven the glorified Son of God. All seven of these words are with one article, “the” (before the word “power”) which shows their oneness, and, as Swete commented, leaving “nothing wanting in the angels’ acclamation of the Lamb” (p. 83). We have considered some of them before, but what let us take just a moment to consider again what they mean. They can certainly serve as guides to us as we learn more about what it means to worship the Lord.

March 25, 2002

But first, what did the large group mentioned in verse 11 mean by saying, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive”? The same verb can be translated *to take*. This is not a question that the expositors have paid much attention to; some pass over it completely.

Let us remember that the Lord here appears as a Lamb, but as a Lamb Who has been slain, resurrected in glory, and Who has ascended back to heaven. In other words we are speaking of the incarnate Christ Who has been glorified. And the question evidently was considered in heaven, “What effect, if any, did it have upon the Son of God to become a Man?” Plus the question, “What effect, if any, did it have upon the Lord Jesus Christ to have been offered as a sacrifice for the salvation of sinners? Since it was even true that He was even “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21), did this affect His Deity so that He was no longer full God?”

Perhaps a statement that the Lord made while He was here on earth will help us to see the issue. I am referring to the words that we find in John 5:20-23, especially verses 22 and 23. This is what they tell us:

20 For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him (John 5:20-23).

The word for “judgment” in verse 22 is κρίσις, from which we get our English word, crisis. It has to do with the execute of judgment, or divine punishment for sin. The word “judgeth” in the first part of verse 22 is κρίνω. This has to do with the trial, *i.e.*, that examining of all of the facts, and the determination of what the judgment should be. Our Lord said that the Father does not do any of that, but He has given that over to His Son “that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.”

So when the Son takes the seven-sealed scroll out of the hand of the Father, and prepares to open the seals, thus bringing terrible judgments upon the earth, the myriads of angels, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders, all cry out with these words, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” Since we are talking about divine judgments, they must be righteous, *i.e.*, they must be deserved. They cannot be like the judgment of men are so often, far beyond what is deserved. So if the Father has given the Son the authority to execute judgment, this means that the Father believes that the Son will bring judgments upon the earth that are righteous judgments, the same kind of judgments that the Father would execute on men if He were doing it. And verse 11 indicates that all of those heavenly beings are in total agreement with what the Father has done in committing all judgment into the hands of His Son. God maintains His righteousness in forgiving sinners through the sacrifice of His Son, and He also maintains righteous judgment by committing the judgment of the world into the hands of His Son. And in chapter 6 that is exactly what the Son of God begins to do. This means that the incarnation and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as He bore the sins of all who would ever be saved, made no change at all in His Deity. So He was perfectly qualified to execute judgment, and we are to honor Him, the Son, in the very same way that we would if God the Father were the Judge.

So the seven words of this verse, verse 12, speak of the qualifications which the Father has bestowed upon the risen and glorified Christ, to show that He is fully qualified to do the very difficult task that the Father has given Him to do.

Now let's look at the words:

- 1) “Power” – actually “the power,” the article “the” appearing only once to unite all of these words as found in one Person, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is τὴν δύναμιν which Lenski says is “omnipotent power” (p. 210). The Lord has been given power enough to bring the greatest judgments upon the world, regardless of what they are.
- 2) “Riches” – The word is πλοῦτον. We are not to think here in terms of money, although all things belong to

our Lord, but it is used here to indicate that what the Lord has He has in an abundant supply. His riches are inexhaustible. The Bible speaks of “the riches of His grace” in Eph. 1:7, and also in 2:7. Eph. 3:16 and Phil. 4:19 speak of “the riches of His glory.” Rom. 2:4 tells of “the riches of His goodness.” Rom. 11:33 tells us of the riches of His wisdom and His knowledge.” All of this probably is an indication that even in judgment the Lord remembers His mercy, and that as long as there is life, there is hope of finding salvation in Christ.

- 3) “Wisdom” – σοφίαν, supreme intelligence, always doing the right thing at the right time and in the right way. Our Lord is never mistaken in His judgments. In 1 Cor. 1:24 Christ is called, “the power of God (see 1 above), and the wisdom of God.” He is too wise ever to be deceived, too wise ever to make a mistake.
- 4) “Strength” – a different word from 1). Here it is ἰσχὺν. In contrast with 1) that is power exercised; this is power in reserve, a part of the riches of our Savior. We have many examples in Scripture of His power, such as in creating the universe, or in raising the dead, etc., but no one has ever seen the full display of the power of the Members of the Godhead. It is both awesome and ominous.
- 5) “Honor” – τιμῆν, which means that God has placed the highest honor upon Him that all should hold Him in the same esteem that they do God. Some day the honor of Christ will be publicly displayed when every knee bows and every tongue confesses “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).
- 6) “Glory” – δόξαν. This means that the Son of God is to be worshiped as God.
- 7) “Blessing” – εὐλογίαν. God has declared that His Son will be blessed in all that He does, and for this all men are to render the praises continuously to Him.

Lenski believed that these seven words correspond to the seven seals which were to be opened promptly. As I mentioned before, Swete called these “seven attributes [which] for a heptad [sevenfold] of praise which leaves nothing lacking in the Angels’ acclamation of the Lamb” (p. 83).

5:13 It would have been impossible to count the number of creatures mentioned in verse 11, and we have to say the same about the group mentioned in this verse. Here heaven and earth are united in their acclamation of the Son of God. And they use the same words except for one, and a total of four instead of the seven which we had in verse 12. The one different word is the word that is translated “power.” Here it is κράτος, a word which is used mainly in the NT for God, and which emphasizes the display of His power.

But notice that here the worship is directed both to the One sitting upon the throne which is God the Father, and also to the Lamb. Robertson reminded his readers that this passage which includes “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea,” reminds us of the passage in Rom. 8:18-25 which says:

- 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
- 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.
- 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,
- 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.
- 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.
- 24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?
- 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it (Rom. 8:18-25).

What we have here in Rev. 5 is not the fulfillment of Rom. 8, but it certainly anticipates that day when even creation itself will share in the glorification of the children of God.

5:14 The four living creatures express their hearty and full agreement with all that had just taken place, and express their agreement with an, “Amen.” Lenski pointed out that “said” that appears here in verse 14 is an iterative imperfect, and so needs to be translated, *kept saying*. So perhaps those living creatures punctuated the singing and praising with repeated *Amens*! He imagined it would have been like the singing of Isaiah 9:6 in Handel’s *Messiah* where suddenly the orchestra and chorus boom out with “WONDERFUL! -- COUNSELLOR! -- THE MIGHTY GOD! -- THE EVERLASTING FATHER! -- THE PRINCE OF PEACE!”

And it would seem that the twenty-four elders, in contrast with all that had gone on, in silence fall down “and worship and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever.”

Matthew Henry concluded his comments on this chapter by summarizing what we have seen under two points:

- (1.) He is worthy of that office and that authority which require the greatest power and wisdom, the greatest fund, all excellency, to discharge them aright; and,
- (2.) He is worthy of all honour, and glory, and blessing, because he is sufficient for the office and faithful in it.

How important it is for us to learn how to worship, and to delight in worshiping our God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously this is what we are going to be doing a great deal of when we get to heaven, and so we need to be doing it now. The Father seeks worshipers as our Lord Jesus said, but only those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Cf. John 4:23, 24.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
March 26, 2002

Chapters 6-9

We have arrived at that part of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ which gives us the prophecies of the end times. And it is introduced by what God has been pleased to reveal about the period known as The Great Tribulation. This covers most of the book – from the beginning of chapter 6 to the end of chapter 18. It was the Lord who called it “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). Before Him, some of the OT prophets wrote about it as “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11). Jeremiah also referred to it as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). Daniel described it as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” (Dan. 12:1). And the Lord had to be speaking of the same period of time because after calling it “great tribulation,” He added, “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21). So it will be the worst period of judgment that the world has ever seen, or ever will see. Only hell itself will be worse. And then He added:

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened (Matt. 24:22).

Earlier in that same twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, the Lord indicated that this was the time that Daniel was speaking about when in Daniel 12:11 he spoke of “the abomination of desolation.” See the Lord’s statement in Matthew 24:15.

This is all related, of course, to the seventy weeks which we read about in the latter part of Daniel 9, usually taken to mean *seventy weeks of years*. The actual passage is Daniel 9:24-27. From the last verse, verse 27, we take it that the Antichrist will make a covenant with the people for one week, one week of years, or seven years, but halfway through that time he will break his covenant with them, and the last part of that week, or for three and one half years, will be the time of Great Tribulation. But we will see more about that as we get farther into the book of the Revelation.

In chapters 4 and 5 the Spirit of God through the writings of the Apostle John has been preparing us for this terrible time of judgment. God is a righteous God, righteous in all that He is, and righteous in all that He does. He only saves on the basis of His righteousness. The Apostle Paul made that very clear in Romans 3:25-26 where, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, he said,

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:25-26).

In like manner when the Apostle Paul was preaching on Mars’ Hill in Athens, Greece, he found that the Greeks had an altar on which was inscribed the words, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” Paul took that as an opportunity to preach the Gospel to them. We have his words in Acts 17:22-31. (Read.) Notice those words in verse 31 that “He [God] hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained.” That Man is the Lord Jesus Christ Whom, as we have learned, God has ordained to be the Judge. And so, just as God is always righteous in salvation, so He is always righteous in judgment. God never judges in an erratic, inconsistent, fickle (capricious) way, but His righteousness is always evident in his judgments. That was true in His judgment of Adam and Eve. That was true in His judgment of the world in the days of Noah. That was true of His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. That was true of His judgment of Egypt in the days of Moses. That was true of His judgment of the Canaanite nations. *That is always true of God’s judgments, and it always will be. And that is the reason for chapters 4 and 5 here in the book of the Revelation. God’s judgments often are terrible beyond description, but when you learn about the people that He judges, even in the most severe way, you see that God did not do a single thing which the people did not*

deserve!

So we need to remember this as we go through these chapters dealing with a future time of judgment which is going to be so bad that, unless the Lord would have shortened it, the whole world and everyone and everything in it would have been destroyed, God's righteousness remains untarnished in any way!

We always need to remember that God is righteous, and that He is utterly incapable of working in any way except in a totally righteous manner. This is what we are told in Psa. 145:17, "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." This truth is also evident in Daniel's great prayer which is found in Daniel 9. Listen to what he said: *cf. Psa. 9:8.*

13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

14 Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

15 And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

16 O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake (Dan. 9:13-17).

When Abraham was praying for Lot and his family who were living in Sodom after he learned that Sodom and Gomorrah were marked out for the judgment of God, his claim upon God was expressed in his question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25b).

In the song that Moses taught the children of Israel to sing, we find this verse in which he was speaking of their God:

4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he (Deut. 32:4).

We have a hymn in our hymnal which declares this great truth. It is #94, and the first verse reads like this:

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Holy His will abideth;
I will be still whate'er He doth,
And follow where He guideth:
He is my God; Though dark the road,
He holds me that I shall not fall:
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.

It is impossible to overemphasize this truth, and it is one of the greatest of all sins to deny it, or even to ignore it. We may not understand all that God does, but it is most comforting for us as believers to know that whatever He does is right! So remember this as we come to the terrible judgments that are ahead in this book. And we need to carry this truth with us day by day as we walk in fellowship with our Lord.

As we get started in this section dealing with The Great Tribulation, let me point out one important feature about the judgments in the book. There are three series of judgments which follow one after another. (Check with the outline.) There are seven seal judgments (6:1-17; 8:1-6), then seven trumpet judgments (8:7-9:21;

11:15-19), and finally seven bowl judgments (15:1-12, 17-21).

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My position on the Great Tribulation is that the Church will be removed before that time. No mention of the Church is made from Rev. 4 throughout this section except for the reference to the marriage of the Lamb in Rev. 19:7-8, and finally in Rev. 22:16. And, as I have mentioned before, the purpose of the Great Tribulation is twofold: 1) Judgment upon the whole world for its sin, and 2) judgment upon Israel following which the elect of the nation will turn to the Lord, as indicated in Zech. 12:9-13:1.

Anyone who teaches the book of the Revelation has to seek to put the pieces together, and to harmonize it with prophecy which has been recorded earlier in the Bible. No one has the complete answer, but we all seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and trust that we will be among those who are, according to 2 Tim. 2:15, "rightly dividing the Word of truth." Much of the difference that exists among expositors is due to the extent that the book is interpreted symbolically, or literally, or a combination of both. My opinion is that we take words literally unless there is some indication that the Holy Spirit was using symbols, as He does often in this book.

As we approach chapter 6, I would like to read a paragraph to you from Dr. John Walvoord's commentary on this book of prophecy in which he draws some very significant parallels between Rev. 6 and Matt. 24 where the Lord was obviously speaking about the Great Tribulation. This is what he had to say:

There is a remarkable similarity between the progress of chapter 6 as a whole and the description given by our Lord of the end of the age in Matthew 24:4-31. In both passages the order is **(1)** war (Matt. 24:6-7; Rev. 6:3-4), **(2)** famine (Matt. 24:7; Rev. 6:5-6), **(3)** death (Matt. 24:7-9; Rev. 6:7-8), **(4)** martyrdom (Matt. 24:9-10; Rev. 6:9-11), **(5)** the sun darkened, the moon darkened, and the stars following (Rev. 24:29; Rev. 6:12-14), **(6)** a time of divine judgment (Matt. 24:32-25:26; Rev. 6:15-17).

Cf. p. 123. And then Dr. Walvoord added this important word:

The picture before us, in a word, is God's revelation of the dramatic and terrible judgment which will climax the present age. This constitutes a warning to those who are living carelessly in unbelief to beware lest this age engulf them. The prophecy of the end of the age is a spur to Christians to snatch souls as brands from the burning and thus prepare them for the coming of the Lord [for His church] (*Ibid.*).

In our outline we are in:

IV. "The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter (4:1-22:5).

We have just completed:

A. The throne in heaven (4:1-5:14).

Now we are ready for:

B. The Great Tribulation (6:1-18:24).

And the first point is:

1. The Seven Seal Judgments (6:1-17; 8:1-6).

In chapter 7 we have a parenthesis, and then return in chapter 8 to the last of the seven seal judgments which leads to the next series of judgments, the seven trumpets. For me this settles the question as to whether or not the three series of judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) are simultaneous or consecutive. They definitely are consecutive. The Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, breaks the seals which results in judgments upon the earth.

a. The first seal (6:1-2).

The first four seals form a series because in each one, one of the four living creatures said to the Apostle John, "Come and see." Preceding this word from the living creature, it thundered. John first heard, and then he saw.

From the details given in these two verses, the emphasis seems to be, not upon who this rider is, but upon what he does. There have been many guesses as to who he might be (including our Lord), but all are guesses. It is very unlikely that it is our Lord, but it may well be one who appears to be the Lord. When the Lord comes in His glory, there will be peace, not war. And the judgments which follow are not characteristic of what will take place when the Lord comes.

It was customary for a victorious king to ride upon a white horse. So this rider is a victor. And he has a bow, so he is a warrior. The crown is *στέφανος*, which usually means one who is victorious in the games, but here it probably suggests royalty. And yet the fact that it "was given unto him" suggests that he may have gained his position by some other means than by succession in a royal family. But his whole purpose was to make war, and to wage it victoriously.

Man has always hoped that sometime there would be a "war to end all wars." But history has shown otherwise. Some say that there never has been any period in human history where there has not been a war going on someplace in the world – and usually many wars! "Wars and rumors of wars" will make the end times. And this is always a time of suffering. In past years it was usually those who were in the armies of the nations that were in the greatest danger, but in modern times the civilian population has suffered greatly in times of war. So conditions are not getting better, but worse! And it is war that will characterize the beginning of the Tribulation period. The word "behold" seems to suggest how startled the Apostle John was by what he saw.

b. The second seal (6:3-4).

The Lord opened the second seal, and the second living creature said to John, "Come and see." This time the rider was on a red horse. There may be some connection between the color of the horse and the blood that was shed as peace was taken from the earth.

Here again we have a theme, "peace," which has been the desire of all of the nations of the earth, but here we have a statement similar to what was said about the crown of the rider upon the white horse, only here the rider on the red horse had "power . . . given to him to take peace from the earth, and . . ." The word "power" is not in the Greek text, but it was added because for him to take peace from the earth would require a certain amount of power. And the expression suggests, too, that prior to this there would have been a time of relative peace. And this fits in with the idea that the first three and a half years of the seventieth week of Daniel will be more peaceful than not, but it is not a lasting peace. In fact, the Tribulation period will not even have the appearance of peace. People will resort to killing each other.

The Apostle Paul was writing about this time in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians, and this is what he had to say:

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon

a woman with child; and they shall not escape (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

In contrast with this, and also as further confirmation of what eventually is going to take place, are the words of Isaiah in Isa. 57:19-21:

19 I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

During the Great Tribulation the world will experience the result of its rejection of God and of Christ. There can be no peace for this world as long as it is alienated from the living God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

To this rider upon the red horse “was given to him a great sword.” All of these expressions about what is “given” to these riders, are indications of the sovereignty of God. As wicked as men get, and as terrible as the situations on the earth get, there never get out of God’s control. But on the other hand, He is behind all of the judgments and difficult situations that take place.

c. The third seal (6:5-6).

The Lord opens the third seal which brings another kind of judgment upon the earth. The third living creature tells John to “come and see.” And he does, even though it must have been very, very difficult for him.

This time he sees a black horse. In the hand of the rider there was “a pair of balances.” “Black” has always been a symbol of grief and mourning. In the Lamentations of Jeremiah we have this statement:

7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.

9 We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.

10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine (Lam. 5:7-10).

In Jer. 4:27-28 we have the same emphasis:

27 For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end.

28 For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.

Jude described hell as “the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 13).

We are talking here about famine. The two staples of life in Bible times were wheat and barley, barley for the poor and for the slaves. Scott gives this word of explanation:

Usually eight measures of . . . what could be bought for a penny [a denarius, a day’s wages for a soldier or a working man], but here only one, just barely sufficient, and no more, to sustain life. But what about the numbers of aged people, women and children unable to work? If the denarius can only procure the necessary food for one, what about multitudes who through infirmity or other incapacity are unable to work! Must starvation be their bitter experience, and death anticipated as a happy release from the agonies of hunger? (p. 150).

“The oil and the wine” were not to be hurt. Commentators deal with this as the luxuries which the rich enjoy. It is often the case that those well-to-do escape the early ravages of famine, but when we get down to the sixth seal we will find that everyone is included. If any are spared, it is a warning that it is just a matter of time until everyone suffers equally. But this would also give the rich the opportunity to share what they have with the masses of people who have nothing.

Let us remember at this point that it is the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is opening the seals. He is admin-

istering judgment. That which the riders on each of the horses do, they do because it is “given” to them to do it. And that word “given” has to be traceable to the Lamb. But in spite of all of the suffering which is caused by the opening of the seals, the Lord continues to open the them. And chapters 4 and 5 have established that He does nothing but in absolute righteousness.

d. The fourth seal (6:7-8).

With the opening of the fourth seal, the fourth living creature says, “Come and see.” And John sees a pale horse and its rider. And here we are given the name of the rider. His name was death. And behind him came Hell. Hell is Hades, and Hades is the place of the dead. The Lord taught about Hades (Luke 16:23) in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man went to Hades, but not Lazarus, and so this seems to indicate that Hades is the place of the wicked dead. The Bible is not clear about OT saints, but we know that for believers, “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). It would seem that this fourth seal has to do with unbelievers who will die since the next seal deals with believers. We can’t be too dogmatic on this point.

But the tragedy of this is that one fourth of the world’s population will die close to the beginning of this terrible time of suffering and judgment. Some will die by the sword. Some will die of starvation. Some will die of natural causes, but this will be far beyond what normally takes place, and many will die of wild beasts. The beasts will be especially vicious because of the famine that has been upon the earth. Again notice that this is by delegated power. And the death at the opening of the fourth seal must be in addition to all of the deaths that will take place after the opening of the first three seals.

e. The fifth seal (6:9-11).

6:9 No living creature will speak when this seal is opened. John is not told to come and see, but he sees what is taking place. In some supernatural way he is able to see “the souls of them that were slain.” They were martyrs because they had been killed “for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.” These words are reminiscent of Rev. 1:2 and 9, telling us what John’s ministry was, and why he had been exiled to Patmos. See also Rev. 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4. Swete said,
If the two causes of martyrdom are to be sharply distinguished, as the repeated *διὰ* seems to indicate, the first will be the martyr’s confession of the One Living and True God, as against polytheism and Caesarism, and the second their witness to Jesus Christ (p. 90).

Evidently the reason that they are spoken of as being “under the altar” was because the blood of the sacrificial animals was spilled around the altar of burnt offering, or “at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering.. Cf. Ex. 29:12; Lev. 4:7. Their blood is mentioned in verse 10.

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6:10 The Apostle John heard the cry of those who had been slain. Martyrdom has always been the lot of many of the Lord’s people, especially in times when the Gospel has been under special attack from its enemies. But the words seem to imply that those who persecuted and killed them are still living. And so this would make them martyrs of the Tribulation period. But like OT saints who frequently cried out to God for Him to vindicate Himself, His holiness and His truth (or the word here probably stands for *faithfulness*), these saints were jealous for the glory of God. It was for Him that they had been put to death, and so it was for His glory that they were still concerned.

We are reminded by the words of the martyr's, "How long," that God's ways and the time in which He works, are different from ours. But in His own time and way, He has, and He will, answer the cry of his people. But in their cry is not only the belief, but the assurance, that God does, and will judge, the wicked.

"How long" is an expression that we meet several times in the OT, especially in what are called *the imprecatory Psalms* because they are calling upon God to judge the wicked. The whole book of the Revelation surely indicates that wickedness will not only continue to the end of time, but it will appear that it is prevailing. We read in the previous verse that these people were "slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held." Even today we see increasing evidence of opposition to the Gospel message which is not only that all people need to be saved, but that there is only one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died to save sinners from their sins.

Instances of the cry, "How long . . . ," are found in Psa. 13:1-2, which is a Psalm of David:

1 How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

In Psalm 35 we find David crying out to God against those whom he had befriended in their times of trouble, but when he was in trouble, they turned against him. And so this is what he said to the Lord:

15 But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not:

16 With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.

17 Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions (Psa. 35:15-17).

It may seem at times as though the enemies of the Lord and of His people, are always going to have their way, yet the Word assures us in many passages that ultimately the enemies of the Lord will be brought down under the judgment of God.

In this passage it is important to notice that, although these people of God have been martyred, yet in the words of their cry to God they still declare, in spite of all that they have experienced, that God is "holy and true," or faithful.

6:11 "White robes" are given to these saints, indicating that they are really the victorious ones. It often seems that the saints, and even our Lord Jesus Christ Who died at the hands of His enemies, were the defeated ones, but this gift to those who had been martyred indicates that they are the victors even though they had been killed. There never was and never will be a greater Victor than our Lord Jesus Christ when He died on Calvary's Cross. Satan's doom was sealed. The people of God were delivered from sin – its penalty, its power, and eventually from its very presence in their lives. And so the victory of these saints has been declared as they await their own glory and the defeat of their enemies.

These saints are also told what appears to us to be a strange reason for the delay of God's judgment. It was because there were others who were to die as they had died. For the Lord's people to face death, and to die, has often been used by the Spirit of God to bring more people to the Lord than have been won by those saints during their lifetimes. This verse reminds us again that God's thoughts and God's ways are very different, but infinitely better, than ours are.

And so the Lord was not saying that He would not vindicate His holiness against the great sinfulness of men, nor that He would not vindicate His faithfulness against His apparent lack of concern for His people, but that

He would wait only “for a little season.” By this the saints were to look ahead to what the Lord would do until He would return, and at the time of His return.

John MacArthur said about this verse:

The world is not too enlightened, humane, civilized, educated or sophisticated to avoid repeating the atrocities of the past. In fact, the atrocities of the Great Tribulation will far exceed any that have gone before. With God’s supernatural restraint on sin removed and the forces of hell running rampant, the slaughter of that time will be without precedent in human history. But out of those dark and evil days will come thousands who sealed their testimony for the Word of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ with their own blood (Vol. I, p. 197).

f. The sixth seal (6:12-17).

6:12 In verses 12, 13, and 14 we see how all of creation is affected by the mighty power of God, and all would be indications of the awesome glory of God. And one significant thing about the judgment of the sixth seal is that men from all walks of life will be forced to admit that these judgments are from the Lord. In our day it seems that when there is not enough rain for farmers to grow their crops, or there is a terrible earthquake in some part of the world, or people are killed by floods, hurricanes, and the like, that people are inclined to think of it as just one of those unpredictable events of nature. But in the Great Tribulation they will know that God is working in judgment, and yet rather than repent, they will call for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them, as we see in verse 16 of this chapter – evidently a reference to “great earthquake” that is mentioned with the opening of this sixth seal.

People do not usually stop to think of what it would mean to them if the sun became black and the moon suddenly appeared to be blood-red. All of this is initiated by “a great earthquake,” and it may be called “great” because it will be worldwide. But this is not all that is going to take place. See how this disruption in nature itself continues in verse 13.

For the sun to become “black as sackcloth of hair,” *i.e.*, *goat’s hair*, meant that the sun was in mourning. The prophet Joel spoke of this day as we read in Joel 2:30 and 31:

30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

6:13 The stars fall to the earth. And they are likened to a fig tree dropping its fruit when it is “shaken by a mighty wind.”

The words for “the stars” are οἱ ἀστέρες. “Stars” is a good translation, but it is also the word from which we get our word, *asteroids*, which can refer to heavenly bodies of various sizes. It also can mean *comets*. The idea is that fiery particles will be flying through the air, and landing on the earth. This would be most frightening to anyone living on the earth. And this is how the reference to the fig tree applies. All of this is completely unexpected and seemingly out of control. It does not take a lot for man to become terrified by situations which he cannot control.

6:14 Even the heavens are rolled together like a scroll, and every mountain and island will be moved out of its place.

There is a passage in Isaiah’s prophecy which speaks of this very thing:

4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.
5 For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment (Isa. 34:4-5).

“The heaven departed” means, as it is translated in the NASB, that “the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up.” This, too, would be very frightening. MacArthur says that “God will strike a blow at the domain of Satan, ‘the prince of the power of the air’” (*Op. cit.*, p. 206).

But not only is the sky affected, but the earth also. “Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” And Henry Morris, in his book, *The Revelation Record*, said,

Some such phenomenon may actually be triggered under this judgment of the sixth seal, dwarfing the damage occasioned by all the might earthquakes of the past (p. 123).

Scott takes the expressions in verses 12 through 14 as symbolic of what the Lord will do with nations great and small, and even of ecclesiastical powers. But such fanciful interpretations are not necessary. The expositor who first said, “When commonsense makes good sense, seek no other sense,” was stating a very important principle in the interpretation of the Word of God. The Lord spoke of what would happen to the sun, moon, and stars, and that is exactly how we should take these verses. What we need to consider is the panic and great fear that such disruptions in nature would cause among the people of the earth. The verses which follow confirm the fact that as we read of the effect of this “great earthquake” upon people, great and small, on the earth. Literally there is no one at any place on the face of the earth who will not experience the terrorizing effect that these judgments in nature. When commentators make allegories out of that which makes sense when taken literally, their expositions can become very bizarre and impossible to substantiate from Scripture.

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What we are told here in verses 15 through 17 certainly support a literal interpretation of the preceding verse.

6:15 There are seven different stations of life mentioned in this verse as having been affected in a most devastating way by the judgments when the first six seals have been opened, and they cover every human being on the face of the earth!

1) “The kings of the earth” – Swete said that these are “heads of state hostile to Christ” (p. 94). This seems to be an indication that the nations of the earth at the time of the Great Tribulation will be anti-God and anti-Christ. And we certainly see that such trend is already present in the world. We have a President who claims to be a Christian, who believes in prayer, and who has a keen sense of right and wrong. But how many other leaders are there in government who feel the same way? As the saying goes, they are as scarce as hens’ teeth. We certainly don’t have them in Oregon.

Leaders of governments feel that they are in charge, but one thing that the Great Tribulation is going to do is to make them feel that they would be better off dead than alive. David’s prayer at the end of Psalm 9 is going to be answered at last:

19 Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight.

20 Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah (Psa. 9: 19-20).

Remember also the words of Psalm 2:

1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,
- 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
- 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
- 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.
- 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (Psa. 2:1-6).

So the Lord is going to deal with the proud, self-sufficient, and powerful kings of the earth, showing them that they are no match for God even though they might stand together in their godlessness.

- 2) “The great men” – οἱ μεγιστᾶνες. These are the chief men of the cities, mayors and those associated with them. This is the word used for Herod’s lords in Mark 6:21. It would refer to our President’s cabinet.
- 3) “The rich men” – those who control the business of the world. They are those who are inclined to think that money is everything. Twice Solomon said, “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city” (10:15; 18:11), and in the latter verse he added, “and as an high wall in his conceit.” “Conceit” means that *this is the way he wants to be known, this is the picture that he wants people to have of him*. “Conceit” is a good translation because usually pride goes with wealth.
- 4) “The chief captains” – lit., the commander of a thousand soldiers. And so this would represent the military leaders of a nation. But here it is of all the nations, noted for bravery and their accomplishments in times of war. In many ways they represent the strength and security of a nation.
- 5) “The mighty men” – These are men who make a lot of noise about what they can do, the influence they have on others, the men who are able to get things done.
- 6) “Every bondman” – the familiar word for a bond-servant.
- 7) “Every free man” – the opposite of a slave, and it includes women as well as men.

With these last two we have all of humanity included. There will be no exceptions. Regardless of one’s position in life, they will seek to hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains because they will fear the fate of the one fourth of the population that was destroyed when the fourth seal was opened.

6:16 There is no calling out to God in repentance, but, even though they recognize that these judgments are evidences of judgment from Him Who sits on the throne, Almighty God, and “the wrath of the Lamb.” Their object is to have some place to hide from Him. What an indication of the depravity of man!

Notice a similar situation at the sounding of the sixth trumpet in chapter 9. We are told in 9:18 that the third part of the men were killed, but then read 9:20 and 21. (Read.) We are inclined to feel that great judgments upon the earth will bring about great repentance, many people turning to the Lord. But such is not the case.

We see the same in Rev. 16:10 and 11 when he pours out his bowl upon the throne of the beast. (Read the verses to see what the reaction will be – again, not repentance, but people will blaspheme God, which means that they will rail on Him, revile Him, speak evil of Him. This would be taking the Lord’s Name in vain.

What confirmation all of this is that, as our Lord said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . .” (John 6:44). Let us be much in prayer in these days that the Holy Spirit will move upon

our hearts, and that He will also move upon the hearts of those we know and love and pray for who are content to live without Christ.

“The wrath of the Lamb.” That is a very unusual phrase, isn’t it? This is the same Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. It is only through the precious blood of this Lamb that anyone can possibly escape the horrors of eternal judgment. Some would have us think that God is never angry, and that wrath is not a part of the Lamb’s character.

Anger is only attributed to our Lord once in the Gospels. That was when He was in the synagogue in Capernaum, and there was a man there with a withered hand. It was on a Sabbath Day, and some of the Pharisees were there watching Him to see if he would heal that withered hand. The Lord knew what they were thinking. He knew the hardness, or the blindness, of their hearts. And just before he healed the man, Mark tells us that “He had looked round about on them, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5).

But the Lord manifested anger the two times that He drove the money changers out of the temple. Only hell itself will surpass the Great Tribulation as exhibiting the wrath of God and of the Lamb. And these passages should have an awakening effect upon all of us about displeasing the Lord, but especially upon people who continue on in their sin. Again, from these passages you can see why it is a good thing to get people reading this book. Under the blessing of the Lord it can be the means of bringing people to trust in Christ.

6:17 “The great day of His wrath” is another title for The Great Tribulation. And here we read that it “is come.” We read about future events in Scripture, and people have been reading about them for approximately 2,000 years since the NT was completed. We have read about the coming of the Lord when we will be caught up to meet Him in the air. All of those events which are yet future seem like they will never come, *but they will!!!* And we need to be ready.

Listen to what the prophet Zephaniah had to say about the day of the Lord’s wrath. I am reading from Zeph. 1: 14-18:

14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land (Zeph. 1:14-18).

As we have already learned this day will be the worst period of time the world has ever experienced, but, as terrible as it will be, it will not begin to compare with the judgment of hell.

April 22, 2002

Now we move on to chapter 7 which is a parenthesis until we have the opening of the seventh seal at the beginning of chapter 8. In the outline it is listed like this:

Parenthesis:

- (1) The redeemed of Israel who are spared from death during the Great Tribulation – the 144,000 (7:1-8).

- (2) A heavenly vision of the saints who will be martyred during the Great Tribulation. Both Jews and Gentiles are included in this number (7:9-17).

7:1 Chapter 6 has described the beginning of the judgments of the Great Tribulation, and it concluded with the reaction of the great masses of people to these initial judgments. Chapter 7 introduces some very important truth with regard to the Great Tribulation. It answers the question, Will people be saved during the Great Tribulation? The answer is, Yes. There will be many who will be saved, but many also will die for their faith. The first of chapter 7 tells us that some will be sovereignly spared; the latter part of the chapter has to do with those who will be martyred. Verses 9-11 of chapter 6 spoke of these. We are not to think that these are all that will be spared, or that these are all that will be martyred, but it simply indicates some will die, and others will be spared from death. They probably will not be a part of the church, the body of Christ (because nothing is said here that they will be), but they will share in the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. But their salvation is just like salvation now, and as salvation always has been: through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 7 begins, “And after these things . . .” And so we are to understand that this was shown to the Apostle John after the revelation of the judgments of chapter 6. But it does not mean that this is the time when the 144,000 were sealed, nor when the saints of the latter part of the chapter were martyred, but simply that this is when John was informed that during the Tribulation period some will be saved, and spared; others will be saved who will die for their faith in Christ. But it does seem that after the events which followed the opening of the sixth seal, there will be a short period when there will be no judgments, but only to be followed by worse judgments when the seventh seal is opened.

This scene gives us added information on the ministry of angels.

John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. Now we know that the earth does not have corners, but this would be a figure of speech indicating that they were standing where they could control “the wind” on every part of the earth. Note that this gives us some added information about what angels do.

The idea that what is said here includes the whole earth is also brought out by the statement that the angels were holding “the four winds of the earth,” *i.e., north, south, east, and west*, and by the added statement that “the wind should not blow on the earth, *i.e., the dry land, or the sea, nor on any tree.*” The entire surface of the earth is either dry land or sea, and trees always suffer the most damage when there is a hurricane or a tornado. This must have been a very ominous silence especially after what had taken place with the opening of the sixth seal! Cf. 6:12-13, esp. v.13b.

7:2 Next John saw another angel, a fifth angel, “ascending from the east, and he had “the seal of the living God.”

The word for “seal” here is the same word that was used in chapter 6 for each of the six seals. But the meaning of the word in these two chapters is different. The seals of chapter 6 are that which closes something permanently or until they were to be opened. The seal here in chapter 7 is that which confirms ownership or that which is genuinely what it appears to be. The verb from which this word comes is used in Eph. 1:13 which tells us that “after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” There it carries both meaning which I have mentioned. We are secure in Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives identifies us as belonging to Christ and to God.

You will remember that Cain was protected by “a mark” upon him so that no one would be able to kill him.

Also the stone at the grave of our Lord was sealed by the chief priests and the Pharisees, to keep the disciples from stealing His body, and then saying that He was alive. But any seal of man is nothing before the sovereign power of the living God.

In our text here “the seal of the living God” means that the angel had come to identify the 144,000 as belonging to the Lord, and to secure them from death. This angel was over the four angels in rank, apparently, and told the four angels not to hurt the earth nor the sea which usually they had the authority to do.

As we go on in this book we will learn in 14:18 of “another angel . . . which had power over fire.” And then in 16:5 we read of “the angel of the waters.” So quite evidently different angels have different assignments on the earth. And all of the angels operate under the sovereign command and control of God. It would be wonderful if there were the same obedience among believers on earth that there is among the angels.

Note that God is called in this verse, “the living God.” Cf. also 10:6; 15:7. The protection granted to 144,000 of His people will be evidence that He is truly a living God, or better, the living God.

7:3 Here we have the message of angel which came according to verse 2. (Read.)

The judgment was not called off, but just delayed until the 144,000 could be sealed. The angels were told to “hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees.” The word “hurt” is used of death in 2:11. But notice also the word “till.” It eventually would be hurt, and hurt badly, but not at that moment.

Those who were to be sealed are called here “the servants of our God.” So they are believers, saved people. It would interesting to know how many Jewish people there are today who are truly “servants of our God.”

“In their foreheads” – the most conspicuous part of a person’s body where it can be clearly seen. In the NT the forehead is mentioned only in the book of the Revelation, and it is in these verses: 7:3; 9:4; 13:16; 14:9; 17:5; 20:4; 22:4. There are a number of references to the forehead in the OT.

7:4 The number given here is “an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Fausset, who is one of the writers in the JFB commentary, sometimes uses “the church” and Israel interchangeably, said of this verse: “Here, where the several names of the tribes are specified, these can only have the literal meaning” (VI, 679).

This is a point of major importance in the interpretation of Scripture. The church is never referred to as having twelve tribes, nor is Israel ever called the church.

It is obvious from this verse that the object of the Devil and of the nations of the earth, is to destroy Israel completely. That is the objective of the Moslem world now – and to destroy America because we are the major supporters of Israel. The nation is indeed headed for serious trouble in the days ahead, but God will preserve His people although it may be that for a time Israel *as a nation* will not exist. Instead, they will be scattered among all of the nations of the earth.

In the following four verses twelve of the tribes of Israel are mentioned:

7:5 Judah, Reuben, Gad.

7:6 Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh.

7:7 Simeon, Levi, Isaachar.

7:8 Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin.

We note that Dan is missing, and that Joseph is mentioned in place of Ephraim. It would seem that Ephraim would carry the name of Joseph, as in the OT Ephraim is sometimes used in place of Israel, because Ephraim was given the greater blessing than his brother Manasseh even though Manasseh was the older of the two. So that would give him the priority in the names of both his father and his grandfather. But there is no simple explanation as to why Dan was omitted. Earlier writers suggested that it might be because the Antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan, but there is nothing in Scripture to support that suggestion. Others have felt that Ephraim is not mentioned (although obviously the tribe of Joseph was a reference to Ephraim, and Dan is not mentioned because of the way those two tribes went into idolatry. To be honest, we can't say for sure why the names appear as they do. But the fact that we have *twelve* is an indication that the whole nation is included, not that the whole nation will be saved, but in every tribe there will be elect Jews, those who belong to "the remnant," the term that is used for them in the OT.

So God is going to preserve His people, His elect among the nation of Israel. This is the message of the first part of this parenthesis. (Any Jewish person who is saved today becomes a part of the body of Christ, the Church.)

Now for the second part of the parenthesis:

- (2) A heavenly vision of the saints who are martyred during the Great Tribulation (7:9-17). Both Jews and Gentiles are included in this number.

7:9 In the vision which the Apostle John was given next, this "great multitude" which no one could number was standing "before the throne" [of God], and before the Lamb." So the scene is a heavenly scene. The fact that they are martyrs is not apparent until we get down to verse 14.

"All nations" means that they are Gentiles from the whole world. "Kindred" is sometimes translated *tribes*, or *race*. It speaks of ethnic groups within the nations. "People" is a term that sometimes applies to Jewish people, but it also refers to people who speak the same language and are of the same stock. "Tongues" points to those whose have a common original language. The study of a Greek lexicon seems to indicate that we cannot distinguish each of these terms from the other, but combined they indicate that every nation, every ethnic group, every language – in short, there will be people from all over the world who will be present in this group.

But two things they have in common: white robes and palm branches. The robes picture salvation, as we learn later in the chapter (v. 14); the palm branches were symbols of both joy and triumph. The suffering of people who are saved during the Great Tribulation will be terrible, but that will make their entrance into glory that much more wonderful. And the number of the people is so large that it is not possible to number them. Surely Jude 24 and 25, while it applies to the church, must also apply to the saints of the Great Tribulation. Their suffering has been indescribable, but their joy will be unsurpassable. And it is all to the glory of God on the Throne, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they have come through their sufferings without denying or dishonoring their Lord.

7:10 How wonderful it must have been for the Apostle John, exiled on the Isle of Patmos, to hear the praise of those who stood before the throne, clothed in their white robes, and waving the palm branches of

victory! And their main theme is *SALVATION!* And by this we must not take it as meaning their deliverance from their sufferings, but their deliverance from sin. It is their salvation from sin in which they rejoicing, but they take none of the credit to themselves, but are saying, or singing, that their from start to finish is all of God, and all of the Lamb. Nobody is going to claim that his or her good works even helped to get them to heaven, but the glory will all be given to the Godhead.

Let me digress for a moment.

This is one big reason, in fact, I can't think of a bigger reason, why we need to get that straight about our salvation while we are here on earth. God has chosen us for salvation. He gave us to Christ Who died for us. He sought us by the Holy Spirit. We were convicted of our sin. He gave us life, and we repented and with the gift of faith we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. And although we have failed Him many times, yet He has kept us and will never let us go. The true doctrine of salvation humbles man, but it glorifies God. And if we are inclined to take any of the credit to ourselves, it is because we haven't seen how hopeless our condition was when we were in our sins, nor do we have a proper understanding of the grace, mercy, and love of God for us. All of us need to make sure that we understand this song that they were singing: "Salvation to our God Who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." God is sovereign in everything, and that includes salvation. What we ought to be saying is that God is sovereign in the greatest, which is salvation, and so He is sovereign in everything else. Many professing Christians don't believe this, and won't believe it. They think that they have determined their own salvation, and that God has agreed to go along with what they have wanted to do.

As we go on to verse 11 the scene becomes even more glorious. And we need to have this in our minds and on our hearts as we go on in this book because it will help us to accept the difficult things that are yet to come.

But what about verse 11?

7:11 Here we meet some friends we have met before: angels (all of them), the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures. And what are they doing? At first they were standing around the throne of God and of the Lamb, but as the saints sang, the angels, the elders, and the living creatures fell on their faces before God, "and worshiped God"! They didn't worship the saints; *they worshiped GOD!* Try to visualize what the Apostle John saw. God has created all of us for His glory, and someday He is going to receive the glory which has been denied Him for so long.

But we not only know what they did, the position that they took before God, but we know what they said. We have it in verse 12.

7:12 First of all, they "*amened*" the saints. They have known that salvation was of God, and only of God, but how it rejoices their hearts to hear that the saints understand this basic truth, too. It could not have been any other way. If salvation were dependent upon man in any way, no one would be saved. David said in Psa. 16:11, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." There is going to be total agreement among all of us when we get to heaven with regard to the doctrine of salvation.

But after *amening* the saints, the angels, and elders, and living creatures added their own words of doxology. Let us notice what they were. There are seven of them. Cf. all of these with what we had in 5:12-13.

- 1) "Blessing" – a word which means *praise*. But what were they praising the Lord for? They were praising Him for what He has done in saving sinners and making them saints.
- 2) "Glory" – a word which points to the Deity of God, His holiness, His mercy and grace, His faithfulness, etc.

It is to glory in God as to His Person – all that He is, has been, and ever will be!

- 3) “Wisdom” – how infinitely wise God has been in planning the salvation of sinners. By the death of Christ, His beloved Son, He has maintained His righteousness, while at the same time has met the need of every sinner who would ever be saved. Cf. Rom. 11:33-36.
- 4) “Thanksgiving” – for daily blessings received. God not only saves, but He cares for those whom He saves, He protects them, and guides them. Cf. Jas. 1:17.
- 5) “Honor” – “Know ye that the Lord, He is God . . .” (Psa. 100:3). His Name is never taken in vain in heaven. He is always honored as the God of heaven and earth, a place which only He holds.
- 6) “Power” – the Greek is δύναμις. This points to all of those verses which describe what God is able to do.
- 7) “Might” – ἡ ἰσχὺς, meaning that He is powerful enough to conquer all of His enemies, and ours! According to Psa. 24:8 He is “the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.”

And what adds to their praise is the knowledge that the Lord not only deserved such worship at the time, but He would always deserve the adoration of His people because what He is, He is forever, lit., *unto the ages of the ages*.

Then their worship is concluded with another “Amen.” This meant that they were completely satisfied with God the way He was, and would never want Him to change.

7:13 There is an important point to be made from this verse which applies to all of us in our relationship with the Word of God. It was important for John to see what he saw, and to hear what he heard, but it was just as important that he understood the meaning of what he had seen and heard. Who were the people that he saw clothes in white garments, and where did they come from? It is important that we read the Word, but we need also to make sure that we are understanding what we read.

John had to confess that he could not answer the question that the elder had asked him, but he knew that the elder knew. And so he turned to him for the answer. And this would make what he had seen and heard mean even more to him.

The elder told him that that “great multitude” he had been listening to, had come “out of great tribulation.” It was a huge *martyr choir*. *Each one had experienced physical death, and death had come to them in many different ways. Their robes were white because they had washed them in the blood of the Lamb.* John knew about the blood of the Lamb, and that it was by that blood that His own sins had been washed away, that he had been cleansed, and that he, too, was righteous before God. But he had not yet died although he was facing that as an immediate possibility as an exile. What a tremendous blessing it must have been to him to see the outcome of all that those saints had experienced even though all of this was still future even for them. God was giving the Apostle John a foretaste of the glory that is to come.

Thayer says that the verb *wash* “is used of those who by faith so appropriate the results of Christ’s expiation as to be regarded by God as pure and sinless” (pp. 519, 520).

On the blood, the Apostle Paul had this to say about the blood of Christ:

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:24-26).

Peter had this to say about the blood of Christ:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19).

And the Apostle John himself wrote these words:

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

There is no other way for sin to be forgiven and for sinners to be cleansed so as to be made acceptable to God except through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross where He shed His precious blood, dying in order that sinners might be saved, and go to Him in heaven when they die.

7:15 The “therefore” at the beginning of this verse means that the only reason that “great multitude” was there, singing and worshiping God and the Lamb as they were, was because of the sacrifice of Christ. This was the only reason they were permitted to serve God, and the only reason why they were delighted to serve Him, and that He was delighted to be worshiped by them, and delighted to dwell among them. On the other hand, while no one would deliberately choose to go to hell, yet if they did not know God and His Son, and love them, they wouldn’t be happy in heaven either. But for us who know the Lord, and love Him, we can sing those wonderful words with great joy:

He and I in that bright glory
One deep joy shall share:
Mine, to be forever with Him;
His, that I am there.

7:16 On the other hand, what these tribulation saints had experienced, they will never experience again.

They will not hunger anymore. This means that some of them, probably many of them, were starved to death. Nor will they thirst anymore. Some, probably many, died of thirst, of dehydration. Nor will they be left out in the heat of the sun to die a most agonizing death. Those terrible things, and all other means of death will be gone forever.

The next verse tells us what they will have.

7:17 The Lamb will take care of them. Remember: He is “the good shepherd” Who gave His life for the sheep. They are very, very precious to Him. He will “feed them.” The verb means *to shepherd* them. He will do for them all that a shepherd does for his sheep – feeding, guarding, guiding, folding them. And He will lead them to the “living fountain of waters.” Who could this be but God Himself?

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” This life is a vale of tears. We are well acquainted with tears from the time we are born until the time when we die. If I were to ask you how many of you have shed tears during the last week, I am sure that most of you would probably raise your hands. I would have to. Yesterday we received word from our granddaughter in California, Courtney Yartz, and she told us some disturbing news about her baby. He is the one who has had trouble breathing. Just recently his pediatrician discovered that he wasn’t lifting his head like a baby his age should. He doesn’t know what the problem is but has prescribed some physical therapy which they will start on soon. But among other things he said, “We can’t rule out cerebral palsy, although if that is what it is, it is a very rare form of it.” I printed Courtney’s e-mail letter to us, and took it upstairs for Lucille to read. I left it with her and went back down to my study. Shortly

afterwards I went upstairs to talk to her about the letter, and I found her in our back bathroom crying. It is only by the grace of God that we are not crying all of the time. But there will be no tears in heaven unless they are tears of joy. But there will be no tears of sorrow, or of pain. In closing let me read to you the first seven verses of Rev. 21:

- 1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
- 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a great voice out of 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 shall be with them, and be their God.
- 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.
- 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.
- 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.
- 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son (Rev. 21: 1-7).

How good it is of the Lord to give us this prophetic picture of the glory that awaits us when we are finally and forever with the Lord!

April 29, 2002

Now we are ready for the opening of the seventh seal. In the outline it comes as follows:

IV. "The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter" (4:1-22:5).

A. The throne in heaven (4:1-5:14).

B. The Great Tribulation (6:1-18:24).

1. The Seven Seal Judgments (6:1-17; 8:1-6).

We have considered the first six seals (6:1-7), and the Parenthesis in chapter 7. Next is the seventh seal.

g. The seventh seal (8:1-6).

8:1 The opening of the seventh seal brings on the seven trumpet judgments. But first we are told that "there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." So the scene is still in heaven.

The Greek verb for "was" is ἐγένετο which literally means *to become*. Everything suddenly became quiet. No angel spoke. The elders did not speak. Neither did the living creatures. God did not speak, and neither did the Lamb. There was no singing, nor was there any thunder. All was quiet. When it became silent, no one, of course, knew how long the silence would last, or what it meant. So it was an ominous silence. No one knew what to expect, but the worst was to be feared. Swete said that it made "an impressive break between the Seals and the Trumpets" (p. 107). We all know that just before a devastating storm things can become very quiet, and so someone coined the phrase, *the quiet before the storm*. Man seems to have a natural aversion to quietness. You can't go into a building these days without hearing music. Some people have their TV or radio on all day long. However, no one even in heaven will escape this silence. It came suddenly and unexpected. It did not last long, but every minute must have seemed like an hour.

8:2 Presumably at the end of the half hour, there were seven angels standing before God, and to each of

them was given a trumpet. Trumpets were often used in Israel in the OT, and trumpets are referred to in the NT in connection with the coming of the Lord. Fausset, in the JFB commentary, called the trumpet “a martial instrument” (VI, 682). That was one of the chief uses of the trumpet during the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan. It could have given those present in heaven the impression that God was about to declare war on the world and the Devil.

Jeremiah expressed great dismay at the sound of the trumpet. He expressed in Jer. 4:19-21:

19 My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

20 Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment.

21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?

The use of trumpets in OT times is described in Num. 10:1-10.

When we read seven trumpets were given to the seven angels who were standing before God, the idea seems to be that *God* was the One Who gave the trumpets to the angels. So what follows was definitely instigated by God.

8:3 “Another angel,” *i.e.*, not one of the seven. We know that angels are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14).

They not only minister to those of us who are the heirs of salvation, but they minister to God. And from this passage we can see that one way in which they minister is to present the prayers of the people of God before the Lord. This does not mean that we do not pray directly to God, but shows how the angels are in sympathy with the saints who offer their prayers to God.

The golden censer suggests that this is a priestly ministry that this angel is performing – a ministry from the saints to God. We are not told who these saints are, but in this context we probably are to take it that these are the saints of the Great Tribulation, probably those whose prayer is recorded when the sixth seal was opened in chapter 6. The incense indicates how fragrant and pleasing to God the prayers of His people are.

8:4 Both the smoke and prayers came before God as they were offered by the angel. So we see in verse 3 that the prayers of the saints are pleasing to God, and here in verse 4 we are assured that they do actually get to God! Evidently we are to know that the judgments which follow are given in answer to the prayers of the saints, but that does not mean that the judgments were not ordained by God. This is an excellent example of what it means for the saints to pray according to the will of God. We have seen before in chapter 6 that God does not always answer *when* we ask Him to, but He does answer in His own time and way – and His time and His way are always better than ours.

Fausset suggested that it is the merit of Christ which actually gives fragrance to the prayers that we bring to God. That is the reason that we pray in His Name.

When the Lord was asked by His disciples to teach them to pray, you will remember that He taught them to pray, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” One of the things that makes heaven heaven, is that the will of God is done in heaven. And that which makes life on earth what it is, full of sin and unhappiness, a veritable vale of tears, is that the will of God is not the desire of the nations, nor of the great masses of the people. God’s people have died because they have chosen the will of God over the will of men, except for those times when God has seen fit to intervene on their behalf. None of us can really imagine what it will be like when the will of God is done on earth like it is in heaven. But that day is coming! But Scripture clearly indicates that it will only come after the great time of suffering and death that the world has ever seen. And so

that is why the prayers of these saints are so delightful to God. They express the saints' desire for that which has always been the purpose of God for the earth.

8:5 The same censer which delivered the prayers to the saints to God, is used to take fire from the altar which, in turn, is cast into the earth. The silence which prevailed before was broken when the seven angels were given their trumpets, but now it is really broken. "There were voices." This evidently refers to the sound made by the thunderings, lightnings, and the earthquake. It always has been the case that when God's warnings have been ignored, the judgments only get worse. At the end of chapter 6 with the opening of the sixth seal, we saw that there was an earthquake that was felt throughout the whole earth. But it did not cause people to repent and to turn from the Lord. It made them want to hide from His presence in the caves of the earth and under the rocks which were broken loose from the earth during the mighty earthquake. The earthquake here must have been equally severe, and maybe even worse with the added destruction caused by the thundering and lightning.

8:6 And so the seven angels prepare to blow their trumpets. The scene is set for the next series of judgments.

J. A. Seiss, in his commentary, raises the question, were the judgments which follow the work of the angels, or the outworking of that which was sovereignly ordained by God. And he pointed out that the word "prepared," ἐτοιμάζω, is "often employed [in Scripture] to denote predeterminations of what is to be done, and the settling of appointments and designs before they are carried into effect" (p. 191). So as great as the intelligence of angels is, they were not the ones who decided what the judgments would be. They were carrying out that which God had ordained should be done even before the foundation of the earth. When man first sinned, there was no doubt in the mind of God as to where that sin would ultimately lead the whole human race. It is amazing to see in history the patience, the mercy, the love and kindness of God, upon the human race from the very beginning. Man in his sin has been blinded to the meaning of what God has done in His judgments upon the world. Even when He sent His Son into the world, He was rejected, shamefully treated, and finally crucified. And it is apparent that our world today still wants nothing to do with God. Even in the early days of the church, when the Apostle Paul went to Athens, he preached,

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:
31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

If *the time* of judgment has been "appointed" by God, then we can be sure that the judgments themselves have been appointed, as well as the order in which they would be poured out on the earth! How foolish people are to think not only that this world is going to go on forever and ever, but that things will actually get better on the earth. This world is passing away, as the Apostle John has told us (see 1 John 2:17), and the last days are not going to be good days, but "perilous times" (2 Tim. 3:1). We make our plans day by day, or week by week, or year by year, and even then we always have to say as we make them, "the Lord willing." But God made His plans from the beginning of time – all of them! And that comes down not only to the fact that there would be seven seal judgments, followed by seven trumpet judgments, and then seven bowl judgments, but the Lord has determined what each judgment would be, and the order in which they would be executed upon the earth. And God being God, He isn't going to be mistaken at any point like our TV weather people are in most instances, but we can be positively assured that these judgments are coming, are coming in their predicted order, and they are going to be just as terrible and far-reaching as the Apostle John was shown that they would be. *The only thing that we don't know is when these judgments will take place. But that they will take place, is just as certain as that there is a living God Who has "prepared" them all.* Prophecy is pre-written history, and only a fool would assume that what is predicted in God's Word is not going to happen. The Bible is full of accounts

of fulfilled prophecy, the greatest of which has had to do with the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. These should be enough to convince us that what has not yet been fulfilled, will be fulfilled. God just has not told us *when*.

But let us move on to see what will happen when the first angel blows his trumpet, which is God declaring war on the earth.

2. THE SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS (8:7-9:21; 11:15-19).
a. The first trumpet (8:7).

8:7 The trumpet judgments are divided four and three just like the seal judgments were. The last three are especially terrible because, as we learn in 8:13 they are called *woes!* Also, as we come to the end of chapter 9, the trumpet judgments are interrupted, and we have another parenthesis, only this time for all of chapter 10 and the first fourteen verses of chapter 11. Then the bowl judgments are concluded in the last five verses of chapter 11. I have tried to make this clear in the outline.

Notice how the first four trumpet judgments are reminiscent of the plagues which God brought on Egypt, only these trumpet judgments are far more extensive and far more devastating than the plagues God brought upon Egypt. With the exception of God's judgment on the whole world at the time of the flood, no judgments have ever been as widespread, involving the whole world, as these trumpet judgments are.

And let us interpret them literally, *i.e., real hail, real fire, real blood*. We don't know how to explain the blood, but it may be that it was the human blood that was shed as a result of the hail and fire. The result was that a third of the trees throughout the whole world were burned up, and all of the green grass. Now you know that such a judgment had to effect thousands of homes, and many lives would be lost. With the destruction of the trees there would be the loss of fruit – apples, oranges, and so on. There has never been anything like this in all of human history! We are not told how long it would take, but it wouldn't have to be long. Just think of what havoc results from a hurricane or a tornado or an earthquake now which may only last for just a few minutes. You would think that this would cause people to cry out to the Lord for mercy, but remember that we are living in a generation of people who for the most part don't think that God has anything to do with the weather.

b. The second trumpet (8:8-9).

8:8 When the second angel blew his trumpet there was a great mountain burning with fire which was cast into the sea..

As I read this I am reminded, as perhaps you are, of the time the Lord spoke of prayer and of casting a mountain into the sea. The disciples were marveling over how quickly the Lord had made a fig tree wither up and die. The Lord responded by saying this:

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21:21-22).

Now there is no record in the Bible of anyone who did this, not even the Lord. And I have never heard of such a thing in all of human history. *But here we are told that the day is coming when the Lord is going to do this very thing, only He is going to set the mountain on fire before He throws it into the sea.*

What will the result be?

One third of the sea will become blood. Moses performed a miracle similar to this, only on a much smaller scale. He turned all of the fresh water in Egypt into blood just by extending his rod with his hand. When the second trumpet sounds one third of the sea all over the world is going to be turned into blood. And what will be the result of that? We learn in verse 9.

8:9 We should be surprised that a third of all of the fish and other sea creatures died. They could not live swimming around in blood. And a third of the ships were destroyed, and this would mean also the loss of their cargoes. It would be impossible for ships to operate in blood. Thus business and travel would be greatly affected. And if ships were destroyed, this also would mean a great loss of life. We pride ourselves today on the sophisticated nature of the equipment that we have, and there is no question but that technology has improved ships along with everything else. But when God sees fit to judge the world, no amount of modern technology will make it possible for man to rise above what God will do.

Again, we are not given any time schedule, but it would not take the Lord any time at all to bring the business of the world to a halt by such a judgment. People will not have time to get out of the way.

Seiss commented:

Fish constitute one of God's precious gifts to man. They were among the principal food of Jesus, and were the subjects of some of His most marvelous miracles. And, in punishment of the sins of men, it is but reasonable to expect the fish of the sea to be smitten, as well as the trees and the fruits of the earth (p. 185).

There is an interesting passage dealing with judgment in the book of Hosea which mentions fish. Let me read to you what Hosea had to say:

- 1 Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.
- 2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.
- 3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away (Hosea 4:1-3).

Zephaniah gave a similar word of judgment which had to do with Judah. This is what he said:

- 2 I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.
- 3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD (Zeph. 1:2-3).

So what we read about here in the Revelation is similar to what God has done in the past in local situations, but what is coming will be far worse than anything that has ever taken place before. Still we have no word about any repentance or turning to the Lord after such a judgment. So another judgment will follow.

c. The third trumpet (8:10-11).

8:10 When the second angel blew his trumpet, the salt water of the earth was affected. When the third trumpet is blown, it is the fresh water supply of the earth that is affected. It is brought about by a fiery star which falls from heaven, polluting now only rivers, but springs. Again it is a third of the supply that is affected.

8:11 The name of the star is Wormwood. Fausset said that Wormwood is a plant which had some medicinal use, but if ever used as water, “would not only be disagreeable, but fatal” (JFB, VI, 683).

There is a passage in Jeremiah’s prophecy which speak of wormwood. It is found in Jer. 9:15-16:

15 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.

16 I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.

So what we are reading about in connection with the trumpet judgments, is the fulfillment of prophecies that were made hundreds of years before.

“Bitter” water is poisonous water, and so many, either not knowing that the water was defiled, or possibly so desperate for water that they were willing to take a chance with it, died. It seems that with each of the trumpet judgments there was a great loss of human life. Such a death would be very dreadful.

When the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt came to a place called Marah, or which they named Marah, we are told that they could not drink the water because it was “bitter.” The people, as they usually did, murmured against Moses and asked him what they were going to drink. Moses did not know what to do, so he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree which he was to cut down and cast it into the water, and the water was made “sweet,” safe, good to drink. But when the fourth trumpet is blown, and the star, Wormwood, falls from heaven, there will be no way to purify the water, and so there will be widespread death.

And yet, still no indication of repentance among the people of the earth. Perhaps they are still inclined to think of it as a major disturbance in nature, but not a judgment from God.

d. The fourth trumpet (8:12-13).

8:12 After the third trumpet was blown, a star fell from heaven. With the blowing of the fourth trumpet, the heavenly bodies were darkened one third. This affected the sun, the moon, and the stars. This affected both the day and the night. On this judgment it is good for us to go back to Genesis 1 to read what God’s purpose was for the sun, moon, and stars. And this is what we read about God’s work of creation on the fourth day:

14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:14-18).

These heavenly bodies were “for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.” The sun and the moon were to rule the days and the nights. Now we can’t say for sure all that would be involved in the cutting off of a third of the lights given by these heavenly bodies, but it seems that there would be a disruption of time, and surely the seasons would be affected. The whole order of days, months, years, the seasons – summer, fall, winter, and spring – everything would be in total confusion.

John MacArthur had this to say about this fourth judgment:

This partial eclipse, reminiscent of the ninth Egyptian plague (Ex. 10:21-22), is temporary, as God will later increase the amount of heat coming from the sun (cf. 16:8-9). At this point, however, the loss of heat from the sun will cause temperatures to plunge drastically all over the world. This will severely disrupt the earth's weather patterns and the seas' tides, leading to violent, unpredictable storms and tides, the destruction of crops, and further loss of animal and human lives (I, 250).

Such a disruption of nature will cause terror to dominate in human hearts. A lot of the security that we feel is due to the normal course of events such as we have in days and nights, twenty-four hour days, the regular seasons of the year, etc. But take that away, and people will be beside themselves with anxiety and fear. But still there is no indication that men's hearts will turn to the Lord. Perhaps the Great Tribulation will give the greatest illustration of words spoken by Solomon almost three thousand years ago. Listen as I read to you what he said:

20 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:

21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,

22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

24 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

28 They shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Prov. 1:20-33).

As I have mentioned before, the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is an excellent book to get people to read who do not know the Lord. The revelation that these judgments are coming on the earth, are meant to be a warning to people who do not know the Lord. And they are meant to make those of us who know the Lord to be careful that we are living in obedience to the Word of God. No person will ever repent of his sins, and turn to the Lord if he is left to himself. But the entrance of God's Word gives light, and the Word of God is that which the Spirit of God uses to convict sinners of their sins. The Word of God is also that mighty instrument which the Holy Spirit uses to regenerate sinners, to make them new creatures in Christ. Every person is responsible to God for his own soul, but Proverbs 1 makes it very clear that men cannot set their own time in which to deal with God, or to prepare for eternity. Today is the day of salvation. When we hear His Word, we are not to harden our hearts. Solomon was describing what countless numbers of people in every generation have done. They may intend some day to get right with God, but not now! And then they are going to find that when they want to get right with God, He will not listen to them. Oh, that we could get this message across to people. As terrible as these judgments will be when the trumpets are blown, they are nothing compared with the judgment of hell. The seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments are meant to warn us to flee from the wrath to come.

But let us look at the last verse in chapter 8.

8:13 Still another angel (although some grammarians feel that the correct reading here is *eagle*, which is the word used in some MSS) appears, flying “through the midst of heaven, and crying out with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe,” to the inhabitants of the earth because of the three remaining trumpet judgments. Anyone reading this would be inclined to feel that this means that the last three trumpet judgments are going to be notably worse than the first four, even though the first four have been worse than the world has ever experienced. “Woe” is a cry of dismay because of a coming calamity. It is meant to be a great warning to those you know are in immediate danger. And for this to be a triple woe, only served to intensify the warning. It is a sign of grief and lamentation. MacArthur said, “Woe is used throughout Scripture [as] an expression of judgment, destruction, and condemnation” (I, p. 251), and he cited Psa. 120:5; Isa. 3:9; Jer. 4:13 as some of his examples. Often the word is used by the people themselves who are experiencing difficult things, but mainly it is an expression of warning from God.

An illustration of a series of woes is to be found in Isaiah 5. See verses 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22. Isaiah was not happy that sinners were going to be judged. He was greatly dismayed by it, but he wanted them to know what was in store for them. People today think they can do anything they want to do, and it will be OK. But they are deceived. They are blinded. People have no conception of the judgment which awaits those who despise God and His Word, and refuse to listen to the Gospel.

May our hearts be filled with praise as we read this book, knowing that we are preserved from judgment through the sacrifice of our beloved Savior. But may our study of these judgments also burden us more and more for people who don't know the Lord, and that the Lord will give us boldness to make the Gospel known to them.

May 6, 2002

e. The fifth trumpet – the first woe (9:1-12).

This judgment is to last for “five months.” Cf. vv. 5 and 10. And here, for the first time, we are introduced to “the bottomless pit.” Cf. vv. 1, 2, and 11. See also 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3. In the Bible it is only mentioned in the book of the Revelation, and only in these seven verses.

9:1 When the fifth angel blew his trumpet, the Apostle John saw “a star” which had already fallen to the earth. This is the idea in the verb, *πεπτωκότα*, a perfect tense, which is the tense of completed action. But the last part of the verse indicates that this is not a real star, *but a person!* We read, “to him was given the key to the bottomless pit.” The Greek word is the word from which we get our English word, abyss. Rev. 20:1 and 3 indicate that this is where the Devil will be confined during the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth.

The fact that the key to the bottomless pit is “given” to this one is evidence that as chaotic as all of the judgments appear to be, yet nothing is done apart from the sovereignty of God Who always and only judges in perfect righteousness. One writer has expressed it this way:

Though Satan has great power, he is under bonds and limitations, beyond which he cannot go without permission. He is now allowed to employ his demons, but not to bring forth all the evil agencies who would fain serve him is his work of malignity (Seiss, 205).

It may be that this fallen creature is the one Isaiah was speaking about in Isa. 14:1-17, and also that this is what the Lord may have been speaking about in Luke 10:17-20. All of these details have led many to think that this

angel is the Devil!

9:2 He opened the pit, and smoke comes out of the pit. This is evidence of something burning. Our text says, “as the smoke of a great furnace.” Smoke has often accompanied the judgments of God in the past. For example, we read in Gen. 19:28 that when Abraham looked off toward Sodom he “beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.” Also, at Mount Sinai, when the presence of the Lord was manifested to the children of Israel, we are told in Exodus 19:18:

18 And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Here in Rev. 9:2 the verse concludes by telling us that “the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.” Thus, as Dr. Walvoord pointed out, the air was polluted, and the day became like the night. If there were nothing but this, the blowing of the fifth trumpet and that which resulted from it to this point, will be distressing beyond anything that any of us have experienced so far during our lifetimes.

But as we move on into verse 3, Dr. Seiss pointed out that so far the judgments have been upon the physical world. Now God would do a new thing:

But the trumpet now before us goes beyond the physical world and calls into action quite other agencies. The doors of separation between the earth and the prison of evil spirits are opened, and mysterious and malignant tenants of the underworld are permitted to overrun the globe, and to inflict torture and woe upon its unsanctified inhabitants (p. 204).

9:3-4 The smoke abides, and out of it come locusts, but not like the locusts of the earth. Swete called them “hellish locusts” (p. 115). They are not like locusts such as destroyed the land of Egypt by eating all of the greenery which survived the plague of hail. They stripped every tree of its leaves. But these locusts were commanded not to hurt the grass, nor any green thing, nor any tree. They were to attack “those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads” (v. 4). But as we read on it becomes apparent that these are not locusts as we know them, but “vile demons,” as MacArthur called them (I, p. 259). And this is the consensus of the commentaries I have consulted.

9:5 They were not to “hurt” the vegetation, but they were to attack men, people, not to kill them, but to torment them for five months! And their means of tormenting people was like that of a scorpion. This, of course, goes far beyond what a normal locust could do. Ordinary locusts can make life miserable for people, as they did the Egyptians, but not like scorpions would.

9:6 The attack of these demonic creatures will be so terrible that men would “seek death, and shall not find it.” This is similar to what we had at the end of chapter 6 when the sixth seal was opened. People from all levels of society will call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and to hide them “from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16). Although there it was to hide them from an angry God; here it was to escape the five-month long torture which was being inflicted upon them by these demonic creatures.

In verses 7 through 10 we are given a more detailed description of these locust-like creatures.

9:7 Although they were shaped like locusts, yet at the same time they resembled horses. On their heads they had crowns of gold, and yet their faces were like human faces.

9:8 They had hair like women, meaning long hair. We are told that women’s hair, if it is long, is “a glory to her” (1 Cor. 11:15). And their teeth were like that of lions. So they could bite and tear, but not kill.

Dr. Walvoord made this significant comment:

This awesome combination of the qualities of beasts and men depicts the utterly fearful character of these instruments of divine judgment” (p. 162, 163).

9:9 They had breastplates like iron, so they could not be killed. And like ordinary locusts they had wings and could fly, which would have made them inescapable, and when they flew it sounded like many horses pulling their chariots into battle.

9:10 We are told again that they had tails like scorpions, which pointed over their heads to strike with terrific speed. Their wound is not usually fatal, but terribly painful. And people could be hurt time after time, or they could be struck by several of these locusts at the same time. Their assignment was to hurt as many people as they possibly could during a period of five months. And remember that all of this was done in darkness. Talk about being terrorized! We can hardly conceive of a worse situation. Thayer, in his Greek lexicon, defines the verb “hurt” as meaning *to damage and to harm*.

So we have these demonic creatures with terrible power to attack all human beings, and people who, as much as they may have wanted to die, were not able to die. Nothing like this has ever happened up to that time.

Man is inclined to think that he has considered how to defend himself against any creatures that we have now, and he is working to conquer all diseases. But even if he were successful in seeking to do all that he is now trying to do, God is prepared to release on this earth creatures to inflict terrible suffering for a period of five months, the like of which man has never considered.

Quoting Dr. Walvoord again who wrote:

It would be difficult to describe a more fearful spectacle than these instruments of divine justice, utterly wicked in themselves, and released from the pit of the abyss to accomplish this terrifying judgment.

The fact that they have power to hurt men five months is repeated in verse 10, as it to call special attention to the length of their torment (p. 163).

We often feel that nothing is going to stop the ever-increasing flow of evil which seems to be consuming the whole world. People appear to be doing all of the wicked things that they want to do, and getting away with it! But there is a day of judgment coming, and it may not be far off. The world is certainly ripe for judgment. This is another reason why we need to encourage people who do not know the Lord to read this book of the Revelation.

Any question that might remain in anyone’s mind about what is going on here, is removed by what we are told in verse 11.

9:11 “And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit.” His name is given in both Hebrew and Greek so that both Jews and Gentiles will know who this angel is to be. As their “king,” “they obey his orders and do his work” (Swete, p. 119). Both words mean *a destroyer*.

Some believe that this is Satan. Others believe that this is one of Satan’s henchmen, one of the leading demons in Satan’s hierarchy, who loyally carries out the diabolic schemes of the one who has opened the abyss. And probably this latter opinion is the best. But whichever is the true interpretation, the meaning is clear. We must all realize that the only place that we can get the real truth about the Devil, and fallen angels (or demons), and their purposes in the world, is in the Bible. In the minds of many people, any thought of a real Devil, or demons, is a big joke. With multitudes they don’t think that it is important enough for them to pay any

attention to such an idea. Still others feel that there might be a Devil, but that he is not going to be concerned with them. But the Bible teaches that the Devil is a real person. He is a master at deception, and he has many instruments of deception which are active in the world today. And he is out to destroy as many people as he possibly can. Even we, the people of God, are not immune to his attacks. His ways are as diverse as that of an angel of light, on the one hand, or that of a roaring lion, on the other hand, seeking whom he may devour. And it is during the time of the Great Tribulation that we are going to see how dreadful the works of the Evil One can be. But, if we are walking in daily fellowship with the Lord, we have nothing to fear because “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). However, it is very, very important that we be living in fellowship with God, and the only way we can do that is by living in daily obedience to the commandments of Scripture. And then we must do as James had told us to do in James 4:7: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” But how do we resist him? The Apostle Peter said that we are to “resist” the Devil “steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:9), which means trusting God, believing His promises, “casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

It is really impossible for us to visualize how terrible this judgment will be, but from our knowledge of God’s judgments in the past (on the whole world at the time of the Flood, on Sodom and Gomorrah, on Egypt with the ten plagues, as examples), God’s judgments have always been as they were predicted that they would be. God has given adequate warning in His Word. He is not to be blamed if people don’t read it, or if they read it but don’t believe it. Anyone caught in this judgment will have no excuse, no just cause for blaming God. From Matt. 3:7 and Luke 3:7 a part of the emphasis of John the Baptist’s ministry was that people were to “flee from the wrath to come.” But he did not mean that baptism itself was the means of escape. So when many came to be baptized, but showed not repentance for their sins, he asked them who they had gotten their warning from. Of course, it had come from their own hearts, but our hearts are deceptive. The way that seems right to us is a way that leads to death, not to eternal life.

Note also again during this judgment that there is really no sign of repentance among the people of the earth. They would seek death, but not God! It shows both the blindness and the hardness of the human heart toward the things of God. Matt. 3:2 tells us that John the Baptist preached repentance. Matt. 4:17 tells us that the Lord Jesus called upon people to repent. Acts 2:38 and 3:19 tell us that the Apostle Peter called upon people to repent. In Acts 17:30 and 26:20 we see that the Apostle Paul preached repentance. And yet when Paul wrote to Timothy he told him that repentance is a gift from God. The passage is 2 Tim. 2:24-26:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

If it is required of all men to repent, and yet we are told that repentance is a gift from God, what are we to believe about repentance? We believe both, and we trust God to bring the two together. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance, and yet he knew that many who came to him to be baptized were not truly repentant of their sins. They felt that the waters of baptism would wash their sins away – which, of course, is not true. True repentance is a recognition that sin is sin in God’s sight, and that we truly intend to quit doing what displeases God. Solomon has given us a definition of repentance when he wrote Prov. 28:13: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

A truly repentant sinner will come to God knowing that his sin is so great that in no way can he be cleansed and forgiven and accepted by God except through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We learn from this passage also a great deal about Satan. He is not omnipotent. He is greater than we are, but not greater than God. He can’t go beyond the limitations that God sets for him. He can hurt, but he cannot kill

if God says that he can't. The same is true of man: he is under the dominion of a sovereign God, and even he cannot take his own life if God says that he can't.

So I hope that we are learning some very important lessons from these passages on judgment.

9:12 The consecutive nature of these judgments is indicated by the statement that we have here: "One woe is past." But the judgments are not over because we are also told, "and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter."

And so now we come to:

f-1. The sixth trumpet – the second woe (9:13-21).

The last part of this judgment come as f-2 in 11:13-14. (See the outline.)

9:13 The sixth angel blows his trumpet, and immediately a voice is heard "from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God." This should remind us of what we learned about "the golden altar" in 8:3 and 4. (Read.) And that passage should take us back to 6:9-11. (Read.)

Swete feels that the "voice" coming from the altar is the united prayer coming from suffering saints throughout the whole world. We know that the judgments come from God, but verse 14 seems to indicate that this sixth trumpet judgment, the second woe, is an answer to the prayers referred to in chapters 6 and 8, so that, in a way, the prayers become the command for the judgment which is now to come. Some think that the voice could be that of our Lord, the Lamb. Rev. 6:16 indicates that that judgment came from both God and Christ. So it could be that here we have our Lord's voice. Or it could have been the voice of an angel. All of these are guesses, but it seems certain that this judgment was a definite answer to the prayers of the Tribulation saints.

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9:14 Both Dr. Walvoord and Dr. MacArthur take the position that the four angels who are mentioned here are fallen angels because, as Dr. Walvoord said, "There is no instance in Scripture where holy angels are bound" (p. 165). On the other hand, he pointed out that according to Jude 6,

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

And then in the first three verses of Rev. 20 we read that Satan is to be bound for a thousand years:

1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season (Rev. 20:1-3).

We also learned that after the blowing of the fifth trumpet in the first part of this ninth chapter of the Revelation that demonic beings were used as instruments of judgment upon the earth.

But why is the Euphrates River mentioned?

Interestingly, it is first mentioned in Genesis 2 as one of the four branches of the river which ran out of the

Garden of Eden. But more significantly it is mentioned in Gen. 15:18 in connection with the covenant which God made with Abraham as the eastern boundary of the land God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants. Beyond the Euphrates were the kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria plus other nations which even today are a threat to the nation Israel. And so this indicates that trouble is coming upon Israel from the east. Swete pointed out in his commentary that there will be an invasion of Israel by those nations in the east which will be like the overflowing of the Great River, which is most likely a reference to the Euphrates River. This is what the Isaiah passage says:

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks:

8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel (Isa. 8:7-8).

Since it was Babylon that carried Judah into captivity, and not Assyria, this may be a prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled in the end times.

Anyway, the Euphrates is mentioned to focus attention upon the nation Israel.

9:15 These fallen angels were released at a particular hour, on a particular day and month and year, indicating that the judgment was ordained by God for a definite period of time coming down to the very hour which it would all take place. In the Greek there is just one article (“the”) which governs all four of these time periods. This is indicated in the KJV by the word “an” before hour, followed by an “a” with each of the words “day,” “month,” and “year.” A better translation would be “the hour, and day, and month, and year.” And this is the way it is translated in the NKJV, the NASB, and the NIV, the latter using the translation, “the very hour” to introduce the series of words. God has ordained the very time that this judgment would begin. God never makes His plans as time goes on, but has ordained all things from before the creation of the heavens and the earth.

9:16 The size of the army is listed at “two hundred thousand thousand” which adds up to 200,000,000. Some expositors take this as an expression similar to what is used in 7:9, “a great multitude, which no man could number,” but here in this verse where the Apostle John added, “and I heard the number of them,” it would seem that we are to take this number literally. And notice that they were mounted on horses. It is impossible for us to imagine what such an army would look like.

9:17 The Apostle John saw the horses, but his attention was directed particularly to the riders on the horses. And again the description goes beyond what would normally be expected. The riders had breastplates “of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone.” The NKJ translates the colors as “fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow.” MacArthur pointed out that these are the very colors of hell, and he cited Rev. 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; and 21:8. And then he added, “They paint a terrifying picture of God’s wrath poured out on the sinful world by these demons” (I, p. 271). Together they speak of fire, smoke, and deadening gas fumes. It seems to be a picture of chemical warfare.

We are also told that out of the mouths of the horses were “fire and smoke and brimstone.” The heads of the horses are described “as the heads of lions.” So both the horses and their riders contribute to the tremendous number of fatalities which will result. For the horses to have heads of lions would seem to suggest that they would stalk people like lions would, and kill them in a most terrible way.

9:18 We are told that a third of what remains of the world’s population will be killed. Actually the power of this mighty army was sufficient to kill all of the rest of the people of the world, but again we see

evidence of the way in which God limits what the Devil is able to do. Earlier with the opening of the fourth seal a fourth of the world's population was killed. Plus, as I have noted, with the destruction of grass and trees, and of the ships of the sea, countless more people would have already died under the judgment of God. So that we can safely say that at least half of the world's population will have died by this time, and even more than half. It is impossible to arrive at an accurate number.

9:19 Here we are told that these horses not only have power in their mouths, but also in their tails which "were like unto serpents." Talk about terrorism; this is terrorism at its worst.

The word for "power" is the Greek word ἐξουσία which actually means *authority*. It speaks of their liberty and strength to do only as much as they were allowed to do. This is another indication that these demons are limited in what they are able to do even though the death and devastation that they cause is greater than anything that the world will have experienced up to that time. As we go through these judgments we can see why the Lord said what he did in words recorded for us in Matt. 24:21-22:

21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

9:20 We come now to another statement of the depravity of the human heart. You would think that such judgments would cause men all over the world to cry out to God for mercy and for an end to all of the death and destruction that was going on throughout the world. *But such was not the case! They did not repent!* Instead, in their spiritual blindness they will actually worship demons plus continuing on with all of their idolatrous worship of images which they have made with their own hands. So as we approach the end of the ages, let us not be surprised to see an increase in the worship of the Devil and demons, and along with it a great increase in idol worship. This is what the Devil has always wanted. You will remember that even with the Lord Jesus, the Devil, after taking our Lord up into what is called "an exceeding high mountain" (Matt. 4:8), and showing Him all of the kingdoms of the world, said, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). The Lord responded by quoting Deut. 6:13 which tells us that we are to worship God only, and serve Him only. This was certainly evidence of our Lord's Deity because a mere man would have jumped at the chance to possess the whole world and its "things."

So instead of seeing a worldwide repentance with multitudes turning to the Lord, just the opposite will take place. They turn from a God Who sees and hears and is everywhere present at the same time, to idols which cannot "see, nor hear, nor walk."

9:21 But along with all of the false religion, neither did they repent of the murders, sorceries, fornication, or stealing. False religion does not deliver from sin, but only makes man's bondage to sin even worse.

We all know what murders are. Think of the terrible murders that are taking place even now, even the murder of innocent children.

"Sorceries" have to do with witchcraft and the use of drugs! It includes claiming to get in contact with the dead as well as the prediction of the future. Cf. Rev. 18:23; 21:8; 22:15.

"Fornication" includes sexual impurity of all kinds – adultery, homosexuality, the rape of children, any and all perversions of what God has ordained as His will concerning the right relationship between people of the opposite sex, or of the same sex.

“Thefts” of all kinds are on the increase even now.

As bad, and as inclusive as these terms are, they are probably just a broad, representative list of how sin will abound in the last days. Now the Holy Spirit is still exercising His restraining power upon men everywhere. What will it be like when His restraint is lifted, and people are even freer to live according to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? Man right now is sinking deeper and deeper into sin. But, as always God has His elect. Many of the elect are still to be saved. But when the church is removed, and the Holy Spirit's restraint is gone, in spite of all of the terrible judgments that God will unleash upon the world, man will still prefer his sin instead of God, and the righteousness of God will be more and more evident the worse conditions get to be on the earth.

The judgment of God is coming. In many respects it is already here. What we need to do is to warn people to flee from the coming judgments of God, ending finally in hell. And we need to make it clear that the only way of salvation is through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. There is only one way to God and to heaven, and that is through Christ Who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
May 14, 2002

Chapters 10-12

So far we have come through the seven seal judgments, and six of the seven trumpet judgments. Before concluding the sixth trumpet judgment (which in the outline is f-1) there is another parenthesis which is as follows:

Parenthesis:

- (1) The mighty angel with the little book (10:1-11).
- (2) The two witnesses (11:1-12).

Then we will go on to:

- f-2. The end of the sixth trumpet judgment, the second woe (11:13-14).
- g. The seventh trumpet – the third woe (11:15-19).

Chapter 12 will give us the account of:

3. The woman, the great dragon, and the child (12:1-17).

So now we come to the first chapter of the parenthesis:

Parenthesis:

- (1) The mighty angel with the little book (10:1-11).**

As a parenthesis it is an interval, or interlude, connected with what precedes, and also with what follows. The fact that it is inserted into the sixth trumpet judgment (which is not finished until we get to verses 13 and 14 in chapter 11) identifies it with that particular judgment and indicates that it falls into the category of being a judgment.

10:1 There are some expositors who have tried to show that this angel was our Lord Who often appeared in the OT as “the angel of the Lord.” Much of the description that is given here of the angel seems very close to revelations of God that are found in the OT. But, as Robert Thomas, a professor at The Master’s Seminary in California, has pointed out in his commentary on Revelation, the Lord is never called an angel in this book, “unless,” he said, “this is an exception” (II, 60). But the use of the word “another” in describing this angel seems to eliminate the possibility that this could be the Lord. “Another” is the Greek word ἄλλος which means distinguishes this angel from previous angels, but in addition means *another of the same kind*. The Greeks had another word which they used when they meant to indicate that it was *another of a different kind*. That is the word ἕτερος. We get our word *heterodox* from it.

So the conclusion that we come to that this is an angel, a mighty angel, whom we have not met before on the pages of this book. “Mighty” means that he has power to do what he was sent to do, what he needs to do, and implied also is the idea that he is going to exercise that power. Swete said that he is “remarkable for his strength” (p. 126).

Notice that he came down from heaven, so the scene shifts from heaven to earth, and so John likewise in the vision is transported from heaven to earth.

And the Apostle John began immediately to inform us about how glorious and how awesome he is. (Read the description in the latter part of verse 1.)

The references to the cloud, and rainbow, and sun in particular seem to identify him with creation as we will see in verse 6. But this is not as the Creator, but as a created being. His feet were “as pillars of fire,” fire being a common symbol for judgment in Scripture.

10:2 Here we have the main emphasis of this vision: “a little book open.” Here, and in verses 9 and 10, are the only times this word is used in the NT. Another word is used in verse 8 although it is translated the same way. It probably was a scroll, but much smaller than the scroll mentioned in chapter 5 which was sealed with the seven seals.

The angel with his feet which were like “pillars of fire” (v. 1), put his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth. This shows, as Dr. Walvoord expressed, “a position of power and authority over the entire earth” (p. 170). This shows, as Swete mentioned, “his colossal size” (p. 127), and that he has a mission to the world. It surely was a spectacular sight which the Apostle John was privileged to see.

10:3 Everything seems to have been quiet until suddenly, and unexpectedly, the angel spoke “with a loud voice which resembled the roaring of a lion. Solomon wrote about a lion in the following word found in Prov. 30:30, “A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any.” In Prov. 19:12 he likened the roaring of a lion to the king’s wrath. So this angel was giving expression to the wrath of God, a wrath from which the world could not, and can not, escape.

The roaring of the angel brought a response from seven thunders. Walter Scott, in his commentary, referred this to Psalm 29 where seven times the voice of the Lord is described as thunder. Cf. Psa. 29:3-9:

3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.

4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

5 The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

6 He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

7 The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire.

8 The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.

9 The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.

Scott explained that these seven references to the voice of the Lord speak of “the perfection of God’s intervention in judgment.

10:4 The Apostle John evidently understood the message that had been given, prepared to make it a part of this book which we are studying. But suddenly a voice came from heaven telling him not to write them. Instead, he was to seal them up so no one would know what they were.

This ought to remind us of the experience which the Apostle Paul spoke of in 2 Cor. 12 where he said in verse 4 that he “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” He was caught up into paradise, but he did not know whether that was actual or in a vision. God has revealed a great deal in His Word, but these two passages in 2 Cor. 12 and Rev. 10 indicate that He has not revealed everything. He had His purpose in what He revealed to Paul, and we can say the same about what He revealed here to John, but not even those purposes were revealed. It seems certain that in both cases the revelations were to have an effect upon the ministries of those two apostles. So it is not only a waste of time for us to speculate on what the revelations

were, but it is wrong to try to push open doors which the Lord has closed. So I am not going to try. Fausset does say this:

. . . so terrible are they [the judgments] that God in mercy withholds them, since “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” [Matt. 6:34]. The godly are kept from morbid ponderings over the evil to come, and the ungodly not drive by despair into utter recklessness . . . Besides the terrors foretold [*i.e.*, those that are revealed], there are others unutterable and more horrifying in the background (VI, 687).

All of this certainly tends to emphasize what we are told in Heb. 10:31: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

10:5 In some MSS this verse read that this angel lifted his *right* hand to heaven, indicating that he was taking an oath that which he was about to say was the truth. But even without the word “right,” the following verse indicated that he was taking an oath. This verse again refers to his standing upon the sea and the earth, so this is an oath for all the world to hear.

In the song which Moses taught the people of Israel to sing, recorded in Deut. 32, a song which God had given to him for them, the song ended with these words which tell us of God lifting up His hand to heaven. This is what the Lord said:

40 For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.

41 If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.

42 I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.

43 Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people (Deut. 32:40-43).

There are times when the oath of God is a blessing. For example, in Heb. 6 we read about God taking an oath for His people:

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:16-20).

But what is the oath that the angel takes? Let us read on into verse 6.

10:6 Two things are emphasized here about God in contrast with the idols which were mentioned in chapter 9, verse 20:

1) That God lives “for ever and ever.”

2) That He is the Creator of all things.

Lit. “for ever and ever” is *unto the ages of the ages*. It is stated of Christ in Rev. 1:18. (Read.) Also it is in 4:9 and 10. (Read.) All of the Members of the Godhead live for ever and ever. They are without beginning, and without ending. And included in this is the thought that they never change. And the ability of God to do what He says He will do, is confirmed by the fact that He was the Creator of the heaven, and the earth, and the sea,

and everything that is in them! This includes angels, and everything that is mentioned in Genesis 1. Everything came into being by the mighty word of the living God! People generally today don't fear God because they don't believe He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. And His power to do so is not gone. He is still as powerful as ever! And so when He says He is going to do something, you can be sure that He is going to do it. These judgments seem incredible, and they would be, if they were not the judgments which God Himself has said that He will execute.

But what was the oath? "That there should be time no longer" is the way it is expressed in the KJV. The NKJ renders it, "that there should be no longer delay." The NASB translates it the same way. The angel was not announcing the end of time, but that God was not going to delay His judgments any longer.

We sometimes interpret the silence of God as an indication that He is not going to vindicate the righteous, nor judge the wicked. The cry of the Psalmists over and over again was, "How long . . . ?" Things in the world get worse and worse. We often feel that they can't get any worse, and then they do! But our text encourages us to believe that the time will come when God is going to execute judgment on this earth. Some day our Lord will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule in righteousness with a rod of iron. And then, as we learn in this book of the Revelation that there will be no more tears, no more death, no more pain. There will not even be any more night – no more sin, no more war. All of the fruits of sin will be gone, but first there must come the judgments of God, and ultimately for so many, the final, unending judgment of hell itself. The angel was sent to tell John, and through John to tell all believers who read this book, that the time will come when God will say, "Enough! Judgment is here!" But this is not all. Look at verse 7.

10:7 We have already been warned that the last three trumpet judgments will also be *woes*. Two of them have been described; one, the seventh, remains. When that trumpet sound then "the mystery of God" will be "finished." What does this mean?

The word "mystery" in the NT has a very special meaning. Several times in the epistles it is defined. For example, it is defined in the last three verses of Paul's epistle to the Romans. This is what those verses tell us:

- 25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,
- 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:
- 27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (Rom. 16:25-27).

You have it again in Eph. 3:

- 1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
- 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:
- 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
- 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
- 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
- 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:
- 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power (Eph. 3:1-7).

Therefore, "the mystery of God" has to be something about God that has not been revealed, or at least fully revealed, until the NT was written. God's Person will be revealed as never before in His judgments, and His silence when evil prevails over the truth will be explained. We often hear people say that God is too good to

send anyone to hell. Among some Christians, even some who have been considered leaders, they are saying that hell is not eternal, that God will judge the wicked, and then it will be all over for them. They also talk of people being saved who do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But the secret is declared in this book of the Revelation, as well as elsewhere in the NT. This world is yet to see the worst judgments that God will bring upon it for its sin. Then people will very likely be saying that God is not a God of love. There is no question but that the world is going to be judged in righteousness. God has already appointed that day, or time, or period of time. And He has already appointed the Judge – His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth is in the Bible, especially the NT, and people had better read it, and believe it, and prepare to meet God because the day is coming when the Lord will indicate that there will be no longer any delay in the execution of His judgments.

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So this term, “the mystery of God,” has to do both with God and the manner in which His purposes for this world will ultimately be fulfilled. And this is both with respect to the judgment of the wicked and the ultimate blessing of the people of God in the new heavens and the new earth. I take the reference to “his servants [bond-servants] the prophets,” to be a reference to NT prophets, not OT prophets.

10:8 For the second time in this chapter the Apostle John is told what to do, the difference being that the first time it was negative (in verse 4 he was told *not to write* what he had heard); here he is told to go and to take the little book which was in the hand of the angel. The fact that it was “open” seems to imply that the Apostle John could read its contents.

For the third time in this chapter (in vv. 2, 5, and here in 8) we are told that the angel “standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.” The angel could not have done this if it were not the will of God, and so it means that God is sovereign over the whole earth throughout the course of the events indicated in this chapter. Of course, God is always sovereign over the earth. His will always prevails. His purposes will always be fulfilled. But we constantly need to be reminded of this, and the Apostle John needed this encouragement as well.

Several expositors have expressed that the voice which John heard was the voice of either the Father or the Son. “Otherwise, John might have been reluctant to approach the strong angel as commanded” (Thomas, II, 72).

10:9 In obedience to the voice which he heard, the Apostle John went to the angel, and said, “Give me the little book.” Perhaps to John’s surprise the angel told him to take it, but to his added surprise he was told to “eat it up.” And with this command was the prediction that it would become bitter in his stomach although it would be sweet to his taste.

This verb, *πικραίνω*, was used in 8:11 when a third part of the fresh water supply of the earth was made “bitter.” There, as I explained, it probably means *poisonous*. The same verb is used also in Col. 3:19 where husbands are told not to be “bitter” against their wives. This last expression shows that eating the book could exasperate the Apostle John, could both grieve him and make him angry. But it would be sweet in his mouth because it was the Word of God.

While here we must assume that the Apostle John ate it, yet this is a Hebrew idiom for digesting, or understanding, through careful consideration and meditation, the meaning of the message of the book. A similar instruction was given to Jeremiah in Jer. 15:16:

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

We see it also in Ezek. 3:1-3, but Ezek. 2:6-10 needs to be included with it. The whole passage, then, is Ezek. 2:6-3:3:

6 And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

7 And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.

8 But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.

9 And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;

10 And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Ezekiel 3

1 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.

2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

It was pleasant to Ezekiel to know that the enemies of God would be punished although, on the other hand, it is never pleasant to any servant of the Lord to know that some people will be forever banished from the presence of the Lord to suffer the judgment of God for all eternity.

10:10 The Apostle John was obedient, and the strong angel's prediction came true.

Then the strong angel spoke to the Apostle John again, and his message is given in the last verse of chapter 10.

10:11 Fausset, in the JFB commentary, had this to say about verse 11: "The eating of this book, as in Ezekiel's case, marks John's inauguration to a fresh stage in his prophetic office . . . the subject of the rest of the book" (VI, 688). The Apostle John's ministry from this point on was not new and different, but a continuation of what he had been doing, only the judgments to come would be more severe than the judgments that were past. And it was for this that John needed the encouragement and strengthening which only God could give to him. See God's words to Jeremiah in Jer. 1:4-10:

4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

In Rev. 10:11 we have that very important little word, "must" (the Greek, δεῖ) which Thayer defined as "that constraint which arises from divine appointment" (p. 126). This is what the Apostle Paul felt when he wrote those words in 1 Cor. 9:16, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Peter and John felt the same way when the Jewish

authorities told them that they were not to speak any more, nor teach, in the Name of the Jesus. This was their response:

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

The strong angel was telling John that he would feel the same divine constraint in his heart, which he had felt before, to continue on “before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” He had to eat first, and preach second.

Several times throughout the book of the Revelation we have the totality of humanity described with these terms (“many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings”), or terms like them, although not necessarily in the same order. See 5:9; 7:9; here in 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; and 17:15.

“Peoples” means *tribes*, are those who belong to the same clan or family. “Nations” are those bound together under the same government and characterized by similar habits, customs, and distinctive characteristics. “Tongues,” of course, would mean those who speak the same language. This would bunch several nations together, but in different groups. For example, those who speak English, those who speak Spanish, those who speak Arabic, those who speak Oriental languages, etc. “Kings” would be included in the first three terms, but this suggests that the message given to John would go to those in the highest places of authority among all of the nations of the earth.

These terms, and their repetition throughout this book, emphasize what the Lord said in Acts 1:8 as well as His words in Matt 24:14:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

The strong angel’s words did not mean that the Apostle John would yet have that extensive a ministry, unless we are thinking in terms of his written ministry. Then he did! But this is the ministry of the church today, and the ministry of those who will be saved and living during the Great Tribulation, and on to the end of time. God’s words will not die, and His work will not fail. He sends out His Word to accomplish His purposes, and He never fails even though He has chosen to work through weak, and often failing, servants. But He is the living God who cannot, and will not, fail.

Now we move on to the second part of this parenthesis:

(2) The two witnesses (11:1-12).

May 20, 2002

(Read these verses, even including verses 13 and 14.)

In Dr. Walvoord’s commentary at this point in his exposition, he briefly referred to the wide variety of interpretations which can be found in consulting various commentaries, and then made a very important statement regarding the interpretation of this chapter which needs to be the primary way of interpreting the entire book of the Revelation. A good basic rule of interpreting this book is, “When common sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.” Here is Dr. Walvoord’s statement:

The guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem. The time periods are taken as literal time periods. [Here he was referring to the “forty and two months” of verse 2, the “thousand two hundred and threescore days” in verse 3, and the “three

days and an half” in verse 9.] The earthquake is a literal earthquake. The seven thousand men who are slain by the earthquake are seven thousand individuals who die in the catastrophe. The death of the witnesses is literal as are their resurrection and ascension. These major assumption provide an intelligent understanding of this portion of prophecy . . . (p. 175).

These are very wise words in the interpretation of all prophecy. When figures of speech which indicate a spiritualizing of the text are intended, this is usually apparent to the reader.

11:1 The “And” at the beginning of this chapter ties it in with chapter 10 and indicates that this is a continuation of chapter 10. Chapter 10 ended by speaking about the Apostle John, and chapter 11 begins in the same way. The Apostle John was “given . . . a reed like unto a rod.” Reeds grow in thickets to great heights in the Jordan Valley, sometimes 15 to 20 feet high, are light, but straight and strong, and so would very useful in measuring “the temple of God.”

A temple was mentioned in Rev. 3:12 and 7:15. Especially Rev. 7:15 seems to indicate that what is said about God upon His throne beginning with 4:2 would indicate that God’s throne will be in the temple in heaven. But as we saw at the beginning of chapter 10, these visions given to John in chapters 10 and 11 have to do with the earth. And so evidently the temple will be rebuilt, as Ezekiel’s prophecy seems to indicate during the first part of the Tribulation period, or possibly even earlier. At any rate John was told to “measure the temple of God,” etc. Some MSS do not have “and the angel stood, saying,” and so it may have been that God is the One Who told John to do the measuring. Thus, John becomes more than an onlooker; he is now a participant in the revelation that is given here in this chapter.

The measuring of the temple was probably for John to be impressed with the its grandeur and greatness, but also with the glory and goodness of God in the place where he was to be worshiped on earth. Notice that there is an altar, and also there are worshipers.

It has been suggested that the altar referred to here is the altar of burnt offerings, the brazen altar, because, if conditions prevail during that time which were in effect under OT conditions, only the priests could approach the altar of incense. But we cannot say for sure because we do not know exactly what will be the order of worship during that time. But one thing that seems to be clear, and supported by verse 2, is that the worshipers are Jews!

11:2 And this verse is what seems to indicate that the worshipers in verse 1 are Jews, Jewish believers. John is particularly told not to measure the court that is outside of the temple because that had been given to the Gentiles. I am inclined to believe that God is the Speaker here. “Given unto the Gentiles” indicates that God was sovereignly involved in what the Gentiles would do. While it might look at the time like the Gentiles *took it*, yet they never could have done it if God had not given it to them.

“The holy city” is Jerusalem. In Matt. 4:5 we are told that during the Devil’s temptation of our Lord, he took the Lord “into the holy city” and set Him “upon a pinnacle of the temple.” Obviously the temple then was in Jerusalem, so Jerusalem would be “the holy city.” See also Matt. 27:53 for this expression, “the holy city.”

God’s sovereignty is also to be seen in the limitation He set upon the time that the Gentiles will dominate the holy city. It will be “forty and two months, or three and one-half years. In the prophecy of Daniel which will be studying this summer, we will learn that the Great Tribulation will be a period for a week of years, seven years. “Forty and two months” is half of that time, and this leads us to the conclusion that the main part of the Tribulation, and the worst part, will be the last three and one-half years.

We are seeing today a tremendous increase in anti-Semitism, which may be an indication that we are approaching this period of time when Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles. The object of anti-Semitism is not just to drive Israel out of their land, but the extinction of the Jews altogether! That will continue right into the Tribulation period, and for a time it will seem that the Gentiles will have their way. But they will not succeed. God has set limits on their time, and the Lord will intervene with His own glorious appearing to save His remnant, to destroy Gentile power, and to rule over the nations of the earth with a rod of iron.

11:3 Here we come to the main subjects of this part of the vision which the Apostle John sees: “two witnesses,” or better, “My two witnesses.” This would indicate that they are servants of the living God.

Let us think for a moment about what a witness is as far as Scripture is concerned.

Looking back into the OT and what God had to say about Israel through the prophet Isaiah, we have this statement in Isa. 43:10-12:

10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

The nation Israel was to be a witness that *the Lord is God, that there was no god before Him, nor will there ever be another God after Him. He is the Lord, and He is the Savior, and there is no other Savior. He is the only One.* How wonderful it would have been if Israel had been faithful to their calling! Instead, they became idolaters, a denial of what they were supposed to bear witness to.

The church in the NT has the same commission. Cf. Acts 1:8,

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Every generation of believers is under a divine commission to bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who He is, why He came, what He did, and so on and on. The Greek word for *witness* is μαρτυρέω from which we get our English word *martyr*. This does not mean that all witnesses were to become martyrs, but it happened in so many cases that the Lord's witnesses were killed, even in OT times, that this word witness took on this meaning.

These witnesses were to *prophesy*. We usually attach that word *prophesy* to the prediction of the future. But its basic meaning is preaching, the proclamation of a message. This is what witnesses for God are to do. They have a message to proclaim.

But why “two witnesses”? Have you noticed in Scripture how often there are two names joined together in the service of the Lord – Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, or Paul and Silas, or Paul and Timothy? Luke 12:1 tells us that the Lord appointed seventy of His disciples to go ahead of Him where He intended to go, and He sent them out in pairs, “two and two.” Why two? Well, in one way it was for fellowship and the strength and encouragement that they would be to each other. But Deut. 17:6 and 19:15 probably give the strongest reason. When two give witness to the same truth, this establishes the truth, much more than if one goes by himself.

The first part of verse three does not include the word “power” as we have it in the KJV. Obviously the Lord would empower His two witnesses to do what He had appointed them to do. The NASB uses the word

authority, which amounts to the same thing. But just translating the words as they appear in the Greek text, the meaning is clear: “And I will give to my two witnesses,” meaning that He would give them power and grace and wisdom and courage and everything else that they would need to do the work that the Lord had for them to do. The Lord does that for all of His people. He gives and gives and gives all that we ever need to be faithful to Him in our lives and in whatever service He has appointed us to do. It is really a very wonderful statement of the Lord’s sufficiency for His two witnesses.

And the Lord, likewise, has appointed the time of their service: “a thousand two hundred and threescore days.” Three and a half years has forty two months, and if you multiply 42 by 30 (the average number of days in a month), you will get 1,260 days – “a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”

Why would the Lord number the time of the ministry of the witnesses in numbers of days? Probably because every day was important. Every day, under the blessing of the Lord, would give them opportunities for their witness, days which needed to be redeemed for the will of God and for the glory of God.

But the last thing that we are told in this verse is that they were “clothed in sackcloth.” This is the garment of sorrow and of mourning. Perhaps it also speaks of the need for the people to repent. The days of the Great Tribulation will not be days of rejoicing, but days of grieving and sadness. The sorrow of the witnesses probably was in a large part because of the suffering of the Jews.

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11:4 The two witnesses here are called “two olive trees” and “two candlesticks,” or lampstands, who were “standing before the God of the earth.” Here we have an example of symbolism in this book of the Revelation. This is a figure taken from Zech. 4 where we have a candlestick of gold and two olive trees by it. The two olive trees are usually taken to represent two of the leaders in Israel at the time, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the king. They, of course, are both Jews, and so that also would be the emphasis here in Rev. 11 – that the two witnesses are Jewish. And they represent in both chapters the truth that the light of the Word of God is kept alive in the darkest of times. The oil, according to Zech. 4, must represent the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as we go on to what is probably the most familiar verse in Zechariah’s prophecy, Zech. 4:6:

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

It is only by the Spirit of God that Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the king could possibly fulfill the task which God had given to them.

The same would be true of the vision that we have in Rev. 11. The candlesticks, or lampstands, are the witness of the two men, the light of their lives, but especially the light of the truth that shines out in their lives, continually supplied by the Holy Spirit. Hosea 14:6 is one verse which pictures Israel as an olive tree. Lampstands were fueled by olive oil, and that is the idea here. Note also the parable of the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins and the oil that was lacking with the five foolish virgins.

The two witnesses here in Rev. 11 are pictured as “standing before the God of the earth.” “Standing” would indicate that they were alive, and ministering, and that they were being sustained by “the God of the earth” Who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sending of these witnesses was an act of mercy on God’s part, like the sending of the prophets of the OT.

11:5 These two witnesses were sovereignly prepared by God to withstand all of the opposition which they might face. “Hurt” in this instance would mean all attempts to kill them. When they were so opposed,

fire would go out of their mouths and consume their enemies. There is probably an allusion here to the time when King Ahaziah, Ahab's son who succeeded him on the throne of Israel, sent to the priests of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, to find out if he would recover after he fell through a lattice. The angel of the Lord sent Elijah to meet them, and asked them why they were going to Baalzebub instead of the God of Israel. When the messengers went back, Ahaziah realized that the prophet who had told them that Ahaziah would die, was Elijah. So he sent a captain of the army with fifty men to get Elijah. Fire came down from heaven and consumed the captain and his fifty men. This happened again with another fifty. Finally, when the third group came, the third captain fell on his knees before Elijah pleading for his life, and the lives of his men. Elijah was told by the angel of the Lord that he would be safe with them. This story is recorded in 2 Kings 1.

As far as the two witnesses are concerned, only God could give them such power. The fire came out of heaven for Elijah; it will come out of the mouths of the two witnesses during the Great Tribulation.

Accounts like these have led many to say that this teaches that *every servant of the Lord is immortal until his job is finished*.

11:6 The two witnesses have the power (ἐξουσία), or authority, to control the rain, and to turn the water into blood as well as to bring all kinds of plagues upon the earth "as they will." These details seem to indicate that the two witnesses are Elijah and Moses. On Elijah and the rain, cf. 1 Kings 17:1 ff., and 1 Kings 18:42 ff. See also James 5:17-18. On Moses and the plagues, cf. Ex. 7-12.

So the likelihood that these two witnesses are Moses and Elijah brought back to earth during the Tribulation is strengthened by the fact that they both were miracle workers, and that they performed miracles of this kind. We also know that the ministries of both men were concluded in very unusual ways. No one was able to find where Moses was buried although it is specifically said that the Lord buried him. See Deut. 34:5-6. And Elijah was caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Cf. 2 Kings 2:11.

Also these two men appeared with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. So they were related there. The evidence seems to be very strong that Elijah and Moses are the two witnesses who will come back to earth during the Tribulation to minister to the people of Israel during that time.

11:7 "Their" is plural; "testimony" is singular. This indicates that their testimony was the same. They were totally united in the message that they proclaimed. But the time came (or will come) when they will finish their testimony, and the beast will ascend out of the bottomless pit, overcome them, and kill them.

There have been many different ideas as to who this beast is. Dr. Walvoord says that it is the Devil. John MacArthur said it is the Antichrist. Swete said that it represents a great governmental power. So the truth is that we do not know. The fact that he comes out of the abyss, indicates that he is evil, but perhaps it is best to leave it there without trying to identify this beast specifically. What is true is that he is able to overcome these two witnesses only because their ministry was finished, and the Lord gave them the authority to do so.

11:8 The dead bodies of these two witnesses are not buried, but shall lie in a street of "the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt." Sodom was a city; Egypt, a country. Both stand in Scripture for ungodliness of the worst kind. Jerusalem is called Sodom and Gomorrah in Isaiah 1:9 and 10. Perhaps the idea that Jerusalem was "called" Egypt is seen by the way the Jews wanted to go back to Egypt after they had been delivered under Moses, and also because in so many ways the effect of Egypt was to be seen so often in the lives of the people of Israel, which brought judgment on Israel like it brought judgment on Israel. Judgment upon Israel is mentioned in Isaiah 22 after it had been announced against Egypt in Isaiah 19 and 20.

The crucifixion of our Lord is mentioned here as the crowning act of the nation's rejection of the Messiah.

Psalm 48 tells of how the Lord delighted in Jerusalem, which, of course, is not true today. No place on earth is today of greater interest world-wide. The nation Israel is in unbelief, and it is yet to experience its greatest trouble for its rejection of Christ. It is the greatest shame that could be heaped upon it for it to be likened to Sodom and to Egypt, but spiritually that is the picture we have of Jerusalem and of all Israel in the last days.

11:9 "The people" refers to the Jews. "Kindreds and tongues and nations" refers to the Gentiles in all of their different tribes, language groups, and national entities. So representatives of Gentiles all over the world will be there to view the dead bodies of the two witnesses. And they are there "three days and a half" to confirm that they are really dead. No one is allowed to bury them.

11:10 Here we see what a great time of rejoicing it will be for Jews and Gentiles alike. And this is universal. They rejoice and send gifts to each other to celebrate the death of these witnesses. But note how the people will feel about them. They are called "these two prophets" who "tormented them that dwell on the earth." But what did these two witnesses do? They preached, and they performed miracles of judgment as Moses and Elijah did when they were originally on earth, both of which were to turn people to the Lord. The verb *torture* means *to torment, to distress, to give great pain*. We are told that these witnesses had the power to keep it from raining, and power to bring plagues upon the earth. How much of this they did, we do not know, but it seems clear that some of this was done, and perhaps much in the way of judgment. But it seems clear also that a part of the torture that the people will feel is because of the preaching of the Gospel. That which brings such great delight and blessing to the people of God, the preaching of the Gospel and all of the Word of God, is torture to those who do not know the Lord. So again we see that instead of a great movement of repentance, we have great joy, much celebration, when the mouths of these servants of the Lord are silenced so that the people don't have to listen to the Word of God. They confirm the words of the Lord Jesus in John 3:19-20:

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

"Make merry" (εὐφραίνονται) is the verb used of the eating and drinking of the rich fool in Luke 12:19. Thayer says that the verb speaks of "the merriment of a feast" (p. 263). So there would be feasting and drunkenness, and all that goes with that. People will be hilariously happy.

But the celebration will soon come to an end. And instead of joy and rejoicing, there will be a return of fear, and the fear will be greater than ever before. The feasting of the people turned to fear. Why?

11:11 The two witnesses are raised from the dead! The power of God to raise the dead is displayed again. As far as we know, when our Lord was raised from the dead, no unbelievers saw Him. But that will not be the case with these two witnesses. Multitudes will see them, and not only fear, but "great fear," will grip the hearts of those who see that the witnesses are alive again.

11:12 But they will not only see, but they will also hear. And this certainly must be the voice of God Who said, "Come up hither." The people in the city will not only hear the voice from heaven, but they will see the two witnesses ascend and disappear into the cloud.

If the means of communication exist in those days, which we have today, world-wide television, where people all over the world can see and hear the same thing as it happens, think of the commotion that this will cause.

Revelation Review
Tuesday Bible Class
October 1, 2002

Robert Thomas, who is the Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at The Master's Seminary in California, calls Revelation "the climactic and most question-provoking book of the NT" (*Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. xiii).

The seven churches of Asia, for whom this book was originally written, were the only churches outside of Jerusalem in the Roman Empire who were blessed with the personal ministries of two apostles: the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John. It is thought that the Apostle John began his ministry in this Roman Province of Asia about the time that the Apostle Paul was martyred. And the Apostle John continued on for about 30 years.

Dr. Thomas mentioned also that out of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 of them allude to the OT Scriptures, and yet there is not a single direct quotation in Revelation from the OT. But these facts would certainly indicate that a familiarity with the OT is a great aid to the study of this one and only prophetic book of the NT.

The book of Revelation has been interpreted in several different ways. It is impossible to say how many different approaches there have been. Some look upon it as already having been fulfilled, many linking it with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. Others consider it to be a kind of an overview of church history. Still others interpret it symbolically. But I believe that the true view is that it is yet future, especially from chapter 4 on. Undoubtedly much of Revelation is symbolic, but it seems that it is important to begin by translating it literally and then explaining the symbols as we come to them. It would be very difficult to support the idea that the judgments of Revelation have already taken place. The world has experienced many great judgments from God since the beginning of time, but nothing like the judgments that we read about in this book.

In seeking to understand this very important book, as we would say about the study of any other book of the Bible, nothing can substitute for the reading and re-reading of the book itself. Many times Christians will begin the study of a book of the Bible by looking for a good commentary, and then reading it. Commentaries are very important, i.e., good ones, but we will never be in a position to evaluate the commentaries if we have not read the text of Scripture itself. So we all need to spend as much time as we can reading Revelation itself. I remember someone saying years ago that the Bible throws a lot of light on the commentaries. Commentaries present many different interpretations. So we need to know the text before we go to the commentaries. The Bible is inspired of God; the commentaries are not. The Lord obviously has helped many of those who have written on various books of the Bible, but just as the Holy Spirit has guided people in the past in their study of the Word, we should desire that for ourselves, and then go to the commentaries to supplement and possibly confirm, or even to correct, what we feel that we have learned.

Discuss the outline, and the place that this book holds in Biblical prophecy, i.e., where this fits with other prophetic passages in the NT. As I have said, this is the only uniquely prophetic book in the NT, but there is much prophecy scattered throughout the books of the NT. And so it is important to see how Revelation fits into the total picture. It speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in fact, it all leads up to that. Is this what the apostles had in mind when they wrote of looking for the coming of the Lord – in passages like Phil. 3:20-21 and Titus 2:11-15? Is what we have here in Revelation what the Lord had in mind when He spoke the words we have in John 14:1-3? What about the relationship between the NT church and the nation Israel? These are all questions that we need to be able to answer because they have a direct bearing upon how we will interpret this wonderful and amazing book.

Now in preparation for getting back to our study of this book, I want to call your attention to some of the things

that the Apostle John mentioned at the very beginning. If we have some of these things firmly fixed in our minds, they will help us in the study of the book.

First, I would call your attention to the fact that this is a book of the Bible which has a *title*. And this is very important for us not only to notice now, but to keep in mind as we go through the book. It is called, "The revelation of Jesus Christ." The translators of the KJV called it, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine." Well, it was written by the Apostle John, but it is not even his revelation. It is God's revelation, if you read the first verse carefully, which God gave to our Lord Jesus Christ "to show to His servants things which must shortly come to pass."

What is a "revelation"? It is the first word of this book in the Greek text. It is the word ἀποκάλυψις. As you can tell from the sound of it, it is the word from which we get our English word, *apocalypse*. Basically it means, *a disclosure, a making known of something that was unknown before*. Now we all know that our Lord made Himself known at various times before. We have His appearances in the OT which we call *Christophanies*. But the point that the Apostle John was making here was that Jesus Christ was going to be more fully revealed, or made known, than He ever had been before.

This word, ἀποκάλυψις, and the verb from which it comes, ἀποκαλύπτω, are used quite frequently in the NT. One interesting place is 1 Cor. 2:9-10. (Read.) The verb ἀποκαλύπτω is in verse 10 where it is translated "revealed." (Then read on in 1 Cor. 2 through v. 14.) Now we know that what the Apostle John wrote in this book was made known to him by the Spirit of God. But what the Apostle Paul was indicating to us in 1 Cor. 2 is, that what is revealed to us in Scripture, must also be revealed to us in our own hearts and minds. Furthermore, he pointed out in 1 Cor. 2:14 that "the natural man," the unsaved, unregenerated man "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." This means that a person who is not a Christian does not have either the capacity, nor the desire, to know the things of God.

This brings two important points to our attention. The first is that in order to know what has been revealed in Revelation, or any other book of the Bible, must be made known to us by the Author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit. And the second thing is this: In order for anyone to be able to help us to understand this book, he also must be a child of God. So the first thing to ask when you pick up a book on Revelation is, who is this writer, and does he, or if he is not living, did he, know the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior.

Now even if we are believers, we need to remember that we are fallible. That is, we are not perfect, and our understanding is not perfect. As long as we live in this world, we are going to, as the Apostle Paul said, "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:13). Many things are very clear in Scripture, but other things are not so clear. As we look to the Holy Spirit, He makes things clearer for us. And yet none of us will ever have perfect understanding about everything in the Word of God. But as we resume our study of this important book of the Bible, let us do so with a deep sense of our dependence upon the Holy Spirit. He is the Author of Scripture, and He is *the* Teacher of Scripture. So let us read this book, and come to Tuesday Class, looking to the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand what He wants us to know.

But the title of this book is intended to remind us that the most important feature of this book is what it tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we must always keep thinking of Him and looking for Him in this book.

The Apostle John gets us started right by his references to our Lord in chapter 1. After mentioning Him in verse 1, he spoke of Him again in verse 2. And then see verse 5, and his reference to the Lord there carries over into verse 6. He was talking about the Lord in verses 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. And then beginning in verse 12 and going on to the end of chapter 1 we have that tremendous vision that the Apostle John had of the Lord. Then all of chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 we read those letters which the Lord sent to the seven church of Asia.

When we go on to chapter 5, verse 5, we learn that the Lord is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “the root of David.” And then in the following verse, 6, for the first of twenty-six times in the book our Lord is called, “the Lamb.” This title is used of our Lord more than any other in the book of Revelation, and it appears in twelve chapters from chapter 5 to chapter 22.

But why would our Lord be portrayed as a Lamb? I believe the first mention answers that question. He is called “a Lamb as it had been slain.” Evidently it had the marks of a Lamb that had been killed, but here He is obviously alive. His death is mentioned again in verse 9, and then again in verse 12. But then in both verses 13 and 14 we learn that He is alive forevermore. He is pictured in Isaiah 53 as a lamb, and this was the message of John the Baptist in John 1:29. So in the Lamb we have Christ crucified, but risen, and alive “for ever and ever” (5:13b, 14b). And it is very apparent in chapter 5 that in this heaven scene, the focus is upon the Lamb, and He maintains that position all through the book of Revelation. As Dr. Mitchell used to say so often, “Wherever our Lord is, He is the center of attraction.”

The second main thing that I want to remind you of as we resume our study is in verse 3. This is a book concerning which we are to expect blessings – blessings if we read it, blessings if we hear it, and blessings if we “keep those things which are written therein.” What does all of this mean? And can’t we expect the same blessings from any and every part of the Word of God?

I am sure that we all would agree that there are special blessings waiting for everyone who read the Word, any part of the Word. Most of us start our days reading the Word. And then at different times during the day we read more of the Word, whether alone or in fellowship with our family members, or friends.

This word “blessed” is a word which makes a beatitude of the 22 chapters of the book of Revelation. There are beatitudes in the OT, especially in the Psalms. And there are beatitudes in the NT. We are all familiar with the beatitudes that our Lord gave in the Sermon on the Mount - “Bless are the poor in spirit ... they that mourn ... the meek ...” - and so on. But the beatitude that we have here in Rev. 1:3 *covers the whole book!* That is truly amazing!

The dictionary defines a beatitude as “consummate bliss.” And “consummate” means that it brings complete happiness. It means that you can never be as happy without it as you can with it. So to find this word at the beginning of the book of Revelation means that if you don’t read it, and if you don’t hear it, and if you don’t keep what is written in it, you will be passing by that which God has designed to be a part, and essential part, of your happiness in this world where there is so much unhappiness – and, strangely, a world in which there is yet to be even more unhappiness, and lots of it.

One of the greatest blessings we have today that those early Christians did not have, is that each of us has his own Bible. And the Bible we have is complete. By the time John wrote his books, the NT was complete, but it had not yet been compiled into one book like we have. Printing was very expensive, and each church was very fortunate if they had even one copy of the epistles that were available. So the reading was public reading. And while one read, the others listened. And then the *keeping* had to do with remembering what had been read, and what they had heard. They were to remember the reading so they could comply with God’s Word in their daily lives. And the times in which they lived made it most important that they be present when the Word of God was read. When we take our Bibles to read, or head off to church with our Bibles, we ought to thank God that we have Bibles. And then we ought to thank the Lord that we can read. And thanks also should be given for the opportunities that we have to hear the Word read, taught, and preached. And we ought to pray that the Lord will enable us to remember what we have read so that we can live like He wants us to live.

One writer, a David Barr, has written a book on Revelation for which in some way he made a study of how

people in Bible times had their minds trained to remember what was read to them in church. And he said that often with one reading, and usually with a very few public readings of a book like Revelation, they would be able to keep the whole book in mind (Robert Thomas' commentary, Vol. 1, p. 60, footnote #26). Often when I read my chapter for the day in Proverbs, I ask the Lord to help me to remember what I have read. Every verse has some practical teaching in it, and there is a lot to remember. But seeing Rev. 1:3 makes me realize that probably I could do a better job of remembering what I have read.

Before we leave this verse, let me ask a question about it. Why do you suppose the Lord put this verse in this particular verse instead of, say, in the Gospel of John, or in the book of Romans, or one of the epistles of Peter? Well, the very fact that people usually only read Revelation if they are going through the whole Bible, or if, like we are, they attend a class or a church where this book is being taught. But generally this is not the kind of a book that we pick up to read like we would the Psalms, for example, or one of the Gospels. Too often the book of Revelation becomes a scene of controversy, and, if you are like I am, you don't like controversy. It would be wonderful if we all agreed about everything in Scripture. But we don't, and probably never will in this life. But we need to be gracious about our differences, and look to the Lord continually for greater understanding, and especially for His blessing. So verses 1 and 3 are very important verses to keep in mind in the study of this book. We need to be looking for the Lord as we read, and paying careful attention as we read, or as we hear it read, so we will learn from our reading how we can best live so as to please the Lord.

There is one more point I would like to take up as we get back to our study.

In verse 4 of chapter 1, and again in verse 11 we are told that this book was originally sent to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia – present day Turkey. And then chapter 2 and 3 with letters addressed to all seven of those churches, that point is emphasized. But why would it be sent to them?

Personally I do not believe that the church is going to be here during the Great Tribulation, and so I do not think that John was preparing them for that time. We know from 2 Tim. 3:1ff. that the last days of the church on earth are going to be "perilous." So the church may go through difficult times before the Lord comes. We can see indications of trouble ahead for us even today. However, these are not times for the church to grow lax about fellowship with the Lord, and obedience to the Word, and holy living. In fact, we are, like the Apostle Paul, to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). The longer we live, the more diligent we need to be in walking with the Lord. And one of the main reasons? In order that by our lives the Spirit of God might be pleased to use us to awaken people in the world to their need of salvation, and only in Christ. We know from the last chapter of Revelation that one of the purposes of the writing of this book was for the evangelization of the lost. So the Apostle John was addressing these churches, with whom he was well acquainted and to whom he devoted the remaining years of his life, probably very typical churches, as an urgent appeal to them for a greater evidence of godly living.

We all know that we are ready for heaven from the moment that we are saved. But the Lord leaves us here for two reasons: 1) that we might grow in grace and live lives to glorify Him; and 2) that our lives would be used by God to point people in the world to Christ. Many believe that the seven churches give us a panoramic view of the church age. I have some problems with that. But those seven letters really deal with the needs of churches in every age, and so they never lose their message to the people of God in any generation.

I hope that all that I have said by way of review and introduction to another year of study together, will whet your appetite to learn all that we can from this book in the weeks ahead. Read it as much as you can. Pray for our times together, and join me in looking to the Lord for real blessing. (Close in prayer.)

This brings us to:

f-2. The end of the second woe (Rev. 11:13-14).

11:13 At the same time that the two witnesses ascended up to heaven there was “a great earthquake.” Note this word “great” in verse 8, “the great city,” in verse 11, “great fear,” and in verse 12, “a great voice.”

Three things happened following this earthquake:

- 1) A tenth of the city of Jerusalem was destroyed.
- 2) Seven thousand people died.
- 3) Even the remnant were “affrighted,” but they gave glory to God.

“The remnant” is a term used in the OT for the elect of Israel. So it is definitely Jewish. “Affrighted” means that they trembled with fear, that they were greatly alarmed. But their fear of what was happening turned to fear of the Lord as we must understand from the fact that they gave glory to God.

So terrible things continue to happen, and yet we see no indication of any evidence of repentance toward God. There could have been some who turned to the Lord, but not enough for it even to be mentioned in Scripture.

11:14 The sixth trumpet judgment, the second woe, has been concluded, and now we are waiting for the seventh trumpet and the third woe.

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g. The seventh trumpet – the third woe (Rev. 11:15-19).

At this point in our study of the book of Revelation, it will probably be worthwhile to review what we have had by way of judgments upon the earth up to this point, their connection with each other, and that which we now come to with the sounding of the seventh trumpet which judgment, or judgments, are called “the third woe.”

There are three series of judgments during the Great Tribulation: the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments. These last judgments are called *vial judgments* in the KJV. The Greek word which is translated “vial,” or “bowl,” actually means *a broad, shallow cup*. So either any of these words would be a good translation: *saucer, cup, or bowl*. Probably *bowl* has been chosen to convey the idea of the greatness of these terrible judgments which will be poured out upon the earth

The breaking of the seventh seal judgment leads to the seven trumpet judgments, and the blowing of the seventh trumpet judgment leads to the seven bowl judgments. The connection between the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments is not as clear as that between the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments. But their order in the book suggests this connection. So this shows that the judgments are consecutive as to their order. By this I mean that they follow one after another and there is really no break or interval between them. This one thing that makes the book of Revelation hard to outline because so many things are brought into the judgments that it is hard to determine in some cases what belongs to some of the judgments, particularly the seventh in each case.

For example, we come in our passage today to the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which is also the third woe. But when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, it seems like the Tribulation is over, and the kingdom of God has been established on the earth, meaning that Christ had come, and the world was enjoying the millennial reign of Christ. But we soon find out that that is not the case. But let us go on with verse 15.

11:15 The scene is in heaven. “Great voices” are heard. But what they are saying is completely different from what we have been reading. It seems like the Great Tribulation is over, but we know that it is not. Why then are they rejoicing as though the Lord has returned to earth and has established His rule over all of the nations of the earth. The verb in the original which is translated “is become,” would be better translated *has become*. It is what scholars call *proleptic* because it speak of a future event as though it had already happened.

There are probably many different reasons for this, but I will mention just two. The book of the Revelation, as we see at the very beginning (v. 3) was given for the blessing of the people of God. The only way that the prophecy of judgments can be a blessing, is that they are what is necessary in order to bring about the ultimate fulfillment of the purposes and promises of God. So here, which we might call, midway through this book, we see that in heaven they were rejoicing because they know that this is what the outcome of all of the judgments will be. And we know it too because it has been revealed to us and for us in Scripture. And so we can be blessed in knowing that wrong will not always prevail, but that in the end the victory will go to our heavenly Father and to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But how can we be so sure? It is because of the sovereignty of our God, and thus His purposes will ultimately prevail. So we can say that there is joy in heaven at this very moment over what is to be.

There is an illustration of this very kind of *proleptic revelation* in the book of Romans. Please turn to Romans 8:30. Paul used four verbs here which apply to every believer: “predestinated . . . called . . . justified . . . glorified.” Have we been predestinated? Yes. Have we been called? Yes. Have we been justified? Yes. Have we been glorified? NO! Why did Paul say that we have been? Because these are expressions of the purposes of God. And so what is still future can be spoken of as an accomplished fact because whatever God purposes is just as certain to take place as if it were already so.

The voices are “great,” meaning that they wanted to be heard. And their message is clear. With all of the ungodliness and sin there is in the world, the day is most certainly coming when “Jesus shall reign where e’er the sun, doth its successive journeys run.” And of His kingdom there will be no end.

11:16 The twenty-four elders who were seated on their thrones “before God . . . fell upon their faces, worshiped God.” And then we have their words in the next verse.

Reading this verse should make us do the same thing. (Read the verse.) When the Lord does return to reign upon the earth, He will not have, nor will He need, assistance from anyone else! And that thought is in the way the elders address the Lord: “O Lord God Almighty, which art, and which wast, and which is to come.” This speaks not only of His sovereign power, but of His immutability. What the Lord has been in the past, He continues to be right now, and He will be the same forever. This is the equivalent of Heb. 13:8: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

The song of the elders continues into the next verse.

11:17 This cannot be the coming of the Lord that is spoken of in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, but it is the coming that our Lord spoke of in Matthew 24 and 25. But what a picture it gives us of the unregenerated human heart. The coming of the Lord does not please them as it does those in heaven, and as it will the people of God who are on the earth. It makes them angry. As we have noticed before, people don’t repent because of the judgments of God. But whether the wicked like it or not, their time of judgment will come, or, in the spirit of the verses we have noted here, their time of judgment before the Lord has come.

The nations of the earth are not talking now about God, nor are they talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. But the time is coming when they will be confronted with Christ as their Judge, whether they like it or not. And His decision will stand for all eternity!

But when the Lord comes to reign this will also be a time of rewards – for the prophets (OT), and the saints (those living when the Lord comes as well as those who were saved in OT times). And here “saints” are described as those who fear the same of the Lord. Cf. 14:6-7; 15:3-4; 19:5. The world will largely remain the same as it is now, but the Lord will call His people out, separate them from all of the ungodliness of that time (which is what a saint is), and who will be living to worship and to please and to glorify God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

11:19 The first part of this verse has to do with heaven; the latter part, with the earth.

When Moses constructed the Tabernacle, he was to follow very carefully the plan which was given to him by the Lord. And the book of Hebrews tells us that the earthly tabernacle was according to the Temple in heaven. No one really knows what happened to the ark of the covenant that Moses made. With its disappearance went the visible manifestation of the presence of the Lord. But here we have the ark in heaven, all in tact, evidence that God was there! But on earth (and the last part of this verse brings us back to earth) we have lightnings, voices, thunderings, “an earthquake, and great hail.”

Thus, this verse provides a fitting close to the brief glimpse we have in heaven, and a continuation of the terrible judgments which are yet to come upon the earth.

Moving on to chapter 12 we have the account of:

3. The woman, the dragon, and the child (Rev. 12:1-17).

Robert Thomas says in his commentary on this chapter:

The seventh trumpet has opened the way for a revelation of the seven bowl-judgments, but that the revelation to be meaningful, a sketch of the hidden forces behind this great climax of human history and of the personages that play in that climax is necessary (II, p. 115).

Now we don't get to the bowl judgments until chapter 16, but it may be that everything from chapter 12 on through chapter 18 has to do with the bowl judgments in one way or another.

In line with the quotation from Robert Thomas above, we have here in chapter 12 an account of the chief players in the conflict which is to reach its climax and end during the time of the Great Tribulation. The woman is not the virgin Mary, but the nation Israel. The child is the Messiah, Christ. The “great red dragon” is the Devil. Michael, mentioned in verse 7 (and only here in this book) is called in Jude 9 the archangel, and he appears in Scripture as the defender of Israel. So this chapter tells us that the Great Tribulation has to do to a great extent with the nation Israel. But let's notice what the chapter tells us the woman, the dragon, and the child.

12:1 We are all familiar with the Apostle John's use of the word “sign” in his Gospel. It is the Greek word σημεῖον. In John's Gospel he spoke of the miracles of the Lord as “signs” indicating His Deity. Here in the book of Revelation it seems to have a special meaning. It suggests that when he spoke of the woman as a sign, he was not speaking of a real woman, but this woman represented something else. The same is true where the word is used in verse 3 of this chapter. He was not really talking about a “great red dragon,” but this was

the way in which the Spirit of God was depicting the Devil. So this is a case in this book where symbols are used to present the truth.

This woman was “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. This should remind us of one of Joseph’s dreams, his second one. Please turn to Gen. 37:9-10. Just as the nation Israel was divided into twelve tribes, so this sign is used to tell us that the woman here in Rev. 12 represented Israel.

12:2 This woman was pregnant and about to give birth to her child.

12:3 Suddenly another “wonder” (sign) appears. It was “a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his head.” Verse 9 tells us that this represented “the old serpent, and Devil, and Satan. But in the next chapter of Revelation, 13, we have a similar description of that beast which rises up from the sea. Also the fourth beast in Daniel 7:9 had ten horns. And some expositors see a connection there. Perhaps the best we can say about the Devil at this point is that he is supported by an alliance of nations in his opposition to Israel. Dr. Walvoord suggested the revived Roman Empire.

The dragon is a creature that may never have existed, but it was supposed to be a huge snake with wings, with claws and teeth like a lion and a long, powerful, pointed tail. Actually the word “dragon” is brought into English from the Greek, δράκων. It was to represent the cruelty of the Devil, his fierce nature, and that he was a killer. Many see in the fact that he was “red” an indication of his deadly intentions.

12:4 In 8:10 and 9:1 we have angels represented by stars (or so it seems). Since we are dealing here with symbols, the stars here are not literal stars, but angels, and it could be a reference to those angels which fell when Satan rebelled against God. It is interesting to see in this chapter how Satan seems to have mustered the forces of the nations as well as the angels in his opposition to God.

But here in the latter part of this verse we see what the real purpose of the Devil is. It was to destroy the Messiah when He came to earth, born from the nation Israel.

12:5 The child that the woman gave birth to was a male child who was destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron. And so he was definitely the chief enemy of the dragon who had his own desire to rule over all creation, over nations and over the angels of heaven. But he was not successful in destroying the child because he was caught up into heaven. The child, of course, is Christ. The work of Christ is passed over in silence, but we know that His work was done followed by His ascension back to the Father and to His place at the right hand of the Father.

12:6 This verse tells us, however, that the woman was not removed from the earth, but she was granted special protect. She was protected by God and fed for 1,260 days, which is three and one half years, or the time of the last part of the Great Tribulation. So this verse clearly indicates that during the Tribulation, the nation of Israel will continue to be under attack.

It is passages like this which have many of the Lord’s people believing that we are very close to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. During our lifetimes we have never seen a situation in which there is so much opposition toward Israel as there is today. The Arab world is set on the destruction of Israel. Arafat says that he is not going to be satisfied until Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian state. Very difficult days are ahead for Israel, but we know that God is going to protect Israel and through the Tribulation He is going to bring the elect in Israel to the point where they will finally realize that the Lord Jesus Christ is their Messiah.

From this sixth verse which takes us ahead to the time of the Great Tribulation and then the coming and reign of Christ upon the earth, we go in verse 7 to an historical account of the rebellion of the dragon and his conflict with Michael which took place before the fall of man into sin.

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12:7 “And there was war in heaven.” Some relate this to the time after the man born of the woman was taken back into heaven, but it seems that that would make two times that the Devil was cast out of heaven. The reasons for the Devil’s original revolt are given to us in Isaiah 14:12-15. He sought to take over the place of God. And this tells us that the war was fought among the angels – the elect angels under Michael’s command, and the fallen angels, the demons, under the command of the Devil.

The outcome?

12:8 The Devil and his forces were defeated and cast out of heaven. This means that they did not have the strength to win. There is no question but that the Devil is powerful, very powerful. And throughout history he had done terrible things in his opposition to God, to the people of God, and to the ways and purposes of God. BUT for the most part his career has been one of failure and defeat. He may have great wisdom and power, and his ways subtle and attractive outwardly. However, his record is one of repeated failure. He failed to destroy the human race. He failed in his revolt in heaven. He failed in his attempt to get the Lord Jesus killed at the time of His birth. He failed to get the Lord Jesus to sin. His doom was finally sealed at the Cross. And, while he has won many victories over the people of God, yet in every instance God in His power has prevailed, and the Devil has been defeated.

It seems that the Devil still has access to heaven, but he has no place there, and the book of the Revelation is not concluded before we learn of his final defeat.

Verse 9 gives us a true picture of the Devil both as to his character and his method.

12:9 “The great dragon” – as powerful as he was, he was “cast out.” He was defeated. The glorious place that he had held before, was taken away from him, and he and his demons were “cast out.”

But let us understand more about him. The Scriptures are the only place that we get a true picture of who this fallen angel is, what his methods are, and what his objectives are. Note the three times in this one verse that we have the verb, *cast out*. Robert Thomas pointed out that this verb is used 26 times in the book of Revelation. It is a word which is often used in the NT in connection with judgment. Thomas also pointed out that there are three stages to the Devil being cast out. The first is here. The second will be when he is cast into the bottomless pit, and the third when he is cast into the lake of fire.

He is that “old serpent,” a reference to the way that he appeared to Eve in the Garden of Eden. We have already seen that he is like “a great red dragon.” The fact that a mythological being is used to depict the character of the Devil, is evidence that there really is no creature of God which can adequately describe how terrible the Devil really is. See also Rev. 20:2.

Concerning the Devil as a serpent, we are told in Gen. 3:1, “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field. What does “subtle” mean? It means that he is “cunning” in a bad sense. He is crafty and sly. He is very skillful in doing what he wants to do. He is wise and clever. But we know also that his appearance as a serpent would let us know that he is deadly. I don’t know of any good a serpent can do for you. I used to have

a belt made from the skin of a serpent, and it was a nice belt, but that snake had to die before a useful belt could be made.

But he is also named “the Devil.” This is the Greek word, *διάβολος*. It means *a slanderer, a false accuser*. This is why he is called in verse 10 “the accuser of our brethren.” He must have had a great time when he enticed Eve into sin, and then when Eve got Adam to sin. And his object in bringing his accusations against the people of God, often true accusations, is to get the Lord to cast His people away also. He accused Job, not just once but twice.

Next we read that the Devil can also be described as “Satan.” This means that he is an adversary. He is an enemy, never a friend, even though he often tempts us as though he were a friend. He appeared as a friend to Eve, pretending to give her the truth about God, but in truth he was her deadly enemy. And this is brought out by the next thing we learn about the Devil and Satan.

He is a deceiver. That is very apparent in Genesis 3. He sought to deceive Eve about God, to destroy her confidence in God, what God had said, and why he had said it. But here we read that the Devil “deceiveth the whole world.” Perhaps no generation in the history of the world has demonstrated how deceived it is than our generation. Even people who can be classified by human standards as “good,” are deceived, terribly deceived. Our country, and the whole world, is going right now the way the Devil wants it to go. People today even in our country are anti-God and anti-Christ and anti-Bible. And the sad thing is that people are perfectly happy to have it this way. The Devil deceives us about sin. He is pro-sin. Whatever is evil in God’s sight, is good and profitable with the Devil. Man is so easily deceived because he has a sinful heart. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

What did Paul mean by “the simplicity that is in Christ”? Some texts read, “from the simplicity and purity that is in Christ.” “Simplicity” means *single-mindedness*. The opposite, as Lenski pointed out, is duplicity. The simplicity, single-mindedness, of Christ was manifested that He was totally and only intent on His love for the Father, His desire to please the Father, and His intention to do the Father’s will. Duplicity, on the other hand, is that which describes a hypocrite. He pretends to be one thing while in reality he is totally different

It cannot be said too often that the Devil is totally a deceiver. He is the Master Deceiver, and whoever goes his way is destined for ruin and shame – eternally!!! The NIV renders this statement about the Devil, “who leads the whole world astray.”

But regardless of how subtle and deceptive the Devil can be with people, he never deceives God, and he never deceives the Lord Jesus, and he will not be able to deceive us if we stay by the Word of God. How thankful we should be for those words of the Apostle John in 1 John 4:4 after his remarks about the false prophets in the world and the whole spirit of anti-Christ which exists in the world,

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

No deceiver, no impostor, likes to be exposed. And that is very true about Satan. He would like to tear out this chapter from the Bible and make people who have read it forget all that it has to say. But the Spirit of God led the Apostle John to write it over 2,000 years ago, *and it is still in the book!* But that does not keep Satan from attacking the source of our information about him, and that is, the Bible! Absolutely not! So let us not be surprised that there are always movements on hand to try to persuade us that the Bible is not the Word of God

after all, and that it is not to be trusted! It is the Word of God, and it is to be trusted. It is the only book that has ever been written that is not tainted in any way with error. By the grace of God let us take our stand on the Word, and never be moved from it.

The great victory described in verse 9, leads to the hymn of worship and praise which we have in verse 10.

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12:10 Beginning with this verse and going through verse 12 we have what Thomas calls “one of the outbursts of praise found in this book” (II, 132). And then he listed the following verses mentioned by Robert Mounce in his commentary: 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17-18; 15:3-4; 19:1-2, 4, 6-8. Verses 10 through 12 of this chapter need to be added to this list.

You have all heard the question, “What do you give to the man who has everything?” The thought behind that question is that you can only give him what he already has, so it makes your gift look meaningless. We like to give people something that they don’t have. Well, if that is sometimes a problem for us in giving a gift to some person, how would you answer the question, “What can I give God that He doesn’t already have?” Or, what is it that God wants me to give Him that will really please him?

Last week reading my Psalm for the day I came to Psalm 50, and I was struck by the way Asaph presented what we need to give to God if we are to please Him. He mentioned two things. Please turn with me to that Psalm, and follow the reading as I begin with verse 7 and read to the end. (Read.)

What does the Lord want from us? Two things: praise (which is a form of worship), and prayer in times of trouble.

From the references I have given you, you can see that praise and worship are a major part of the book of the Revelation. And it needs to be a part of our lives every day. The Lord wants us to express that we know that our blessings come from Him, and that He is the One we go to *first* in “the day of trouble.”

This hymn is sung in heaven. And we could say that there are three stanzas in the three verses. The first one celebrates the establishing of the kingdom of God. The second, the victory of the saints. Third, a warning to those who live on the earth.

The first is like what we had in 11:15 where the Lord was not actually reigning on the earth, but His reign is spoken of as actually going on because it is guaranteed by the promises and by the power of God. The casting out from heaven of the Devil is step #1 in the ultimate establishing of the Lord’s reign upon the earth. It means big trouble for those who are on the earth, and that is ultimately to be demonstrated in the Great Tribulation. The “now” is *proleptic* – that word which means the description of something which is yet future as though it had already taken place. Remember that these singers are in heaven, and time is like nothing when viewed from heaven. So while John is receiving this vision of the future, and it was, as we now know, over 2,000 years away (and possibly longer), yet to those in heaven it was just like a couple of days since, as Peter has told us, “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8).

But now let’s turn to the hymn.

Fausset (JFB commentary) interestingly links this as following the ascension of Christ which was referred to in chapter 11, and ultimately will lead to the second coming of Christ to the earth. And notice that not until Satan

is finally cast out can there be the culmination of all that has to do with salvation. Cf. Heb. 9:28:

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Finally it is going to mean the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth, but here in Revelation we are seeing the outworking of the purposes of God step by step. Note that “salvation” and “power” (δύναμις) and “kingdom” all are God’s. And it is all by God that “power” (ἐξουσία), authority, of Christ will be established. Just as by the power of God, Satan is cast out, so by the power of God, Christ is set up to reign. But that will not take place until Satan is cast out and ultimately bound. On the authority of Christ, cf. Ps. 2:8; Matt. 28:18; John 17:2. We are to recognize that all of this is assurance given to us by God that Satan will be ultimately defeated, and the victory will belong to our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, he is “the accuser of the brethren.” He has already done all of the damage that he can do among the angels. From Genesis 3 on his object has been people, and we learn in this passage that the people he is particularly against are “the brethren,” those true brothers and sisters in Christ, those who are genuinely redeemed.

This is the only place in the NT where Satan is called “the accuser.” When we think of the way the Apostle John spoke of our Lord in 1 John 2:1, as our “advocate,” or *Paraclete*, we see that we have a court scene. God is the Judge. The Devil is the prosecuting attorney, and the Lord is the defense attorney. But what charges can the Devil bring against the people of God? He charges them with sin. Are his charges true? Many times they are because the people of God do sin. What is Satan’s charge? That if a person sins, he should die. And he has Scripture on his side because Paul wrote that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). In Ezekiel 18:4 and 20 we read that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” But doesn’t he know that if we are saved, we are saved forever? Yes, but it is like His opposition to the Lord and to his work, he evidently feels that there might be some possibility that He can bring charges that would nullify the purposes of God.

What is our hope when Satanic charges are brought against us “before God”? The Lord Jesus stands to our defense, and by virtue of His sacrifice for us, He declares before God that the penalty for our sins has been met, and the charges are dropped.

Are we ever conscious of these accusations against us? Possibly. It could be that when we are overwhelmed with the awfulness of our sins, and when we have to turn to Christ for peace and to worship Him for what He did for us at Calvary, it may have something to do with accusations that are made in heaven against us. The Apostle John’s words are,

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

This is brought out also in Rev. 12:11.

“Day and night” shows how incessantly Satan opposes the people of God.

12:11 Here is the second stanza of this heavenly hymn.

Two things are stated here about the accused of verse 10. First, the “brethren” were victorious over their accuser. And this victory was “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” Our sin was the reason for the death of the Lamb of God. Personal merit plays no part in our salvation. It is all a gift of God’s

grace and because of His great love for us. This is the divine side. On the human side we have “the word of their testimony.” The reality of their salvation was demonstrated (or actually, is to be demonstrated) by their faithful testimony of Christ and the Gospel when only a denial of both could spare them from death.

At this point we need to remember that our Lord said while He was here on earth,

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

These saints were (will be) victorious in life, and victorious in death. “They loved not their lives unto the death.” Our Lord said on another occasion,

4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do (Luke 12:4).

The Devil would consider this a great victory, but instead the victory belongs to the Lord.

12:12 This is the third and last stanza of the hymn.

This stanza really starts where the first stanza began. The heavens can rejoice and those who are in it for two reasons: 1) the Devil has been cast out; and 2) the persecuted saints have arrived. But there is a warning here for those who still are “of the earth and of the sea.” Thomas says that this speaks concerning “the inhabitants of the whole terrestrial world” (p. 137). There are three reasons for the warning: 1) because the Devil has been cast out into the earth, and on the earth he has to stay; 2) because he is angry, very angry; 3) because he knows that he has only a short time in which to do what he has to do. Robertson describes the Devil’s wrath as “boiling rage” (VI, 395).

This “short time” is taken by evangelical scholars to mean the period of the Great Tribulation, which is three and a half years, time times and half a time, one thousand two hundred and sixty days. He is going to cause so much trouble and suffering and death that if the Lord had not put a limit on those days, the whole human race would be extinguished.

And so Scott summarizes what is this last stanza by saying,

His [the Devil’s] expulsion from the heavens is a matter of jubilant praise above, his deportation to the earth will fill the scene under heaven with sorrow, wickedness, and woe (p. 263).

12:13 In this verse the Apostle John resumed the discourse which had been interrupted with the scene in heaven beginning with verse 7. And the text again focuses upon Israel. The Devil was not able to devour the Lord Jesus Who at this point is in heaven, and so he goes after His mother according to the flesh, the nation Israel. The last word that we had about her was that she had fled into the wilderness, to “a place prepared by God where she would be safe and cared for during the 1,260 days of the Tribulation. This suggests that the nation would be out of her land. The Devil found her, and immediately began to persecute her because of the child she had given birth to our Lord. He was not satisfied that she was out of her land; he wanted to do away with her completely. And today we see that the attitude of the Arab world is aimed at this very thing. They want Jerusalem and are not going to be satisfied until Israel is out and they are in.

12:14 This may be a repetition of what we read in verse 7. Remember that all of this was symbolic, and so the figure of the woman being given the wings of a great eagle so that she can fly to “her place,” is symbolism to show God’s protection of her, *i.e.*, the nation Israel. Regardless of what the Devil tries to do, he is not

going to be able to kill her. Throughout her history Israel has faced many times when her very existence was threatened, but what we have in these verses is undoubtedly the worst time that Israel will face, and it is yet future.

12:15 We do not know exactly what this means. We know that the Devil is a miracle worker. Our Lord said about this same period of the Tribulation,

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:24).

So we should not think that it is impossible that the Devil might do something very unusual to destroy Israel. Again we see that his purpose is the complete destruction of Israel.

12:16 But neither should we think it impossible that the Lord could literally do what is mentioned here. We have an OT example in which the Lord did this very thing. The only difference between the OT incident and this is that the OT incident was a judgment from God; this would be a manifestation of His great mercy for the nation Israel. I am referring to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram recorded for us in Num. 16:1-35.

Whatever the true interpretation of this verse is, it teaches us that the Lord will completely nullify this plot of the Devil to destroy the nation Israel.

12:17 Anger seems to be one of the chief characteristics of the Devil. See 12:12 and here. He couldn't get her Son, nor is he being successful in getting her, and so he turns here to "the remnant of her seed."

Thomas suggests that this is the 144,000. And this seems very possible. They were to be preserved from death throughout the Great Tribulation, and the Devil may feel that this is his only remaining hope of destroying the nation. There are many problems with all of the suggestions that various writers have made. So it is best for us just to believe what is written here, and not be bothered if we cannot exactly identify the people involved. We know in a general way what Satan will want to do, and that even though many Jews, saved Jews, will die during the Great Tribulation, yet the Devil will be providentially prohibited from doing what he wants to do. The Devil has great power, but he is not omnipotent. God is omnipotent, and He is the One Who will be the Victor!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
October 14, 2002

Chapters 13-16

We come now to #4 on page 2 of our outline. And this is under the main heading of The Great Tribulation which includes chapters 6 through 18.

- 4. The two beasts (Rev. 13:1-18).**
 - a. The beast out of the sea (13:1-10).**
 - b. The beast out of the earth (13:11-18).**

We need to keep in mind that we are in a series of events in this part of Revelation which follow the blowing of the seventh trumpet (see 11:14-15), and are in preparation for the third and last series of judgments, the pouring out of the seven vials, or bowls, upon the earth (see 16:1ff.).

While there are many different ideas as to what these two beasts represent, there doesn't seem to be any question but that they are the beast and the false prophet which are mentioned several times as we go in this book. Cf. 16:13 in connection with the pouring out of the sixth bowl judgment. And then see 19:20 and 20:10.

These two great powers which arise in the Tribulation period are the two masterminds produced by the Devil himself to deceive and destroy the whole world. As proof that the Devil is behind these two beasts, note 13:2 and 11. William R. Newell spoke of the Devil and these two beasts as the trinity of evil. Many attempts have been made to identify and even name who these two beasts are that we come to here in Rev. 13, but we need to examine what is revealed here and be careful that we don't try to make this chapter say more than it says. We know that a person known as the Antichrist will come. And this appears to be what we are concerned with here, the Devil's final attempt to deceive the whole world before the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the true Messiah comes to rule and reign with a rod of iron.

(Explain the objectives of the Devil from Isa. 14:13-14.)

So let us carefully examine what this chapter tells us.

13:1 Obviously this chapter continues on to tell us what follows from what we are told about the Devil in the last verse of chapter 12. We must remember, too, that our Lord Jesus Christ, while coming as a Savior and Redeemer of sinners, is coming also as a King. The kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. This is probably one thing that causes some confusion as to the identity of these beasts since we are inclined to think of our Lord only as a Savior. But He is also a King, the greatest of all Kings. And when He comes again to the earth He will come as the Savior-King. He sovereignly rules now in all of the affairs of His creation. But He is not now *visibly* present. But the day is coming when "every eye shall see Him" (as we are told in Rev. 1:7).

John said here that he was standing upon "the sand of the sea," i.e., the shore. Many take this to mean the Mediterranean Sea as an indication that this first beast will arise from that area of the world. But I don't think that we can be absolutely sure that this is the case. But whatever may be the true situation here, while he is standing there he sees a beast arise "out of the sea."

Now if we are looking for the significance of "the sea," there are two things that can be said:

1) The sea is a figure of speech that is used in the OT of the Gentile nations. Examples of this are Isa. 17:12,

Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of many waters.

Ezek. 26:3 is another example:

3 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up.

2) Secondly, the sea is used in Scripture as a representation of the wicked. The text in proof of this is Isa. 57:20-21:

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

I have struggled in my own mind as to whether the first beast or the second beast is the Antichrist. Some who believe that the first beast is the Antichrist also believe that since he arises out of the sea, therefore the Antichrist must be a Gentile. But I have a hard time believing that the Jewish people would accept a Gentile as their Messiah *unless because of their desperate need for help, and because of the way the Devil will deceive them, they would accept whatever help they can get!* It may be that this verse means that the false Messiah will be a Jew, but that he will arise from among the nations somewhere. There are just many things that are not perfectly clear to us. We know that all of this will take place, but we cannot be more specific than the Scriptures are. There was one Bible teacher who during World War II wrote a book declaring that Mussolini was the Antichrist. But when Mussolini died, and was not raised from the dead, this teacher did all that he could to call back his books. There is much blessing and much light given us in the book of Revelation without feeling that we are responsible to identify every person who is mentioned in the book.

By the way, I think it is important for us to recognize that these two beasts are individual men. The first beast of Rev. 13 is “the beast” in the expression “the beast . . . and . . . the false prophet.” The second beast is “the false prophet.” According to Rev. 20:10, as we have seen, the Devil is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are. So, since we know that the Devil is a person, a fallen angel, so the beast and the false prophet must be individuals also, not nations.

This first beast has “seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns.” This may be related to the ten toes of Dan. 2:42. We are also told in Rev. 17:12:

12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

This has led many to feel that this beast is a revived Roman Empire, and it certainly may have a connection there. I have held this position myself in the past. But I am inclined now to believe that this merely indicates the one aspect of the extent of the Antichrist’s power, but that it does not make the beast the powers, but the head of the powers.

The only other times that *seven heads and ten horns* are mentioned in the Bible are right here in the book of the Revelation. The Devil is mentioned in 12:3 as having “seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. In chapter 17 we read of “seven heads and ten horns” three times: in 17:3, 7, and then they are explained in verses 9 through 18, especially verses 9 and 12. But in Rev. 17 the seven heads and ten horns are related to “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” So this further complicates the picture. In the past many commentators linked BABYLON with the Roman Catholic Church. But it may be, if we look at current events, that BABYLON means “Babylon, having to do with the Islamic world. But we will look at chapter 17 when we get there. But if we take the heads and horns of the seventeenth chapter as mountains and kings with seven kings on the seven mountains, then we actually are talking about *seventeen kings!*

But let us think about this a little more. “Heads” is a word that has to do with authority. Christ is the Head of

the Church. The man is the head of the woman. And I suppose that many would see in the reference to “heads” a portrayal of wisdom. I wonder if we are not to believe that the Antichrist has seven heads and ten horns like the Dragon does to show the intimate connection to the two, and that their power, or authority, is actually supported by a group of kings. But the Beast is pictures as this person because we have to consider these powers as actually a part of the Beast because they could not exist without him. Nor can we fully understand how terrible and influential the Beast’s power is apart from those kings which support him. It certainly is going to be a time of great wisdom and great power, but it is all Satanic in character because on these heads is “the name of blasphemy.”

I don’t think that we should be disturbed if we can’t identify all of this to our own full satisfaction. We can certainly understand that the forces of evil during the Great Tribulation will be mighty in power and authority, and terrible as they are exercised. It seems to be clear that more people will die during the Great Tribulation than at any other comparable time in all of human history – maybe even including The Flood.

Obviously this identifies the beast with the dragon. And since the true Messiah is to be a King ruling over all of the earth, it is reasonable to think that the Antichrist will also have world rulers who will be in support of him.

“And upon his heads the name of blasphemy” – Blasphemy, according to the dictionary, can mean a couple of things. It can mean that a person vilifies or desecrates God and His Name, *or it can mean that a person claims to be God and as having the attributes of God!* And this latter is probably the meaning here. We have a person appearing on the scene who claims to be Christ, who claims Deity! And he will be accepted as such!

Keeping this in mind, before we leave this verse let me comment on the word “beast.” This is a dangerous animal. Thayer, in his Greek lexicon, defines this word as pointing to a man who is cruel, savage, brutal, and ferocious. And that character is emphasized as we go on to verse 2.

13:2 This first “beast” was “like unto a leopard,” a large, dangerous, member of the cat family, a treacherous killer. It had feet like a bear. A bear fights with its feet, and is also a killer. Like a leopard it can come upon its prey suddenly and quietly. And it had the mouth of a lion. The roar of a lion is known to paralyze its prey with fear, leaving it helpless. All three of these animals are killers. And they are the animals that are used to describe in Daniel 7 Greece in verse 6, Medo-Persia in verse 5, and Babylon in verse 4. Thus, as Dr. Walvoord, points out, this beast includes all of the terrible aspects of the three preceding empires in one final assault against God. And we can add, *in an assault against the people of God.*

And where did this terrible beast get his power? From the dragon. The Devil gave the beast his power, his throne, and his authority.

In Rev. 4:11 this word “power” (δύναμις) is used in connection with God’s creative power – “for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). And so the beast’s power has to do with the working of miracles “Throne” speaks of authority, governmental authority. The final words are “great authority.” Thayer says this is “primarily liberty of action . . . delegates power . . . unrestrained arbitrary power” (p. 160).

13:3 The wounding here speaks of conflict, possibly warfare, and it seemed that it would be a fatal wound. This could be the wounding of one a king who was very influential in all that the Antichrist will do, so much so that it threatened the Antichrist himself. But miraculously the wound was healed, and the beast continued to live. The end of the verse tells us that “all the world wondered after the beast.” This means that

the influence of the beast was now world-wide, and the fact that the world “wondered,” or *marveled*, means that they could not believe what they were seeing.

Many see in this a parallel between the resurrection of Christ and the return of the beast from what seemed to be almost certain death.

13:4 Out of the apparent defeat of the beast in verse 3, the Devil and his cohorts become stronger than ever. Since the dragon gave “power” (ἐξουσία) to the beast, the dragon has to be greater than the beast. And so people begin to worship the dragon, but they also worship the beast. This is another blasphemous situation. No one but God is to be worshiped. The people were guilty of blasphemy in worshiping the dragon and the beast, and the beast and the dragon were guilty of blasphemy by accepting their worship. But such will be the great deception which the dragon will be capable of bringing into the world.

At this point the attitude of the world is that the beast is invincible.

In verses 1 and 2 of this chapter we learn what the beast is. In verse 3 and 4 we learn what happens to him. In verses 5 through 7 we are told what he does. And in verses 8 through 10 we see his apparent success, but then his ultimate doom.

13:5 The career of this first beast is marked by boastings and blasphemies. And here in the word “power” we have ἐξουσία again. His authority is delegated to him by the dragon, and his time of power is for the whole period of the Tribulation, “forty and two months.” While we read of the beast’s great power which is given to him by the Devil, yet this verse indicates that God has set a time-limit on the Devil and the two beasts. They cause great suffering and death for the period of the Tribulation, *but that is all! The Devil nor the beasts can go a moment beyond the time that God has set for them. Their victories may cause them to think that they will never be defeated, but God says that they will. The powers of evil will only increase from now on, but the day is coming when God will bring them to an end.*

13:6 In verse 5 we see that the beast was given a blasphemous mouth, and here in verse 6 he uses it against God, His Name, His tabernacle, and the saints in heaven (although this may also include angels).

To blaspheme the Lord’s Name, is to blaspheme His character. This was a terrible violation of the third commandment not to take the Name of the Lord our God in vain. It is to make God less than God, to belittle His glorious Person.

To blaspheme God’s tabernacle is to blaspheme His dwelling place. And is this not heaven? The Devil would make the earth the center of his reign and power since he was not able to establish Himself in heaven. And since the beast blasphemes God and His dwelling place, we are not surprised that he blasphemes also the people of God. He denigrates everything that is good and holy, showing what a totally evil person he is.

13:7 But the beast is not just all talk. He goes after the people of God who are earth to make war with them, and he is victorious. And his victory was world-wide in its extent – “over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.” The word “power” here again is the Greek word for *authority*: ἐξουσία. Notice the words: “it was given unto him.” This speaks again of the fact that he rules by someone else’s authority. That person has to be the Devil (see verse 4). But as powerful as the Devil is, he can only operate within the limits of the will of God. So as difficult as the situation is which is described throughout these chapters, let us always remember that the Lord is in charge, not the Devil. MacArthur said on this verse:

Once again the text notes that Antichrist can do only what he is **given** permission by Almighty God to

do, thus stressing that never relinquishes His absolute control of events (II, 48).

And then he said:

But Antichrist will slaughter God's people on an unprecedented scale as he expresses his world dominance (II, 49).

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13:8 Everyone except the saints will worship the Antichrist. But those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life will not worship him. And this is the reason that many of them will die.

Think of what it will mean when worshiping the false Christ will cover the world. Perhaps it is not too far from that now. True believers will choose to die rather than to deny their Savior.

We really have two great truths in this verse as far as salvation is concerned. One is that it was determined before the foundation of the world that the Son of God would die for sinners. The Father chose those whom He willed to save. The Lord Jesus was appointed by the Father to be their Savior. He is the Anointed One. He is the Christ. And it is the Holy Spirit Who convicts and draws the elect to Christ. Christ incarnate was, and is, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Apostle Peter also supported the statement in this verse about Christ when he wrote in 1 Peter 1:18-21:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God (1 Peter 1:18-21).

13:9 "If any man have an ear, let him hear." The ear is made for hearing. But although everyone has two ears, not everyone hears the Word of God. In fact, most people don't hear. This book, like the others of the NT, was originally read to whole congregations. Even if we read this book for ourselves, as we read we are either "hearing" what we are reading, or we are not. The Lord is the One Who gives us understanding. Statements like this were used by our Lord, and we have a similar statement to each of the seven churches in Rev. 2 and 8. Always this is to call attention to something that is very important. What has appeared so far in this chapter, can be very discouraging. It looks like the Devil is in control, and that he is winning. But in verse 10 we are given comforting and encouraging words.

13:10 The statements of this verse have been taken two ways by expositors. Some say that this is a warning to the people of God not to fight captivity, and not to take up arms against the beast and those who are allied with him. Others looking especially at the last statement in the verse say, "No, this is to encourage patience and faith in the hearts of the Lord's people, and so it is a warning to those who persecute and kill the people of God." And so they take this as a warning to the Beast and all who would persecute the people of God. It is true that believers are not to use force against force, and to kill our enemies because they seek to kill us. The true explanation of this verse seems to be that which Paul spoke of in Rom. 12:19:

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

This is in part a quotation of Deut. 32:35:

35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

The writer of Hebrews partially quoted Deut. 32:35 in Heb. 10:30, and then went on in verse 31 to say, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” As bad as it is to fall into the hands of evil men, it is more than a million times worse “to fall into the hands of the living God” when He is angry. Remember what the Lord said about this when He was here on earth:

4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him (Luke 12:4-5).

So this is one of the many blessings that we receive from reading this book – the promise of the ultimate victory of the people of God. Paul said in Philippians that “to depart, and to be with Christ; ... is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

Now we come to the account of the second beast:

b. The beast out of the earth (Rev. 13:11-18).

I have already expressed my idea that this is “the false prophet” spoken of in Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10. Many feel that this is the Antichrist, and there was a time when that is what I believed. But the Antichrist seems to be the main one on earth during the Great Tribulation, and that is why it seems that the first beast in this chapter is the Antichrist, and this second beast is the false prophet who supports him.

13:11 The first beast came out of the sea; this second beast comes out of the earth. There is a possibility that the word γῆ that is used here, can mean *land*, and so be a reference to *the land of Israel*. But all of the more recent translations retain the translation “earth.” MacArthur says on this point, In the ancient world, the earth was less mysterious and foreboding than the sea. That the false prophet arises from the earth suggests that he will be subtler, gentler, less overpowering and terrifying than the Antichrist. He will be winsome and persuasive, the epitome of the wolves in sheep’s clothing Jesus warned of (Matt. 7:15) (II, 58).

MacArthur also has an excellent section on what the Scriptures have to say about false prophets which is well worth reading on pages 54 into 58.

There were false prophets in the OT, and there were false prophets in the days when the NT was written. And there are warnings in Scripture about false prophets in the last days. It was with a warning about false prophets that our Lord brought His Sermon on the Mount to a close. He introduced His remarks with these words:

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15).

And then He went on to speak about good trees and good fruit, as compared with corrupt trees and evil fruit.

The Apostle Peter issued this warning in the second chapter of his second epistle:

1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Peter 2:1-3).

And then the Apostle John had this to say about false prophets:

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

A false prophet is one who claims to be a messenger from God, but he does nothing but distort the truth and add to what is in our Bibles. The key to distinguishing a false prophet from a true prophet is what the false prophet teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the reason it is extremely important for every Christian to know what the Bible teaches about Christ.

This second beast had “two horns like a lamb” (which is an anomaly, a departure from the norm), and so it should immediately raise our suspicions. We can see from the fact that he just has two horns that he is not as powerful as the first beast. Remember: although he looks like a lamb, he is a beast – wild, ferocious, dangerous, a killer. The give-away is that “he spake as a dragon.” *This is the only time in this book of the Revelation that the word “lamb” is used where it does not refer to Christ.* But this is one reason many feel that this makes the second beast the Antichrist.

13:12 Again the word “power” here is the Greek word for *authority*. He has his full authority from the first beast. The first beast got his authority from the dragon, and this second beast got his authority from the first beast. So they are all demonic, and justifies our calling them *a trinity of evil*.

This second beast causes all who dwell on the earth “to worship” the Antichrist, the first beast. The word “worship” suggests that the Antichrist is worshiped *as God!* At this point it is good for us to remember what the Apostle Paul wrote about “the man of sin” in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica. (Read 2 Thess. 2, especially verses 3 and 4, and then 6 through 12.)

Worshipping the image of the beast, the first one, is equal to worshipping Satan himself.

The words, “whose deadly wound was healed,” not only identifies the first beast, but shows how the world will be impressed by this fact. And this is thought by many expositors to be the Devil’s version of the resurrection. It would intent to deceive people into thinking that the true Messiah had really come. But we need to remember what we have just read from 2 Thess. 2. God sends upon men a strong delusion so that people believe the lie – that is, the lie that the Antichrist is in reality the Christ. Anti-christ means two things: *in the place of* Christ, and *against* Christ. And as one coming as *the* Christ that his greatest work of deception is done.

13:13 This false prophet will be a miracle-worker, like Elijah did in his contest with the false prophets of Baal. This would also appear to add credibility to both of the beasts. The word “miracles” is the translation of the Greek word for *signs* (σημείον) which means that there were done to identify the Antichrist as the true Messiah.

13:14 But not only did he do that, but he encouraged those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast. This our Lord never did. The image would be for the purpose of worship. But after the people on earth had been brought this far in the deceptive work of the second beast, we should not be surprised that the people did what the beast told them to do. The Devil began his work on earth by deceiving Eve, and he will continue to deceive until he is finally cast into the lake of fire. How thankful we should be that the Lord has given us the understanding that we have “that we might know Him that is true.” Let me remind you of the

words of the Apostle John as he brought his first epistle to a close:

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen (1 John 5:20-21).

13:15 But this beast was not finished with his deception. It was given to him to give life to the image so that it would speak. But that was not all. The beast was able to cause all who refused to worship the image to be put to death. The people should have known that idolatry has always been abominable to the Lord, and that under the Law it was punishable by death. The Lord never killed anyone who refused to bow down to worship an image. Perhaps the fact that the beast gave life to the image would make people think that it was not really an image, but a true person. Who knows how they will rationalize their sin?

13:16 But the beast was not finished.

He made all people who had worshiped the image of the beast to receive a mark either on their right hands, or on their foreheads. This mark identified them as loyal followers and worshipers of the first beast. Three classes are mentioned to show that no one was excluded: “small and great, rich and poor, bond and free.”

13:17 No one could buy or sell who did not have the mark of the beast. So this was another method of doing away with the people of God. It would mean that those who did not have the mark of the beast would soon die. And this will be world-wide. Contrast this with the sealing of the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel in Rev. 7.

13:18 The chapter ends with, “Here is wisdom.” This must mean true wisdom, the wisdom of God. And it is given as a warning. No one has understanding (which is mentioned here) except those to whom the Lord has given them understanding. We read in Ps 119:104 where the Psalmist said, “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.” We get our “understanding” from the Word of God. Solomon also pointed out several times the great value of “understanding.” He said in Prov. 4:5-7:

5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

And in Prov. 16:16 we read that he taught, “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!”

So only God can give us true “understanding.” The Devil will always seek to deceive us, but God never does. His Word is truth. See John 17:17.

So the Apostle John wrote by the Holy Spirit, “Here is wisdom.” What a pleasant relief from the rest of the chapter which is filled with Satanic deception.

But the problem is that we don't really know what it means, and the meaning may never be clear until the time of the Tribulation. But there are some things that we can understand about it. It is called “the number of a man” – 666. And so it not the number of God, but man. In fact, in verse 17 it is called also “the number of his name, *i.e.*, the beast's name. And since we are concerned in this chapter with the work of the second beast on behalf of the first beast, this must mean *the Antichrist's name*. This is the Devil's master work of deception, but whoever the Antichrist will be, he will only be *a man, an unregenerate man, deceived himself and also a deceiver of men*. There will not be a trace of anything godly, or God-like in him. Although he pretends to be

God, he will be only a man, the greatest of fools himself, and one who will lead all who will follow him right into the lake of fire that will burn forever and ever. Here we see man in his greatest attempt to overthrow God, and perhaps that is why we have 666! All who believe him and follow him will go right where the Devil is headed, not by his own choice, but by the judgment of Almighty God.

Now those of us who read this, knowing that all that the Devil and the beasts do is designed for the damnation of men, are responsible to point out to people today in this world in which we live, that there is only one way to escape the torments of an eternal hell. That is through faith in the Lamb Who was slain from the foundation of the world.

October 28, 2002

We come now to:

5. The song of the 144,000 (Rev. 14:1-5). Cf. Rev. 7:1-8.

In chapters 12 and 13 we have been dealing with the work of Satan, most of it having to do with the last days, and specifically of the time of the Great Tribulation. In chapters 12 and 13 we are concerned with the Devil as “a great red dragon.” What a relief it is at the beginning of chapter 14 to see the Lamb standing on “the mount Sion,” or Zion! S-i-o-n is the NT spelling of the OT Z-i-o-n. Zion is mentioned 152 times in the OT; Sion, 7 times in the NT (Matt. 21:5; John 12:15; Rom. 9:33; 11:26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; and here in Rev. 14:1).

14:1 The first mention of Zion in the Bible is in 2 Sam. 5:7. Reading verse 6 with it, this is what we learn. You will see that these verses have to do with the days of King David.

6 And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither.

7 Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David (2 Sam. 5:6-7).

The next reference is in 1 Kings 8:1, and this has to do with the days of Solomon who succeeded David his father as the King of Israel:

1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion (1 Kings 8:1).

There is some confusion over Zion. At first it seems that it was synonymous with Jerusalem, but then, as in 1 Kings 8:1 it seems that it was in reality only a part of the city, specifically the residence of the king where his throne was. In the second Psalm, which is prophetic of the second coming of our Lord, the Messiah, to the earth, we have this statement in the first six verses:

1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (Psa. 2:1-6).

Notice this last statement. *It is from Zion that the Messiah will reign over all of the earth.*

And so when the Apostle John saw the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, standing on mount Zion, this does not mean that He was there reigning. Remember the Apostle John is seeing this in a vision, *but it is predictive that*

the day is coming when He will be there, reigning, and it is given here for the encouragement of those who read this book that with all that the Devil does to overthrow the Messiah and the plans of God concerning His people, Israel, he will not be successful!

In addition, the 144,000, whom we met in Rev. 7, are here seen with the Lamb. As we are told here, they have "His Father's Name in their foreheads." In Rev. 7:2 and 3 it says that they had "the seal of the living God . . . in their foreheads." This means that they were marked as belonging to the Lord, and sealed so they were protected from death! And here they all are, still alive!!!

14:2 So the first verse of this chapter has to do with the earth, but as we move on to verse 2, John hears a voice, or a sound, *from heaven*. It was "as the sound of many waters." In Ezek. 43:2 God's voice is described as "like a noise of many waters." In the vision of Christ which the Apostle John saw in chapter 1 we are told that His voice was "as the sound of many waters" (Rev. 1:15). So here in Rev. 14:2 it could be the voice of Deity. But in Rev. 19:6 we have the voice of a great multitude described as the sound is described here, "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings." And this is probably the way we should voice this sound in Rev. 14:2.

It was also as "the voice of a great thunder." Two different ideas are conveyed to us by "the sound of many waters" and "the voice of a great thunder." The first could be comforting, relaxing, as the sound of a river or stream flowing over rocks, but "thunder" is often the warning of an approaching storm. Perhaps both ideas are here. The singing of the redeemed sends forth a comforting and hopeful sound to others who were saved, but it becomes a warning to those who are not saved. Obviously it was a sound that could be heard and understood by those who were on the earth. The same is true of the music produced by those who were playing harps.

14:3 Now I have called these verses (1-5) the song of the 144,000, but it was to be a song that the 144,000 were yet to sing. The song that they heard was a song that they heard from heaven, a song that was sung before the throne, *i.e.*, before God, and before the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders, but a "new song," a song which no one could learn but the 144,000 "which were redeemed from the earth."

Just what does all of this mean?

Well, the first thing that it means is that there are songs which no one can sing but the redeemed. Let's not be surprised if the world does not like the songs that we sing. The hymns of the church are songs which only the redeemed can really sing. When I hear secular singers singing a hymn like "Amazing Grace," I always wonder what it means to them. Do they really believe the words, "that saved a wretch like me"? No one can really sing that song who has not in reality experienced the saving grace of God.

But there is another detail that is important here. Think of what the 144,000 will experience during the Great Tribulation even though they are spared from death. Our trials make it possible for sing certain hymns in a way that we never have been able to sing them before. I mean with greater meaning. We experience a great deliverance from the Lord, or we have seen a special answer to prayer, and certain hymn take on a new meaning for us, a meaning that they did not have before.

So Christians sing songs that are different from the world, and even among Christians there is a difference because of different ways in which the Lord deals with us. The 144,000 Jews during the Tribulation are marked out by the Enemy. But he will not be successful in doing what he wants to do. Nevertheless, he can make life very miserable for them, but God will be faithful to them and enable them to sing "a new song," or an old song with new meaning. This often explains why even we now as the redeemed the redeemed of the Lord,

have different hymns which have a very special meaning for us.

14:4 The song of the 144,000 is not recorded for us here, but we see from this verse the counterpart of what it will mean that the 144,000 bear the Father's Name in their foreheads. The Lord has chosen them, and marked them, and they show that they have been redeemed because they "were not defiled with women." They are even spoken of as "virgins" even though many, perhaps all, of the 144,000 are men. The emphasis is upon moral purity. There perhaps is no drive that we all possess by nature that is stronger than the sexual drive. But God has always intended that that desire be satisfied in marriage. I agree with John MacArthur when he says that this does not mean that none of the 144,000 are married, but it does mean that none are involved in an adulterous relationship. Marriage does not defile us. Remember what Heb. 13:4 tells us:

4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

Even today sexual immorality is running rampant in our country. Whenever people turn away from the Lord, there is always the possibility that they will turn to promiscuity. And the more that society is permeated with such immoral behavior, the greater the danger to even the people of God. It looks like people are getting away with it, but God's word still stands: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). See also 1 Cor. 6:13b: "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." And then Paul added in the same chapter, beginning with verse 18:

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that commiteth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

It is profitable for us to be reminded of these truths in the perverse generation in which we live.

In John MacArthur's commentary he gives a quotation from Robert Murray McCheyne, a young minister in Scotland who died when he was only twenty-nine years of age, but who has left a mark on many believers throughout the world down to the present time. He was born in 1813, and died before his thirtieth birthday in 1843. But this is the quotation, a statement which he gave to another young minister:

Do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God (quoted in John MacArthur's Commentary on Revelation 12-22, p. 77).

Although sin will run rampant during the Great Tribulation, yet God will have a people even then who will walk in holiness before Him. If it will be so then, it can be so now – by the grace of God.

And so the Apostle John said, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." This is the only way to be protected from the ungodliness of the world. We often are more concerned that the Lord be with us than we are that we be with Him. In the former, we are doing the leading; in the second, we are following Him.

How do we know that we are following Him, really following Him? It is when we are living in obedience to the Word and in fellowship with Him. Our Lord said to His disciples as He met with them in the Upper Room,

26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour (John 12:26).

Finally we are told that “these are the redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb.” Reference is probably made here to the 144,000 Jews who are saved during the Great Tribulation, and who are sovereignly preserved from death. But they are called “firstfruits.” You will probably remember that when the Jewish people in OT times harvested their crops, they were to bring the firstfruits to the Lord. The firstfruits were the first of the crop, and bringing it to the Lord meant two things:

- 1) That they were given the first to the Lord as evidence that the whole harvest belonged to the Lord.
- 2) That there was more to come.

We know that when the Lord comes for the Church, the body of Christ, all believers will be removed from the earth. But it is clear that even after that people will be saved. There will be more than the 144,000 Jews saved. There will be many Gentiles saved too. And so the power of the Gospel will continue to be displayed right to the end of time.

14:5 “No guile” actually means that among the people of God nothing *false* was coming out of their mouths, *i.e.*, there was nothing coming out of their mouths that you would not expect a Christian to say. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the mouth. The Greek word for “guile” is the word from which we get our word *pseudo*. A pseudo-Christian is not a Christian at all. One complaint that the Lord had against the people of Judah in Isaiah’s day He expressed in these words: “. . . this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me” (Isa. 29:13). Perhaps it will be that the opposition in the world during the Great Tribulation to anything that has to do with God or with Christ, will have a purifying effect upon the people of God in those days.

The second great thing that is said about the 144,000 is that “they are without fault before the throne of God.” This is the Greek word ἄμωμος. It is used ten times in the NT, and among the verses in which it is found are Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:19; Jude 24. Trench objects to the translations “without blame,” and “unblameable” as we have in Eph. 1:4 and Col. 1:22. He prefers “without blemish” (Eph. 5:27), or “without spot” (Heb. 9:14), or even “faultless” (Jude 24), or even as it is here in Rev. 14:5. He says that it is a word which is a technical word for a sacrifice, referring to the absence of anything that would render a sacrifice unacceptable, or the presence of anything that would render a sacrifice unacceptable. And the chief emphasis of the word has to do with what is internal rather than external.

Trench cited verses like Ex. 29:2 which suggests that leaven in bread would make it unacceptable. And also to Num. 6:14 and Ezek. 43:22, 23 which speak of animals as being without blemish if they are to be offered in sacrifice to God.

For us this would apply to the sacrifice of our bodies in Rom. 12:1-2. We need to be careful that we do not lack anything that would make our sacrifice unacceptable to the Lord, such as, submission to God and His will, or the presence of any sin that would be displeasing to the Lord. The word ἄμωμος speaks of a very high state of spiritual life among the 144,000. May it cause us to think of our own hearts. The acceptance of our outward behavior is always dependent upon the condition of our hearts.

November 4, 2002

Seiss in summarizing the statements made in this chapter, asked the question, “*What are the chief marks or characteristics of these 144,000?*” And then he mentioned four.

The first was not only a true, but a conspicuous confession. They had the name of the Father of the Lamb on their foreheads. There was not attempt to conceal the fact that they belonged to the Lord. And Seiss said that “there is nothing more honorable in God’s sight than truth and faithfulness of confession” (p. 352). The second was their separation from the world. They were “redeemed from among men.” The term suggests a separation from the world and worldly living. In addition, they were called “virgins.” And they “followed the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” There was no attempt to conceal their relationship with the Lamb, Christ, nor their devotion to Him. Third, and this is related to the second, was their purity. Many people throughout history have separated themselves from the world, believing that it is the world that defiles us, but they have not separated themselves unto Christ. The 144,000 will do both. And, finally, Seiss mentioned their truthfulness of speech. Purity starts from within, and works outward. And so it will be with the 144,000. People behave badly and speak badly because their hearts are bad. The solution is for the heart to be changed, and only God can do that, and He does it through salvation by the blood of the Lamb. (See these points on p. 352).

But now we leave the 144,000 and move on to what the Apostle John had to say about:

6. The vision of the six angels and the Son of man (Rev. 14:6-20).

As I have mentioned in the outline, “Three angels appear, then the Son of man, and then the last three angels.”

14:6 Perhaps you will remember one thing that the Lord said about the Gospel in the message which He gave to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Therefore, it is call *the Olivet Discourse*. I am referring to His words found in Matt. 24:14:

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Many mistakenly, I believe, apply this verse to the present age, saying that when the Gospel goes to “all nations,” then the Lord will come for His church. But in context those words of the Lord Jesus apply to the time of the Great Tribulation. As far as I know there is no prophecy that needs to be fulfilled before the Lord will come for His Church. He can come at any moment. But during the Great Tribulation the people of God will be waiting for the return of the Lord *to earth*, to set up His kingdom. So we learn from Rev. 14:6 and 7 that an angel (and possibly more than one) will be used to spread “the everlasting Gospel throughout the whole world – “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”

The Lord called it “this Gospel of the Kingdom.” Here we read about “the everlasting Gospel.” We are told in Mark 1:14 that John the Baptist preached “the Gospel of the kingdom of God.” When Paul was speaking to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20 he spoke of “the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). In Rom. 1:1 Paul said that he was separated unto “the Gospel of God.” Later in that same chapter he spoke of “the Gospel of His Son” (Rom. 1:9). In Rom. 10:15, “the Gospel of peace.” And I could go on and mention other prepositional phrases that are used with the Gospel. Paul even spoke of “my Gospel” in Rom. 2:16 and 16:25 and 2 Tim. 2:8.

How are we to handle all of these different expressions? Will there be some difference between “the everlasting Gospel” of Rev. 14:6 and “the Gospel of the Kingdom” and “the Gospel of Christ”? Let’s let the Apostle Paul answer that question as he did in Gal. 1:8-9:

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

And so we must believe that there cannot be another Gospel. There is no other Gospel. There is only one

Gospel. If there is another Gospel, then there has to be another Savior. And so even though some try to make a difference as to the content of the Gospel, or even as to the purpose of the Gospel, there is only one Gospel.

The Apostle Peter also made this clear in his words found in Acts 4:12:

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Therefore, these terms for the Gospel which I have given you, and which are recorded as such in our Bibles, are not different Gospels, but they are different names for the same Gospel. **But what is the Gospel?** We read in 1 Cor 15:1-5:

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5 And that he was seen . . . “ (1 Cor. 15:1-5 ff.).

The Gospel is the message which declares that “Christ died for our sins.” That is the historical fact. “He was buried,” is also an historical fact, and at the same time it is proof of His death. “He rose again the third day” is the second great fact of the Gospel, and the fact that “He was seen” by many is proof of His resurrection. The expression given twice, “according to the Scriptures,” speaks of the fact that it was predicted in the OT that these events would take place.

Another good passage describing the Gospel is found in the first few verses of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. Here is what he had to say there:

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1-6).

And then we see his eagerness to preach the Gospel later on in that same chapter when he wrote these words:

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:14-17).

The word *Gospel* appears 101 times in the NT, and many times the message of the Gospel is referred to where the word is not actually used. An example of that is found in Titus 2:11-14:

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a

peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Now our text says that this first angel went forth with the everlasting Gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth. But salvation is not for angels. Christ did not die for angels. However, that does not prohibit angels from preaching the Gospel in the last days? Certainly not! The word for “preach” in this verse means *to evangelize*. The Greek could actually be translated, *to evangelize with the evangel*.

The four groups cited here, “to every nation and kindred and tongue and people,” indicate that the angel’s mission will be world-wide. No one will be passed over. These have been mentioned four times before in 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; and 13:7. This is the last time these words are used as here. Robertson says that this grouping of words is used “for all mankind, representatives of all races and nations” (VI, 336) – all Jews and all Gentiles. No matter where people are, what their nationality might be, whatever language they might speak, Jews and Gentiles alike, will hear the Gospel so that they will be without excuse.

14:7 This verse tells us what the angel says along with the preaching of the Gospel. Even during the Great Tribulation it will be true of people that “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). Man worships man. He worships pleasure of all kinds. He worships wealth and position. But he does not worship God. He lives as though there is no God and that there is no judgment coming. The calamities that have hit the world up to this point have not awakened man to the awfulness of his sin before God. And nothing but a sovereign and gracious work of God will awaken man. And so God sends His angel with the Gospel, calling upon people to fear God, to give glory to Him, and to worship Him Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in them. The mention of the God as the Creator would seem to indicate that during the Great Tribulation the prevailing idea, as it seems to be today, is that the heavens and the earth and the seas and the abundance of fresh water, were not the result of the creative work of God, but they have just happened. A person has to be a fool to believe that. Belief in God as Creator and believe in God as Savior, are two truths that stand together. It is impossible to believe one and not believe the other. To deny one is to deny them both.

“Fear God” – This is the primary need to every person on the face of the earth, to recognize that God is God, to stand in awe of Him as God, to humble ourselves before Him, to listen to His Word, and to believe the Gospel. Listen to our politicians today and you would think that everything depends upon who is in power, and what their agenda is. Nobody seems to be concerned about morality unless it involves the loss of money or the loss of life. And even then the emphasis is not upon punishment. But let a President drag a nation down into the gutter, but people still listen to him and would probably re-elect him if he were to run again today. But nobody is going to get away with ignoring God so that they can do what they want to do. And the warning must accompany the preaching of the Gospel, as we learn from this verse. “The hour of judgment is come.”

14:8 A second angel appears and announces the fall of Babylon. A literal translation of the first part of this verse should be, “Babylon fell, fell, that great city.” This anticipates chapters 17 and 18. But the fall of Babylon is so certain that the angel speaks of it as having already taken place. This is taken from Isa. 21:8-9 which says:

8 And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights:

9 And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground (Isa. 21:8-9).

This, of course, applied to ancient Babylon, but it seems from Scripture that Babylon is to be restored in the end times. In the past prophetic teachers have felt that Babylon represented Rome, but recent events in the Middle East have made some wonder if it may be the case that ancient Babylon will be restored, and achieve great

power throughout the world. The location of ancient Babylon was in modern Iraq. Perhaps this will eventually be the center of the Moslem world and its opposition and hatred of everything that has to do with Christ and Christians and Israel.

Babylon is here called “that great city.” See also “great” in Rev. 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21. She great because of her importance, great because of her power and influence in the world, great because of her wickedness as each of the above passages indicates. But in spite of her greatness she is to come under the judgment of God. And the thought is that if Babylon cannot survive the judgment of God, then none of the wicked on the earth will escape the judgment of God.

Here the reason for her judgment is that “she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” The word for “wrath” here is the Greek word for *passion*. It is θυμός. “Wrath” is certainly a passion, but combined here with “fornication,” it would seem that it means a strong, irresistible desire for anything that is anti-God, and anti-Christ. The word “made” seems to indicate that the nations of the earth are forced to submit to her power.

I have mentioned that one of the purposes of this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is evangelism. We have seen this in verse 6, and that is the purpose of this word concerning Babylon. It is a warning to those who read not to have anything to do with the godless powers of the earth because like ancient Babylon, they all fall under the judgment of God. It is really impossible to overemphasize the importance of this verse, verse 8.

But then we come to a third angel, and this takes us down from verse 9 to verse 11.

14:9 Sometimes men make decisions from which there is no turning back. Such is the warning here.

In Rev. 13:15 ff. we learned that whoever would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And that whoever would not receive the mark of the beast could not buy or sell anything, which was the same as a death sentence. But we need also to remember again the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He said, speaking to a multitude of people:

4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him (Luke 12:4-5).

And so here is something far worse. Read vv. 9b-11.

If anyone worships the beast and his image (because to worship the image is to worship the beast), and receives his mark on his forehead and on his hand, that person shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, and that torment shall never end. Once anyone does this his doom is sealed forever.

14:10 What we have here is a description of hell. People pay no attention to any warnings against sin. We even legalize things that are abominable to God as if it doesn't make any difference what we do. And we ridicule the idea of eternal punishment. But the important thing is not the ideas that people have, but what God has revealed in His Word. The Cross of Christ teaches us that God does not minimize or overlook sin. He deals in judgment with it. And if people do not seek cleansing and forgiveness through the blood of Christ which results in a turning away from sin, the consequences are eternally disastrous.

The fact that the holy angels and even the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, see all of this, is a mark of their approval of the righteous judgment of God. And yet they do not do it with joy. Instead there is joy even in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

14:11 The torment of the unregenerate continues forever, and there is “no rest.” Many are inclined to say about everyone who dies that he has gone to his rest. That is true of a believer, but just the opposite is true of those who do not know the Lord. What an awakening awaits those wicked and deceived suicide bombers the moment they die. They expect paradise and seventy-two virgins waiting to serve them, but what they experience right away is torment, a torment that is eternal.

We live in a world which sin prevails. And that is becoming more and more apparent. People feel safe and secure in their sin (but they refuse to call it sin). But a day is coming things will be completely reversed. The Lord has graciously given us the book of the Revelation of His Son as a warning, but also to point out where salvation is to be found.

How ominous is the message of this third angel! How thankful we should be that the Lord has caused us to hear the truth, and to find salvation in Christ.

The tone of this chapter takes a sudden change in verses 12 and 13.

14:12 One would think that in such times of suffering and judgment as will prevail during the time of the Great Tribulation, that the people of the world would be seeking the people of God to find out how they can be saved. But such will not be the case. People will be saved, but not in the numbers which we might expect. Instead, there will be pressure upon the people of God to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ, and to turn from the commandments of God, *i.e.*, from the Scriptures and from a life of obedience to the Word. It will appear that the only way to have any peace will be to give in to the forces of evil. Otherwise what many will have to face is death, death at the hands of the enemies of God and of the truth.

Why, under these conditions, would anyone continue to try to “buck the tide”? We remember that after the Devil was proved wrong when he told the Lord that if the Lord would “touch all that he hath, ... he will curse Thee to Thy face” (Job 1:11), he came to the Lord again and said to him that which is usually true of most people. I am referring to the Devil’s words in Job 2:4-5:

4 And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.

Self-preservation is one of the strongest instincts that we have. It is a characteristic of all living creatures. And so the Devil acts on this fast and hard. But as with Job, he finds that this is not always true. The people of God are different. They have “patience.”

As I have explained before, the literal meaning of the word *patience* is *to remain under*. We usually think of patience as a willingness to wait until things change. It means that, but not with the idea that we sit and do nothing. Actually inherent in the Greek word for patience is the idea of persevering doing what I am doing even when I may run into trouble by doing it.

A good illustration of patience is what we see in Peter and John when they were told, in fact they were “commanded . . . not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Now they knew that if they did, they faced further physical beatings and even the possibility of death. How did they respond? Here are their words in Acts 4:19-20:

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

This is the Biblical idea of patience. They did not remain silent, and then go underground. They were up front with the Jewish leaders, knowing that there might be a high price for them to pay for their faithfulness to the Lord.

Later when the authorities came to them again because they had continued to preach the Gospel, they said to Peter and the apostles:

Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us (Acts 5:28).

Do you remember how Peter responded? He said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The KJV of this verse is not as strong as it should be. The word which has been translated "ought" is the Greek word *δεῖ*, which means *must*. They meant that God had told them to do what the authorities had told them not to do, and that they had no choice but to obey God. I wonder what I would have done. What would you have done?

Daniel's three friends faced the fiery furnace rather than back down. And Daniel went into the lion's den in the same spirit. They were men of patience.

But there has to be a reason for our patience. One is that we know that the Lord will take care of us, and that He can deliver us. But the patience in our text here in Rev. 14 was the patience they had to continue on knowing that, as Paul expressed it, "to depart, and to be with Christ . . . is far better" (Phil. 1:23). "To die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

So even with the intense persecution of the Lord's people in the Great Tribulation there will be those "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Note that the first of these is practical; the second is doctrinal. Westcott in his commentary on John (p. 138) says that this means keeping God's commandments not just generally, but *specifically, i.e., each and every commandment*. Swete says in his commentary that this always has been and always will be "the chief factor in the Christian life" (p. 186).

Thayer says in his lexicon that "the testimony of Jesus" is an expression which "denotes *a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God*" (p.513). So this is faithfulness to the doctrine of Christ which is what the Bible teaches about the Person of Christ and His work for our salvation past, present, and future.

But why do they insist on obeying God and holding to the doctrine of Christ? The first reason is because the first is the evidence of salvation, and the second is the means of salvation. The person without Christ in reality has nothing. But the person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior in reality has everything that is really needful both for this life and for the life that is to come. It is like the Apostle Paul told Timothy, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8).

But more of the answer to our question is given in verse 13.

14:13 And what a contrast this is with what we have seen in verses 9 through 11. The voice from heaven is the voice of the Holy Spirit. And the Apostle John is commanded to write.

We have a new beatitude! “Blessed” means *happy!* We must not forget that death is an enemy, a terrible enemy. It will be the last enemy to be destroyed, as we learn in 1 Cor. 15:26. In heaven there will be no enemies – no sickness, no suffering, no tears, no death! Hell is an eternal death without actually dying. Whereas the wicked will never experience rest; believers will never experience anything but happiness and joy and peace and contentment – *and rest!* This applies only to those who are “in the Lord,” saved, accepted in the Beloved One, the sheep of the Shepherd. And it is more than the weary mariner returning home after struggling day after day with the storms of the sea, and more than the soldier returning to safety after a fierce battle with the enemy. Nothing on earth can even begin to compare with what believers experience when they die in the Lord, or when the Lord returns to take us to be with Himself. In either case, “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). This is our hope, and this is when we will finally be conformed to the very likeness of the Lord Jesus. We will share many of His attributes, but not all of them. There will always be a difference between us and God. We will never be Deity, but we will be like our Lord in many respects.

“Their works do follow them” evidently means that we will be rewarded for the service we have given to the Lord here on earth. The Lord has worked in us and through us, but then we are to be rewarded as though the works were really ours. But in spite of the blessedness which is ahead for believers, and the terrible torments that are ahead for the unbeliever, man in his spiritually blinded state prefers to get all of the good that he can out of this life while at the same time making no preparation for what is coming after death.

Two things need to be said here:

- 1) Such a passage as we have here in verses 12 and 13 ought to make our hearts overflow daily with praise to God that He has saved us, and kept us, and promised us such an inheritance as we shall have when we get to heaven. We don’t deserve it any more than the worst of sinners, but God in His grace chose us, and sought us, and won us, and will not stop working in us until His work is finished. Whatever other reasons (and there are many) that we have for praising the Lord, we must never overlook the blessing of salvation.
- 2) The other point is this: When we realize what is ahead for those who don’t know the Savior, how it should burden our hearts to pray for those we know who are without Christ, to live so that others may ask us to give them a reason for the hope that have, and then to speak boldly of Christ to make sure that those among our acquaintances really hear and understand what the Gospel is, and why it is so extremely important. How wonderful it will be if, on our way to heaven, the Lord uses us to bring others along with us.

November 11, 2002

Before we leave verses 12 and 13, note that in those two verses all three of the Members of the Godhead are mentioned.

14:14 Actually from the days of the Exodus, a white cloud is one OT representation of the presence of the Lord. We read this in Ex. 13:21-22:

21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

22 He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Psa. 104:3 speaks of the Lord Who “maketh the clouds His chariot.” Nahum 1:3 says that “the clouds are the dust of His feet.” At the time of the Transfiguration the Father “out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 17:5). In Matt. 24:31 we are told about the coming of the Son of man and that all of the tribes of the earth “shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” This is when He comes to the earth to reign. And it certainly was no accident that when the Lord ascended back to heaven after His resurrection we are told that as He went up “a cloud received Him out of

their sight. So for the Son of man to be pictured here as sitting upon a white cloud is consistent with all of these other passages. When we combine verses 14 and 15 it seems that our Lord sitting upon the cloud is waiting for His Father to give the word that the time of harvest has arrived.

What we have here is an anticipation of the coming of the Lord to reign, but also to exercise judgment as the following verses show. He has "a golden crown" on His head. This is not the crown of a king, but the crown of a victor. It is the victor's wreath. "And in His hand a sharp sickle." This sickle is a pruning hook, or what has been called *a hooked vine knife*. And so in the following verses we have both a harvesting of fruit here followed by a harvest of judgment such as was suggested in verse 9, 10, and 11 of this chapter.

14:15 At this moment another angel appears, the fourth one. He comes "out of the temple" which must mean in heaven, and the thought seems to be that he has come with a message from God, the Father. And the message is for the Son Who is sitting on the cloud. He is obviously waiting for word from the Father before He proceeds in any way to complete His work on the earth.

This is what we learn reading the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, about the relationship between the Father and the Son in connection with the Lord's ministry on earth. The Lord made statements like this:

- 1) "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38).
- 2) "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (John 14:10).
- 3) "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34).
- 4) "I must work the works of Him that sent me" (John 9:4).
- 5) "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4).

The Lord Jesus always manifested complete devotion to the Father and an uncompromising intention to do His will. And that is the picture that we have of our Lord here. In verse He is waiting for the Father's word for Him to proceed with the harvest and with the judgment. And the angel comes, "out of the temple," that is from the very presence of God the Father, with the message, "Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap." Lit. it is, *for the hour is come*. And the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15 what is going to happen following the reign of the Lord. I am reading verses 24 through 28:

- 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.
- 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.
- 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.
- 27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.
- 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

We may not now understand how all of this will be, but one thing is certain: the Lord Jesus Christ, at both His first coming to the earth, and His second coming to the earth, showed and will show His complete devotion for the Father, His desire to do only the will of the Father both in His words and His works, that the Father might be glorified in all that He did, or will do.

I want to mention another point before we go any farther in this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We see in this chapter much about the ministry of angels. Why is this? One reason is that we will see that in all that God does, and in all that the Lord Jesus Christ does, the holy angels are in full support of them because they are in full agreement with what the Members of the Godhead are doing. People are often critical of this book saying that a good God could never bring the judgments upon men that are predicted in this book. By the mini-

stry of the angels they are declaring that God is just in all that He does, and so we see them fully supporting God and Christ in all that they do, including the judgments.

14:16 When the Lord received the message from the Father, He immediately put his sickle “on the earth, and the earth was reaped.” Many believe that this is the first judgment of Matt. 25:31-40, the judgment of the “sheep” nations. This does not mean that this judgment did not take time. It was not done instantly. But whatever time it took, it was done completely! It was finished. MacArthur believes that this judgment anticipates the bowl judgments which come in chapter 16. But it does seem that this judgment is likened to a harvest of wheat, or of some other grain, and it is spared from the judgment which follows in the next verse and on to the end of this chapter.

14:17 Here we have the fifth angel. He comes “out of the temple” (in heaven) like the angel in verse 15 did. But this angel did not come with a message for the Son of man, but he came with his own “sharp sickle” to execute judgment upon the earth.

14:18 Then the sixth angel comes “from the altar” (evidently also in heaven). So both the fifth and sixth angel come from God, just like the fourth one did. This sixth angel had “power over fire.” The fire is thus related to the “altar,” and so it seems that this is an indication of judgment. The question is, is the altar referred to the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense? Perhaps an even better question would be, is this the altar referred to in Rev. 6:9 where with the opening of the fifth seal John saw “under the altar the souls of them that we slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony that they held,” and they were crying for vengeance against those who had been martyred during this time of Great Tribulation? This seems very likely.

This sixth angel, having come “from the altar,” had come from the presence of God with the message which he gave to the fifth angel who had the sharp sickle. And he is told to thrust in his sickle, “and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.”

This expression, “the vine of the earth,” has led many, on the basis that Israel is referred to as a vine in Isaiah 5, to say that Israel is the subject here, that Israel is under judgment. Another passage where Israel is spoken of as a vine is Psa. 80:8-16. But it seems more likely that this judgment fits into the prophecy of [Joel 3:9-17](#). If so, this then is a judgment against the nations. If we are following the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 25:41-46, it would be the judgment of the “goat” nations.

“Her grapes are fully ripe.” This could suggest a good harvest, but when we get into verse 19 we see that “ripe” here means *ripe for judgment*. God is always just in His judgments. When the Lord spoke to Abraham about the land that He would give to Abraham’s seed, He told him that he would not live to see the possession of the land, and the reason was this: “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). So it seems at this point referred to here in Rev. 14, the grapes of sin were “fully ripe.” And so “the vine of the earth,” the whole earth, the Gentile world, was ripe for judgment.

14:19 The fifth angel had his orders from God, and so he thrust in his sickle, “gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.”

Every vineyard had its own winepress. Usually there were two, both cut out of rock. One was higher than the other. In the higher one the grapes were placed, trampled out, and the juice would flow into the lower. We know from the Lord’s Supper that the fruit of the vine represented blood. So the winepress itself was a striking figure of judgment. Cf. [Isa. 63:1-6](#). (Read.)

14:20 “The city” here is probably Jerusalem. “Without the city” means *outside of the city*, and this probably means that Jerusalem is spared at this time of judgment. The grapes are trodden and blood comes out of the press. But instead of flowing into a lower vat, it comes up to the horses’ bridles and extended “by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs” – which has been calculated to be about 200 miles which I understand is roughly the length of the land of Israel. We are already seeing how there is much opposition to Israel, especially in the Moslem world, but anti-Semitism is strong in many parts of the world, even with many people in our own country. It is hard for us to imagine how terrible the bloodshed will be when God moves in judgment against the whole world. Although there are many things in this chapter about which we cannot be specific, yet it is certain that the bloodshed and death at this time will be worse than anything that the world has ever seen. One way in which we can measure how terrible sin is, is by the Cross of our Savior. But another way is when we realize how terrible the judgments of God are going to be throughout the whole world.

This chapter throws a great deal of light upon angels, the elect angels, and the ministry to which God has appointed them.

November 18, 2002

Now we are ready for the third and final series of judgments:

7. THE SEVEN VIAL, OR BOWL, JUDGMENTS (15:1-8; 16:1-21).

Chapter 15 gives us the preparation for the bowl judgments and chapter 16 gives us the actual execution of the bowl judgments. And so the first sub-point under this main heading is:

a. The preparation for the bowl judgments (15:1-8).

15:1 The Apostle John sees “another sign in heaven.” For the others, see 12:1 and 3. Rev. 13:13-14 tells us about Satanic signs, or miracles. The word “another” here means *another of the same kind*. That is, as Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* defines the word “sign,” or *miracle*, it leads us “to something out of and beyond itself . . . a kind of finger-post of God . . . valuable, not so much for what it is, as for what it indicates of the grace and power of the doer” (pp. 342, 343). This definition with regard to “grace” would apply only to those miracles which God works. Satanic signs, or miracles, are an indication of his power, but Satan knows nothing of grace.

The word “sign” in the singular is descriptive of all of the judgments of God which follow.

They are called “great and marvelous.” They are “great” in every way – great as to their extent and effect, great as to their power and judgment, and great as to their importance. No one living on the earth will be able to ignore them. Seiss says that this “sign” is called “great” because it involves “so much more in range and intensity than anything of the kind that has ever been; and it is marvelous with reference to the unparalleled character of what it foretells.

Going to Archbishop Trench again to help us with the word “marvelous,” he says that it speaks of something which provokes “admiration and astonishment” (p. 344). Actually “marvelous” is a good translation because it means that these are judgment which cause men *to marvel, to wonder, to be shocked with amazement* at the terrible and deadly nature of these judgments. God has been very patient with our world in spite of the way we have despised Him, and because of this, people have the idea that they can do whatever they want to do and that God will not judge them. Some think that there is no God to judge them. And so it is going to be a time of

great awakening when God is moved by His wrath to bring judgment upon the ungodly. This is what is going to cause the world to be shocked and amazed. But it will be too late to avoid the wrath of an angry God.

The bowl judgments are called “the seven last plagues.” They are called plagues again in verses 6 and 8 of this chapter. Judgments were first called plagues in this book in 9:20. Plagues are mentioned again in 11:6. Following these references see 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18.

By definition, what is a plague? Basically it is a whip. It is that which describes the public punishment of a criminal. It is that by which people are afflicted by anything bad, and which most often ends in death. In the Bible it is used of punishment at the hand of God. The word finds its definition in the plagues that were brought upon the land of Egypt in the days of Moses.

The plagues which result from the pouring out of the seven bowls are called “the last” because, as Swete explained, these in chapter 16 are “the final cycle of such visitations” (p. 193). Thayer (p. 253) called it “the last in a series.” We had the first in the seal judgments, the second in the trumpet judgments, and now the bowl judgments are the last. The verb “is filled up” emphasizes that there will be no more judgments in a series. By the way, this is a verse which can legitimately be used to indicate that the number *seven* speaks of completeness. Psa. 7:11 tells us that “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.” But at various times in history His anger has exploded. This is why the Apostle John used the word θυμός here. His anger will turn to wrath.

15:2 Swete thinks that verses 2, 3, and 4 are parenthetical. They certainly are in contrast with verse 1, and what follows in verse 5. In verse 1 we see the angels with their bowls by which they are ready to bring more judgments upon the earth. But then the Apostle John was given a contrasting scene in the same heaven. Seiss called it “another vision, of a more gracious order, though connected with these outpourings of the plagues.

He saw “a sea of glass mingled with fire” followed by those who had come out of the Great Tribulation, evidently by death, who are rejoicing in the victory that God has given to them. God has two ways of delivering His people. Often it is *from* death; at other times it is *through* death. We see this in Heb. 11 when we see the contrast between verses 32 through 35a as compared with 35b through 38. The “these all” in Heb. 11:39 includes all from verse 32 through verse 38.

John saw these saints standing on “a sea of glass mingled with fire.” This must be the same sea of glass that John mentioned in 4:6 in the first vision that was given to him following the letters to the seven churches. We read this in Rev. 4:6:

6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

There the sea was “like unto crystal,” showing how clear it was; here in chapter 5 it is “mingled with fire.”

The “sea of glass” suggest peace since usually a sea is anything but glass-like. Some think that the fire represents the trials that these saints have come out of; others feel that it anticipates the judgments that are about to fall upon the earth. It seems like the latter may be the best suggestion because God will take vengeance on those who persecute His people. They may die for their faith, but their death does not mean that those who killed them will not be judged. Paul’s prophetic words in 2 Thessalonians 1 may be prophetic of the very scene that we have here in Rev. 5. Listen to what the Apostle Paul had to say:

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Seiss' comment on the "sea of glass" is this:

It is best taken as a sea of just judgments which are poured forth in the seven final plagues, while in that regard at the same time a sea of blessed vindication and joy to those faithful ones whom the Beast persecuted unto death (p. 369).

The price of victory for these saints has been martyrdom. Through death they had gotten the victory over the beast, over his image, over his mark and the number of his name. There they stand, on that glassy sea, with "the harps of God," ready to sing the praises of God and to worship before Him. In Rev. 4:6 "a sea of glass like unto crystal" is mentioned as being "before the throne" of God. So it seems that we can take it that the sea here in chapter 15, is the same sea, and that the activity in Rev. 15 is taking place in the very presence of God upon His throne.

The "fire" suggests judgment. Fire is often connected with judgment in the Scriptures. In Gen. 19:24 and 25 we read this in connection with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

The presence of God was manifested at night during all the years of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan by "a pillar of fire." See Ex. 13:21-22. Deut. 4:24 tells us, "for the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." And 2 Peter 3:7 says this: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

Notice that these who had been martyred are called victors! And that is so even though they had paid for their faith with their lives. They were standing on this sea of glass, and they had "the harps of God."

It would seem that what we are about to see in the bowl judgments is the main answer to the prayer of the martyred saints of the Great Tribulation which is found in Rev. 6:9-10:

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The harps suggest that these saints are preparing to sing. They were singing because of the victory they were to enjoy in the defeat of Satan and all of his cohorts.

15:3 They are singing "the song of Moses." This should remind us of another 15th chapter, the 15th chapter of Exodus. You don't find these same words in Exodus 15, but the thought is certainly there. See Ex. 15:3-12. See also the song which Moses taught the people of Israel just before he died. It is recorded in Deut. 32, and it, too, celebrates the victory of the Lord on behalf of His people. So we might say that the saints here are from the nation of Israel (although we probably should not overemphasize that point).

Moses is called “the servant of God” which would indicate, as Exodus 15 does also, that God gets the glory, not Moses. Moses was the instrument God used, but God did the work. And the absence of any reference to himself in Exodus 15, indicates that Moses recognized that all of the glory for their deliverance belonged to God alone. The Israelites were looking out over another sea of judgment, the Red Sea, in which the army of the Egyptians was destroyed. But again, that which spelled defeat for the Egyptians, had been the path of victory for the Israelites.

But this song is also called “the song of the Lamb.” This probably means two things:

- 1) That this is the song with the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, sings to the Father.
- 2) It means that the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt was a type of our salvation.

And so as “the song of the Lamb,” we have:

. . . the song of victory over sin and death, the song of justification and eternal life through the blood and triumph of [our Lord] Jesus [Christ], whose dominion and right as the Lord of the nations are attested by these mighty judgments (Seiss, p. 369).

This same song, thus, has two names, but there is a difference. As “the song of Moses,” it was not about Moses, but about the Lord God Almighty, as was the song in Ex. 15. As the song of the Lamb, while it could be a song which the Lamb sings to the Father in commemoration of His victory at the Cross, yet it also is a song *about* the Lamb, because it commemorates by the saints the great victory of the Savior, and anticipates His rule over all of the nations of the earth.

John MacArthur, in his commentary on The Revelation, quoted a writer, associated with the Plymouth Brethren, John Phillips, who drew some interesting comparisons and contrasts between the song of Moses in Ex. 15 and the song of the Lamb as we have it here. This is what Mr. Phillips wrote:

The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon [I would say, over the Beast]; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes (Phillips, John, quoted by MacArthur, p. 130).

Notice that they were singing to the Lord, standing on the sea before the throne, pouring out their hearts to Him. This is the way we ought to sing always – either when we are singing directly to Him, or singing to each other about Him. Singing has always been a major part of worship when God’s people have sought to honor Him. The Apostle Paul spoke of singing in his letter to the church at Ephesus as well as in his letter to the church at Colosse. This is what he told the Ephesian believers:

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:19-20).

To the Colossians he wrote:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

The song begins with the same two words which John used in verse 1 to describe the vision that he saw in heaven: “great and marvelous.” (Review the meanings of the words.) These words describe “the works” of the Lord. “Just and true” describe His ways. What is the difference? “Works” speak of *what* the Lord does; “ways” describes *how and when He does them*. We don’t usually have any difficulty with the works of the

Lord, but we sometimes have trouble with His ways. The children of Israel were constantly rebelling against the ways of the Lord. Unanswered prayer is a problem to us. God often answers our prayers in ways that are strange to us. But the words of this song ought to be an encouragement to us where the ways of the Lord are concerned. They say that God's ways are "just and true." "Just" means *righteous*; "true" means *consistent with Himself*. He is always faithful. Paul told Timothy, "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself. God is always true to His promises. He is true to His love for us. He is true to His grace. And we could go on and on through all of His attributes. God never acts in a way that is inconsistent with His character. It may seem to us that sometimes He does, but we must trust God on the basis of what we know Him to be, not on what He appears to be from our circumstances, especially in times of trial.

But the point in this Psalm is that these saints, from their place in heaven, they proclaim that God's works are an expression of His omnipotence. He is the "Lord God Almighty." And His ways are "just and true, thou King of saints." This is a declaration of the sovereignty of God in the experiences of His people. They may have gone to heaven by crucifixion, or by stoning, or by the sword, or by famine, but from their heavenly point-of-view, God is completely exonerated of any wrongdoing. They would sing our hymn, "Whate'er my God ordains is right." (See #94 in our Trinity Hymnal.)

Anyway, let us be sure to notice that the song of Moses, "the servant of God," and the song of the Lamb (combining the two as though they were one), is a song about God. The hymns we sing, we sing to God. They are to teach us about God, and we sing them to worship and give thanks to God. The church today needs to come back to the teaching of Scripture regarding music in the church.

Now on the basis of those two great truths about God, the hymn continues. But before we go on to verse 4, let me point out how important it is for us to be growing in our knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would remind you again, as I have done before, of the importance of that little statement that is found over and over in Exodus, and over and over in Ezekiel: "that ye may know that I am the Lord." That is our main mission on earth. There is nothing more important that we have to do. Most of our troubles, real troubles, in the Christian life, are because we don't know the Lord as well as we should. Often we are like spoiled children who aren't happy unless they can have what they want to have and can do what they want to do. The Apostle Paul was really speaking of his own great need, and ours as well, when he wrote to the Philippians, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

And this further word needs to be said. It is important for us to realize, in the light of the terrible judgments that God will some day bring upon the earth, that God is righteous ("just") and "true," or faithful in all that he does. The world will get what it deserves – and I am talking about the people in the world when I say that.

15:4 And so these saints ask the question: "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name? That is, as they review the works of the Lord and the ways of the Lord, they marveled that there was anyone on earth would did not love Him and trust Him and want to please Him. The Lord is so wonderful, so sufficient, so faithful and so loving, so abundant in His blessings, and so satisfying in our times of need, isn't it truly amazing that people are not standing in line to receive the Lord so that they can worship Him, and love Him, and do what He wants us to do? To fear the Lord is to begin to realize that He is God. It means to stand in awe of Him, to revere Him. It means that we humble ourselves before Him and submit ourselves to Him. To fear the Lord is to be able to sing from the heart,

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.

November 19, 2002

In the remainder of the verse (following the question), the singers give three reasons why people should fear the Lord. And each one is introduced with the word “for.” It is the Greek word ὅτι which can be translated, *because*.

The first reason is “for Thou only art holy.”

All people need to fear the Lord because He only is holy. It is to be able to say from the heart, as Habakkuk said, “Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?” (Hab 1:12). And he also said, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13).

But the word translated “holy” here in 15:4 is different from the usual word for “holy.” It is the Greek word ὁσιος. Greek scholars are not always clear in seeking to distinguish between this word and ἅγιος which is used more frequently to express how separated in character God is from all other persons, whether human or angelic. But in translating this word into Greek, the translators of the LXX (the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the OT) used this word to translate the Hebrew word *hesed* which has to do with *lovingkindness*, or *mercy*. And so many feel that ὁσιος has to do with the manifestation of God’s holiness in His relationship with men. God’s holiness sets Himself apart from all of His creatures, but He does not allow it to separate Himself from them. However, in all of His dealings with His creatures, He is always consistent with His uniquely holy character. Even though He is absolutely holy, without the slightest tinge of anything sinful in Him, yet because He is ὁσιος, He has even sought sinners, to bring them to Himself. We see this, for example, in God’s revelation of Himself to Isaiah in Isa. 6. But when God seeks sinners, He never lowers His holiness in doing so. Instead, through Christ He makes sinners acceptable to Himself by the atoning sacrifice of the Savior.

So this means that none are to stay away from God, nor from worshiping God, because they are sinners, or because they feel that their sins are too great for God to have anything to do with them. He is holy, but He is merciful in His holiness. And so He has chosen to save sinners, and He saves them, and He keeps them, and He is going to fulfill His purposes in everyone of them. He is a God full of mercy and grace.

But there is a second reason why all should worship the God: “for [because] all nations shall come and worship before Thee.” Here it would seem that the saints had in mind Paul’s words in Phil. 2:9-11. Also Rev. 5:9-10 and Rev. 14:6-7. It is the decreed will of God that there will be those of every nation, every tongue, every tribe and people who will be among the redeemed, and so that is the reason the angel of Rev. 14:6 was sent to preach the Gospel to every nation and tribe on the face of the earth. So every person has the right to believe that the salvation proclaimed in the Gospel can be for them! No Gentile should stay away from Christ because he is a Gentile, and not a Jew. In Romans 1:16 we learn that there is only one Gospel, and that it is for Gentiles as it is for Jews.

And then the third and final reason is: “For [again, *because*] thy judgments are made manifest.” A better translation would be, *for Thy righteous judgments have been revealed*. That is, God has declared in His Word that those who believe in Christ will be saved, but also that those who do not believe in Him will be under the eternal judgment of God. God has not left us “in the dark” (so to speak) as to what salvation is, and what men must do in order to be saved. They must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in His sacrificial and substitutionary death for the forgiveness of their sins. So all who hear the Gospel should fear the Lord and manifest that fear, not by hiding from God, but by coming to Him.

And so this brief but wonderful digression comes to an end. Verse 5 resumes where verse 1 left off.

15:5 Here the Apostle John returned to what he had started to write in verse 1 after telling us about the glass sea and the singing of the saints in verses 2, 3, and 4. And he began this part of the chapter with the words, “And after that I looked, and, behold . . .” Dr. Walvoord says in his commentary, “This expression always introduces something dramatically new” (p. 229). John’s attention is being drawn away for the glorious singing of the saints to that which will make every reader look at his words in total amazement, and perhaps, in many cases, with unbelief. The only way that people can say that these judgments have been fulfilled, is to spiritualize them. But there is no need to spiritualize them, *i.e.*, to say that they cannot be taken literally. We are dealing with judgments, terrible judgments. There is nothing to indicate that they will not be real. I like the statement of one Bible teacher who said, “If God didn’t mean what He has said, why didn’t He say what He meant?” The temple is real. The angels are real. The four beasts are real, and the bowls are real. And so John was enabled to look right into the very heart of the Tabernacle in heaven.

Let me spend just a moment on this, and I will ask you to turn to Hebrews, chapter 9. I want you to notice what is written here beginning with verse 21. The writing was speaking about how all of the vessels in the Tabernacle on earth were consecrated by blood. Now those things were very real to the people of Israel. The altar of burnt offering was a piece of furniture, we could call it, that could be touched. The same was true of the laver and the altar of incense and the table of shewbread and the ark of the covenant. That was true of the fence that surrounded the outer court, and the actual Tabernacle. But notice that in verse 23 we are told that the Tabernacle and all of its furnishing were but “patterns of things in the heavens.” The word “pattern” means *imitations*. In verse 24 all that made up the earthly tabernacle was called “the figures of the true.” This means that what was on earth represented the true tabernacle which is in heaven. So if you want to spiritualize, spiritualize the earthly tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was the type; the heavenly tabernacle is the true.

I point this out to say that here in Rev. 5 we are dealing with heavenly realities. We are dealing with that which is eternal. What we can see here on earth is temporal; that which we can’t now see in heaven is eternal. And all of this was opened up for the Apostle John to see, really see.

At this time John saw into “the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” in heaven which was opened to him. This is the true temple and tabernacle of which the earthly temple and tabernacle were but a copy, or pattern. The word “temple” probably refers to the Holy Place which was the inner room of the Tabernacle. This was the dwelling place of the Lord God Almighty. “The testimony” evidently refers to the Law, the copy of which was placed in the ark of the covenant, or the ark of testimony, as it is also called. The Law was never given as a means of salvation, but to show the need for salvation, and to guide the people of God in their living until the Messiah would come. The moral standards proclaimed in the Law have never been changed. God’s judgments are righteous and in full accord with the testimony given on the tables of stone to Israel, and written in the hearts of all men as the Apostle Paul explained in Rom. 2:14-16:

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (Rom. 2:14-16).

It is interesting that with the temple open, attention is focused upon the Law of God as being the basis of the judgments which are yet to come.

November 25, 2002

(Much of pages 173 to this point in the notes was added to on this date, and some things revised.)

15:6 Here we are told about the seven angels who were mentioned in verse 1 of this chapter.

They came out of the “temple,” *i.e.*, out from the very presence of God, and each one had a plague. Verse 7 went on to say that the “seven golden vials, or *bowls*, or even *saucers*, were given to them by “one of the four beasts.” It is hard to understand how these two ideas fit together because it seems that if the angels had the plagues, as verse 6 says, then they must have had the bowls too. Dr. Walvoord suggested that verse 6 may be prophetic, and that verse 7, the authorization to pour them out. Or it could be that somehow the plagues were able in some way for the angels to carry them, and that the bowls were given to them to pour the plagues out on the earth. We probably can’t say what the true meaning is here. But two things are certain: 1) coming out from the temple, they were being sent by God; and 2) both the angels and the living creature were in full agreement with God that these judgments should be poured out on the earth. And pouring means *all at once, unannounced, taking people on the earth by surprise*.

These seven angels were “clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.” In Rev. 19:8 we are told that in that instance “fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.” Angels are not saints, but angels are holy, having never sinned. So this would indicate along with the word “pure” that these were holy angels. And it would mean that they would not take part in the judgments if it were not right to do so.

The golden girdle over the breasts of the angels probably was a sash worn over a shoulder, and extending across the chest to the waist on the other side of their bodies. The linen garments and the golden girdle seem to some expositors to indicate that these angels were clad as priests, and acting as priests. But that does not seem to be necessary. Priests have not historically been associated with judgments. Instead, it may mean that these are heavenly beings, and their garments were an indication of angelic glory which is neither as great as God’s glory, nor as great as our glory will be when we shall be like the Lord.

15:7 One of the four living creatures (see Rev. 4:6-8) came and gave “seven golden vials” to the angels, and they were “full of the wrath of God.” The Greek word for wrath is θυμός, which we have had. It is a sudden outburst of rage, fiery anger. God Who has for such a long time put up with man’s sin, occasionally judging sin because He is angry with the wicked every day. But anger is a more settled attitude, while θυμός is a violent and sudden outburst of rage which cannot be quelled until action has been taken. And He is the eternal God Who has exercised amazing patience in not destroying the ungodly world long before the time spoken here in this verse.

15:8 “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God.” God is glorified in the judgment of the wicked. We need to understand this. The Psalms often lament the fact that the wicked continue on in their evil ways, but God doesn’t seem to be doing anything about it. Well, He is going to do a great deal about it, and that is what we are reading about here in these chapters of the book of The Revelation.

“Smoke” is also a symbol of God’s wrath. After Abraham had prayed faithfully for Sodom, basically because Lot was there, asking, as he did, that the Lord would not destroy the city if ten righteous people would be found in the city, we read this in Gen. 19:28:

28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

This is the first time that the word “smoke” is used in the Bible. Abraham knew that God did not find ten righteous people in the city of Sodom, and so He in His wrath had destroyed the city.

It was not only God’s glory, but also His power that John saw displayed from heaven. And the word used for

“power” is δύναμις. The word implies that God was exercising his omnipotence which He is constantly able to do, and which He does for specific reasons. This can either mean blessing, as in Acts 1:8, or it can mean anything from the judgment of a single person all the way to the judgment of the whole world.

The chapter concludes by telling us that “no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.” This is similar to what we read about the Tabernacle in Ex. 40:29:

34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-35).

The same was true when the Temple was complete. See 1 Kings 8:10-11:

10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD,
11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

This is similar to what Isaiah saw when he saw the Lord sitting upon His throne. He saw the seraphs above God’s throne, and then this is what happened:

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.
4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke (Isa. 6:3-4).

What was Isaiah’s response?

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.
6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:
7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:5-7).

Isaiah’s call followed. But do you suppose that we can say that it was here the Isaiah really learned to fear the Lord? Doesn’t this take us back in our chapter to verse 4 and what the Tribulation saints said about *fearing the Lord*? Whether for blessing, or for judgment, the presence of the Lord is awesome. And both angels and men are inclined to stand off from the display of His glory, it is so majestic and so overwhelming. It is all a part of knowing God. Those who know Him the best, as well as those who have been exposed to the revelation of His glory, are overwhelmed with the majesty of God, and, until they are asked to come, they are not able, they can’t find the strength, to approach such a glorious God.

Don’t overlook what the Bible in both the OT and the NT have to say about fearing God. Solomon said to his son, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [One] is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). All of us need to learn to fear the Lord. It is not a lesson that can be learned at one time, but it is the objective that should be before us all the days of our lives. I close this chapter by reading to you what the Lord said to the people of Judah in Jeremiah’s day. The reference is Jer.5:22-24:

22 Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?
23 But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.
24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

Now we are ready to consider the bowl judgments which are explained in Rev. 16 – the whole chapter.

December 2, 2002

In the outline this is #7 under the general heading of The Great Tribulation:

7. THE SEVEN VIAL, OR BOWL, JUDGMENTS (Rev. 15:1-8; 16:1-21).

And this is the second point under that heading:

b. The execution of the bowl judgments (16:1-21).

We live in a world of sin, and the evidence of sin seems to be increasing daily. And because people seem to be able to get away with whatever they want to do, even though their consciences certainly tell them that they are doing what is wrong, they feel safe in proceeding with their wrongdoing because they are getting away with it. Normally reasonable people have become very unreasonable when it comes to homosexual behavior. For years our liberal courts have been more concerned about rehabilitating criminals than punishing them. And they continue along that line even though their efforts have been proven again and again to be a total failure. We are constantly hearing about crimes committed by those who have committed them before, have been arrested and convicted, may have even been given a sentence in some penitentiary, but then released only to repeat their crimes when they are out.

But even among people who are outwardly respectable and law-abiding, we are seeing terrible dishonesty among business people. Adultery has become a way of life. Gambling is not only allowed, but it is encouraged, and justified because some of the money is used to support our schools. It used to be that gambling was a crime, but no more.

Along with all of the sin, there is a growing hostility against anything that has to do with the Bible, or God, or the Gospel. And we are reaping the results of this too. The Bible tells us that “in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1). The persecution of Christians will increase. Christians are being persecuted right now in other parts of the world, and it seems to be coming closer to home all of the time. Wickedness prevails, although people refuse to speak of sin as sin, and they don’t like people who do talk about sin. In our study of The Revelation we have seen how during The Great Tribulation many of the people of God will be martyred for their faith. Wickedness is like a great steamroller which flattens out anyone who stands in its way. *But there is coming a time when all of this is going to change.* The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote long ago that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Long ago when the Apostle Paul was preaching in the city of Athens he said that even then that God “now commandeth all men every where to repent.” And then he gave the reason:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

That final judgment will be preceded by many judgments, climaxing in three series of judgments which we are learning about in our study of this book. But in spite of all of these judgments, as we will see here in Rev. 16, men, instead of repenting, will blaspheme God for the terrible judgments that He will bring upon the earth. It is amazing, isn’t it, that people will not thank God who daily loads us with His blessings, but they will curse Him when things go wrong. Such is the hopeless depravity of the human heart. The ways of men on the earth confirms the truth of Scripture every day.

But as terrible as these judgments are, they are nothing compared with the final judgment when the wicked will be cast into the lake of fire. Rev. 20:15 tells us: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). And the Apostle Paul could hardly have used stronger language when

he wrote about the coming judgment of the wicked in 2 Thess. 2:8-10:

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

It seems now like the wrong will prevail, but there is coming a day when the judgments of God will be in the earth as they never have been before. Even Isaiah spoke of “the day of the Lord” when he wrote:

17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

18 And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? (Isa. 2:17-22).

Even today God’s judgments are in the earth, as, for example, what happened in New York on September 11 of last year. Look at the problems we face with terrorism world-wide. Our economy is another indicator. It seems like every State is in trouble. God is speaking, but who is listening? Some day everybody will be listening, and fearing!

But let’s see what our chapter tells us.

16:1 In chapter 15, verse 8, we are told that “no man was able to enter into the temple,” but chapter 16 begins with, “And I heard a great voice out of the temple.” The reason that no one could enter the temple was because “the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power” (Rev. 15:8). So this “great voice” which John heard must have been the voice of God. To whom was He speaking? To the seven angels. And what was He saying to them? He was telling them to “pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.”

Dr. Walvoord in his commentary pointed out how many times the word “great” appears in this chapter. Here it is “a great voice.” In verse 9 it is “great heat.” In verse 12, “the great river Euphrates.” In verse 14, “the great day of God Almighty.” In verse 18, “a great earthquake.” In verse 19, “the great city” and “great Babylon.” And in verse 21, the plague which was “exceeding great.” And it is always the same word (although not the same form of the word). It can mean a number of things: large, strong, powerful. The repetition of the word is significant.

This is divine authorization to begin with the bowl judgments. So God is behind these judgments; they come from Him, and at His time and by His will.

16:2 And what happened? Immediately the first angel went to pour out his bowl upon the earth. What was the result? All those who had received the mark of the beast, and who had worshiped his image, were immediately afflicted with a “sore,” ἔλκος, the word for an ulcer showing infection. It smelled bad, and it was

deadly. And so it is called “noisome.” But it was also “grievous.” Thayer says that this word means painful; Swete and Robertson call it malignant. So it was a deadly, running sore, showing infection, and very, very painful. And so those who in 13:16-17 accepted the mark of the beast and worshiped his image to avoid death, now find themselves facing a most terrible death.

16:3 Right after the first beast had poured out his bowl, the second beast poured out his bowl, not upon people, but upon the sea. And the waters of the sea became like the blood of a dead man. Robertson quoted Moffatt who described this as “coagulated blood.” It would have been a loathsome sight, making the sea a motionless mass instead of the usual rolling waves.

16:4 The third angel poured out his bowl upon the fresh water supply of the world, “and they became blood.” There is talk today about what the terrorists might do to contaminate our water supply over the nation, or destroy our dams ruining our electrical supply. And notice that verse 4 does not say that the water became *like blood*, but that “they became blood.” There is no need to spiritualize this judgment when God is capable of doing this very thing.

16:5 Here we come to a very important verse with respect to the divine judgments. It seems that before proceeding to the rest of the judgments, it is necessary for something to be said about the rightness or the wrongness of these judgments. They are so overwhelming that many expositors do not feel that these words can be taken in a literal sense. But they must be literal or the words of this angel would not be as significant.

“The angel of the waters” is evidently not one of the seven angels who have the bowls, but the angel whom the Lord has put in charge of protecting the waters of the earth. There may be other angels who work with him. But this ought to be encouraging to the environmentalists of our day. God is taking care of His creation. He made everything. Everything belongs to Him. We read in Psa. 24:1-2 that:

1 The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

We forget this. The people of the world don't even know it. As God's creatures we all belong to the Lord; as the redeemed we belong to the Lord in a special and eternal way.

What does this “angel of the waters say”? “Thou art righteous, O Lord.” And put the last part of the verse with the first part: “because Thou hast judged thus.” This means that He was righteous in what He did, *and that it would have been unrighteous for Him not to have done it!* God has never done anything unjust or wrong, and as terrible as this will be, He was not unrighteous in doing this! Some translations read, “Righteous are You, Who are and were, O holy One.” The word for “Holy One” here is ὁσιος. In the KJV ὁσιος is translated “Lord,” taking it is a proper Name for the Lord. Trench says that it expresses “the everlasting ordinances of right, which no law or custom of men has constituted, for they are anterior to all law and custom; and rest on the divine constitution of the moral universe and man's relation to it” (p. 329). Thus, God does not judge according to man's law, but according to His laws of right and wrong which, of course, were established before creation, and have never changed. So while men might feel that they were not deserving of such terrible judgments, God does not rule by man's law, but by His own. And the angel was recognizing this. Man is inclined to set his own rules and to judge himself by his own standards. But the world is yet to learn that God's will is the standard, not man's rules which are adjusted to justify himself. This is an important point for all of us to remember. We have seen in our day that man will legalize what is wrong, and then think that it is OK to do it. But God does not change. What was wrong in NT times is still wrong, and, contrary to popular thought, what was wrong in OT times is still wrong. So we need to remember Sodom and Gomorrah.

What God is, is what He always has been, and always will be. He is immutable, and so are the divine standards

of right and wrong.

16:6 The angel of the waters continues. Whatever reason men of the world may have for killing the saints and the prophets, it was murder, and it was wrong. It cannot be justified in any way. So for God to give them blood to drink, is no more than what they deserve, “for they are worthy.”

Seiss made this comment on verses 5 and 6:

When God once comes with His terrible awards upon the wicked, the righteousness of them (i.e., His awards, or judgments) will be so conspicuous, and the justice and truth of His administrations will be so clear and manifest, that it will not be in the power of any holy being to find a flaw, to raise a question, or to withhold the profoundest Amen. And when the earth refuses to yield any drink but blood to its apostate population, angels, and altar, and all heaven must confess and answer that it is just; they deserve it (p. 372).

And so the angel is supporting all of the decisions of God.

16:7 The commendation and support of the Lord continues in this verse.

The altar is personified as speaking, although MacArthur thinks that this is another angel. However, do you remember the passage in Luke’s Gospel where the disciples were praising Him, and the Jews objected? Do you remember how the Lord responded to them. Let me read that passage to you. I am reading Luke 19:37-40:

37 And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

38 Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

39 And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

40 And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

If the Lord can make stones talk, He can make an altar talk. It may be that the altar referred to here is the altar mentioned in chapter 6 where the martyred saints were crying out for revenge. The verses are 9 and 10 of Rev. 6:

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

Keep in mind that these are heavenly testimonies, given by those who judge things from God’s point of view.

The Lord God as the “Almighty” One is used frequently throughout The Revelation. It is in 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6,15; 21:22. It speaks of the Lord God Who “holds sway over all things; the ruler of all” (Thayer, p. 476). He is an absolutely sovereign God in every respect! Since He can do anything that He chooses to do, He always does what is “true and righteous.” These characterize His every decision. He is faithful to Himself and to His Word.

16:8 The first three bowl judgments had to do with the earth; this fourth judgment has to do with the sun.

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No angel has the power to do what is done in each of the bowl judgments. That fact is indicated here by the words, “and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.” Lit. the Greek says, “and it was given unto him . . .” But the idea of authority is contained in those words, and that is probably why the KJ translators felt justified in adding the word “power.” So the verse means that this angel was delegated to do what he did. Swete believes that ἀὐτῷ which can mean either *he* or *it* should be translated *it* because he believed that it referred to the sun. But it seems to me that it is consistent with the pouring out of the plagues that it refers to the angel.

The Greek also does not simply say “men,” but *the men*, meaning a particular group of men, or generically, men and women. That is, it speaks of a particular group of people, and it would seem from a verse like verse 2 that it would be those who had received the mark of the beast, and had worshiped his image.

16:9 Thayer says that the verb, “to scorch,” means to be tortured with intense heat” (p. 341). Scientists tell us that the sun at its center reaches 500,000 degree Fahrenheit, and God has protected us from that intense heat or life on the earth would be impossible. At the same time He can release that heat to any degree that He chooses, and this He will do to some degree when the fourth angel pours out his bowl upon the earth.

What will be the result? Will the people repent and cry out to the Lord for mercy? Unfortunately not! In fact, just the opposite takes place. They will blaspheme the Name of God and not repent to glorify God.

What does it mean to blaspheme the Name of God? It is the opposite of fearing God. It is to treat God as though He were not God. But more than that, it is to speak of God as though He is less than we are. It is to speak of God as though He is not what He claims to be, holy, righteous, loving, compassionate, and merciful. It is to scorn Him. It is to swear, using His Name. Blaspheming the Name of God is to bring reproach upon the very character of God. It is a refusal to give Him glory. Sometimes people under the judgment of God repent, but often when judgment does come, it is too late.

Archbishop Trench in his excellent book, *New Testament Synonyms*, describes repentance in four steps from its usage in the NT:

- 1) Lit. it means *to know after*, or *to have after-knowledge*. Our word for this is *hindsight*.
- 2) Next, on the basis of hindsight, there is *a change of mind*.
- 3) Then, as Trench said, there “is regret for the course pursued” (p. 258).
- 4) Finally, “it signifies change of conduct for the future, springing from all this” (*Ibid*).

As I have said, these are all based primarily on its usage in Scripture, not on the etymology of the word itself. One of the best illustrations of repentance is in the story of the prodigal son. See Luke 15:17-24. But there is no such reaction to the judgment which will take place when the fourth angel pours out the judgment in his bowl.

16:10 In this judgment it seems that the condition with regard to the sun is just reversed. There is a condition on earth which is described as “full of darkness.” It is like the plague of darkness which the Lord brought upon Egypt in the days of Moses. It was a darkness that covered the land of Egypt except where the children of Israel lived. It was a darkness which people could feel (Ex. 10:21). The people couldn’t see each other, nor could they go anyplace. The darkness here in The Revelation was focused upon (lit.) *the throne of the beast*, the first beast of Rev. 13. Swete says in his commentary that “the point is that whilst earlier plagues

had seized on the subjects of the Empire, the very seat of government is now assailed” (p. 204). His kingdom was “full of darkness.” It was full of spiritual darkness before; now literal darkness engulfs his whole domain.

“They gnawed their tongues for pain.” When men are in severe pain, they have been known to chew their tongues, or even other parts of their bodies. A lit. translation of the word “knawed,” is that *they kept on chewing*.

MacArthur referred to two OT books which point to this time of judgment. The first is the prophecy of Joel where we have this prediction regarding the day of the Lord:

1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness . . . (Joel 2:1-2a).

And then in Joel 3:15 he said this: “The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.”

In Zeph. 1:14-17 we also have these words:

14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

The following verses show that just as in Egypt the devastation of each succeeding judgment was added to those that had gone before, so it is here.

16:11 Here again we see that more judgment does not bring repentance, but more blasphemy. Ungodly people do not thank God for their blessings, but they are quick to blame God for their troubles. “Their pains and their sores must be a reference to the noisome and grievous sores from the first bowl judgment as well as when their bodies were scorched with the heat of the sun under the preceding bowl judgment: #4. But there is no repentance for their sinful deeds, only blasphemy for God.

“Their deeds” have to do with the way they have been living, their conduct – godless, wicked lives. They will not change, they will not give up their sinful ways in spite of the terrible judgments of God.

MacArthur made a very significant statement here regarding this point in the bowl judgments. This is what he said:

This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God’s final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call, and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents (II, 145).

16:12 The record of this judgment extends down through verse 16. This is the sixth bowl judgment.

Both the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl have to do with the River Euphrates. These are the only two times (9:14; 16:12) this river is mentioned in the NT. According to ISBE (II, 1038) the Euphrates is 1,780 miles long, and it is the most important inland waterway in Western Asia. It is the chief water supply for irrigating

Babylon. When the river overflowed, the sediment in the river provided much of the fertility for the soil. With this judgment the waters of this great river were completely dried up.

We might wonder how there could be any good fresh water after the third bowl judgment, but it seems that the Lord remembered to be merciful even in judgment otherwise life, all life, would soon have become non-existent on the earth. Habakkuk recognized this at the beginning of his prayer in chapter 3 of his prophecy. This is what he said:

2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy (Hab. 3:2).

God is not a tyrant who delights in the suffering and death of those who reject Him and His ways, but as we saw over and over again in the plagues in Egypt, God answered Moses' prayers for relief time and time again even though God knew that Pharaoh would go back on his promises and not let the children of Israel go. What a truly amazing God we have!

The city of Babylon was located on this river. At one time Babylon was built on both sides of the city so that the river ran directly through it. It is mentioned twenty-one times in the Bible. Only two times is it mentioned in the NT, and both are here in The Revelation.

The river runs in a southeasterly direction from the north of Israel to the Persian Gulf. An article in *A Bible Atlas* gives us the following information:

It is navigable for 1,100 miles, and has in all ages formed the principal means of travel between Eastern and Western Asia. At Babylon it was nearly a mile in width, though for 800 miles it does not receive a single tributary, as it flows through the desert. It overflows its banks every year, rising as high as twelve feet (*A Bible Atlas*, p. 4).

We learn from Gen. 15:18 that this river formed the eastern boundary of the land God promised to Abraham, so its importance in both history and prophecy cannot be overlooked.

But why did God dry up the water of this river? The last part of this verse tells; "that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." There have been times when men were able to cross the Euphrates because the waters were drained. Cyrus crossed the Euphrates when he conquered ancient Babylon. But what we have here in this passage is yet future. Robert Thomas says that:

This bowl looks to the future and the last conflict of world empires against God and His Messianic people (Joel 3:2; Zeph. 3:8). This is the historical program yet to come anticipated in 17:12-14 also (II, 263).

This passage seems to anticipate the time when the nations of the earth will join together in one final attempt to destroy the people of God, particularly with reference to Israel. They come in support of the Beast. As verse 16 indicates, they will be gathered by God in Armageddon. But it is called in verse 14 "the battle of the great day of God Almighty." With the battle against God Almighty, there is no question as to what the outcome will be.

16:13 John sees three unclean spirits (meaning demons) appear. One came from the mouth of the dragon (the Devil). A second one came from the mouth of the Beast, the first beast of Rev. 13. The third demon came from the mouth of the false prophet. So we can see that all of the forces which are arrayed against the Lord's people are Satanic in character. They have been called *The False Trinity*. Fausset describes the as "a blasphemous anti-trinity" (JFB, VI, 708). Thomas calls them "the infernal trio" (II, 264). This is the first time that the second beast of Rev. 13 is called "the false prophet," but he carries this name throughout the rest of the

book. Many false prophets have gone before him throughout human history. Thomas calls him “the false prophet to end all false prophets” (p. 264). They appear like frogs, which makes them more detestable to men. According to Lev. 10:9-12 frogs were an abomination to the children of Israel because they were creatures who moved in water, but did not have fins or scales. And so as frogs these evil spirits were clearly abominable to God and to his people. The fact that they came out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet shows that they must have been very successful in deceiving the people of earth, getting them to join in their opposition to God and His people. So even though detestable as frogs, yet effective by their speech, which is further evidence of the spiritual blindness of men. This is a further evidence of their depravity.

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16:14 There is only one Devil. *Demons* is a better translation in the first statement of this verse. It should read, “For they are the spirits of demons.” We can always be sure of two things when it comes to the work of Satan and his demons, the fallen angels. One, whatever they do is evil. And two, they are always deceptive. Thus we see here that they will be capable of “working miracles.”

Now not only are the forces of the Devil deceptive, but man, in his depravity, is particularly vulnerable to deception. And so the fact that “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” gather together with these “unclean spirits,” is evidence that the demons deceive and that the kings of the earth are deceived. No king in his right mind would venture force, regardless of how many allies he might have, to enter into battle with God Almighty. And yet that is exactly what they are doing here.

Jeremiah said long ago,

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings (Jer. 17:9-10).

And so the kings, evidently thinking that they can do away with the people of God, with special reference to Israel, will be deceived into thinking that because of their numbers, will be able to accomplish what the “unclean spirits” are leading them to do.

How thankful we should be that we have the life of God within us, and the Word of God and the Spirit of God to guide us! If that were not the case, we, too, would be just as susceptible to the workings of Satan as the kings of the earth will be.

There has been a difference of opinion as to the translation of the word “battle” in this verse. Some take it to mean that there will be one major battle, while others think it will be an extended war with many battles. That question may be resolved as we are given further details of that will happen just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth.

There are certain OT prophecies which predict this final conflict. For example, in Psalm 2 we read these words:

1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

In Joel 2:11 we have these words of prophecy:

11 And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

Zechariah had this to say about the day of the Lord:

1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.

2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle (Zech. 14:1-3).

That will truly be a terrible day, but the Lord will be the Victor. There is no question about that.

16:15 Suddenly and unannounced, the Lord Jesus speaks. We know that it is the Lord Jesus because He is the One Who is to come. But no date is set. Our Lord was asked about the restoration of Israel just before His ascension. Here is the question the disciples asked, and the answer which the Lord gave to them:

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:6-9).

“Behold” is to attract the attention of the reader to a special announcement. This is followed by the third of the seven beatitudes that are to be found in this book. Cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; and 22:7, 14.

“Watcheth” describes a person who is awake and who is aware of what it is that is going on. This word suggests that the effect of Satanic activity in the last days will be to put men to sleep as far as recognizing what is really going on. This is always the case with sin. Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, says that this verse describes one who is not only awake, but who takes “heed lest through remissness and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtakes one (p. 122). The Lord used this word in Matt. 24:42-44, and also in Matt. 26:38, 40, and 41.

It seems that “watcheth” may have to do with the inner man, while “keepeth his garments” has to do with the outer man, how they appear before others. The believer has to be concerned about both, beginning with the inner man but manifesting itself outwardly. “Keepeth” is τηρῶν is a present participle as is γρηγορῶν. Both

— speak of continuous action. They were to watch, and keep watching; they were to guard, and to keep guarding. There is nothing more shameful for a professing child of God than for people to discover that he is a hypocrite. We, too, are living in the last days, the end times, and we need to be especially careful about our walk with the Lord, inwardly and outwardly. Bible reading and prayer and obedience to the Word are always extremely important, but that importance is intensified when under trial or under attack from the enemy. How needful is this special announcement for all of us at all times!

16:16 Here John resumes what he had been saying from verse 14. The better reading of this verse is “they,” not “he,” referring to the three unclean spirits of verse 13.

“Armageddon” is lit., mountain of Megiddo, near Mt. Carmel in the north of Israel. So the conflict is with Israel, in Israel.

And with this the revelation of the sixth bowl is completed, and we are ready for the seventh and last bowl judgment.

16:17 MacArthur said of this seventh bowl judgment, “The seventh bowl will be the worst calamity in the world’s history, the most complete and devastating catastrophe the earth will ever experience” (II, 151). The one exception to this statement, of course, will be when the present earth and heaven are destroyed to make way for the new heaven and the new earth.

— Previous judgments have affected the earth, the sea, the fresh waters, and even the sun. This is poured out into the air, the air which people breathe, and which is absolutely essential for life on the earth. “It is done,” spoken by “a great voice out of the temple,” obviously the voice of God, signals the end of the three series of judgments which will come upon the world of sinners who choose to blaspheme God rather than to repent of their sins.

16:18 This looks like, and it must be that it will sound like, what the children of Israel experienced when they got to Mt. Sinai, when they were terrified by all that took place. See Ex. 19. Here there were various deafening sounds, thunderings, earthquakes, lightning – and all of this will be worse than it ever has been since the beginning of time. The earthquake is “so mighty” because of its intensity and its extent. It may go off of the Richter Scale. But it is “so great” because of its importance in God’s dealings with the nations of the earth.

16:19 This is the third time a “great city” is mentioned in this book. The first was in 11:8, and it referred to Jerusalem. The second was in 14:8, and it referred to Babylon. This third time it seems that it also refers to Babylon. Babel and Babylon have come under the judgment of God before; this will be the final time, and we are to learn about it in chapters 17 and 18. The effect of the earthquake will be felt worldwide, but it will split the city of Babylon into three parts, and this will be, as we will learn in the following chapters, to the great dismay of the nations of the earth which will also suffer from the earthquake. Although people are not inclined to think of natural disasters on the earth as having anything to do with God, this verse leaves no doubt but that this “great earthquake” was God dealing with Babylon for her great wickedness and for her treatment of God’s elect people – with the focus upon Israel. “The cup” speaks of that which God measures out for a people which is commensurate with the sin for which they are being judged.

— The word “remembrance” is a word which brings blessing to the people of God. Cf. Heb. 6:10. But it brings sorrow and death to the wicked. God does not forget anything. He does not forget the good works of His people, but neither does He forget the sins of the wicked. He forgets the sins of His people (cf. Heb. 10:17), but He remembers every sin that the wicked have committed, and they will be judged accordingly.

16:20 This verse shows the extensive effect of this judgment. The surface of the earth will be greatly altered with the loss of life which most surely will accompany such a judgment. While there have many great earthquakes throughout history, with staggering death tolls, yet perhaps all of them combined will not equal the judgment that is spoken about in verse 18.

16:21 The judgment ends with a hail storm. But again, this is not a normal hail storm. Swete estimated that a talent of weight is over 100 pounds, perhaps as large as 130 pounds. The plague of hail in Exodus was nothing compared with what this will be. Think also of the loss of life that it will cause.

Both times that the word “men” is used in this verse, they are preceded by the definite article “the,” so the translation should read “the men.” This probably refers to the men mentioned in 14:9-11 who received the mark of the beast, and worshiped his image.

What is the reaction of those men (and women)? It is the same as the reaction of those who were like them which were judged before. They blaspheme God. They do not repent. But none of these people, nor anyone else, will ever be able to tell the Lord that they did not have the opportunity to repent of their sins, and to call upon Him for His mercy in salvation.

The expression, “exceeding great,” at the end of this verse, is very emphatic. It will be extensive, and powerful, and damaging beyond anything that will have occurred before. God is very patient with the sins of men (and women), but the time will come when judgment will no longer be delayed.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
January 6, 2003

We are ready now for the last point under the fourth main division of the book:

IV. “The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter” (Rev. 4:1-22:5).

B. The Great Tribulation (6:1-18:24).

8. The Judgment of Babylon (17:1-18:24).
 - a. Babylon’s destruction described (17:1-18).
 - b. Babylon’s destruction explained (18:1-8).
 - c. Babylon’s destruction mourned (18:9-19).
 - (1) By the king’s (18:9-10).
 - (2) By the merchants (18:11-19).
 - d. Babylon’s destruction celebrated (18:20-24).

Babylon occupies a major place in Scripture. It begins with the building of the Tower of Babel, and is mentioned in Gen. 10:10 and 11:9. After the references in Genesis, Babylon is not mentioned again until 2 Kings 17:24, and then we read about it many times there, only once in 1 Chronicles 9:1, but nine times in 2 Chronicles. And then it carries on throughout Scripture, mainly in the OT, and is finally mentioned in these two chapters in Rev. 17 and 18. Prior to this in The Revelation it is mentioned in Rev. 14:8 and 16:19. In the two chapters we are now covering it is mentioned four times: 17:5; 18:2, 10, and 21. In all Babel or Babylon is mentioned 288 times in Scripture. And over half of these times (161) Babylon appears in the prophecy of Jeremiah. We read of Babylon in Ezra and Nehemiah and a number of times in Ezekiel and Daniel. Micah mentioned it once (4:10) and Zechariah twice (2:7 and 6:10). And so Babylon is important in history and prophecy.

In the NT Babylon is mentioned 4 times in the Gospel of Matthew, and all of them are in chapter 1. It is mentioned once in Acts (7:43) and once in 1 Peter (5:13) where he recognized that there was a church in Babylon. All of the other references are in The Revelation.

And so it has a major place in Scripture. It was located on the middle Euphrates River in the country which is very much in the news today, Iraq.

The name Babylon comes from the Hebrew verb, *babal*. It means *to confound*. The article in the New Unger’s Bible Dictionary says that the name “refutes any God-honoring connotation of the name.” It originated as a movement in opposition to God’s command regarding the whole world, and the history of Babylon in the OT is a history of opposition to God and the people of God. And, of course, this is the place that Iraq holds today in its attitude toward Israel and toward Christians.

I believe it was back, early in the twentieth century, that a man by the name of Alexander Hislop, wrote a book in which it was his purpose to prove that ancient Babylonianism exists today in the Papal worship of the Roman Catholic Church. And many Bible teachers were convinced by his book that he was right. And so it has been the widely taught that Babylon in The Revelation is the Catholic church. But current developments in the Middle East have made many wonder if Babylon in the book of The Revelation could be the resurrection of ancient Babylon as a major anti-Christ power in the end days. We all have to recognize that the Moslem world has become the major threat to world peace. In The Revelation we are concerned primarily with what is to take place during the Great Tribulation. The world is not yet in that period of time, but we may be close to it. And

so it is interesting to contemplate that the present situation may be the beginnings of a mighty world-wide power which will have to be reckoned with in the last days. I personally feel that the wise thing for us to do is to seek to understand this prophetic book of the NT as it is given to us in Scripture, but we must be very careful about saying that “this is that” in seeking to relate it to current events. Many Bible teachers in the past have sought to name the Antichrist, and to relate prophecy to what has been going on at a given time in history, only to be proven wrong as time has moved on. So let us give our attention to the text of Scripture without seeking to say that the Roman Catholic Church is modern Babylon, or that Saddam Hussein is the head of a nation which some day will be recognized as the Babylon of Rev. 17 and 18.

As we start, let us look at the two references to Babylon in this book which are mentioned before we get to this chapter: Rev. 14:8; 16:19.

It is verses like these that made a man like Dr. Walvoord of Dallas Seminary, who has studied prophecy throughout his long life, say that “it is probable the events of chapter 17 occur at the beginning of the Great Tribulation” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 243). The earlier references in this book to Babylon seem to suggest this possibility. The order of events in this book have long been a matter of discussion among prophetic teachers, but I feel that the three series of judgments (the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls) are successive as they are described in this book. So I am inclined to believe that these chapters are where they are because they describe the fall of Babylon as one of the last major events of the Great Tribulation. But as with everything in Scripture where godly people differ, we need to exercise grace in our attitudes toward each other, and be thankful that God has been pleased to reveal what He has revealed.

Before we get into the exposition of chapter 17 I would like to call your attention to the statement in verse 5, printed all in capital letters in our text, to show their importance. But I am thinking especially of the words, “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT.” This word appears again in verse 7. We had it also in Rev. 1:20 and 10:7. It is found in its singular and plural forms 27 times in the NT. And it is defined several times. For example, we have a definition of the word “mystery” in Rom. 16:25-27. This is what those verses tell us:

25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,
26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:
27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

So, whatever we have learned about Babylon by the many references to it before this in the Bible, what we are about to learn from Rev. 17 and 18, has not been revealed before. A mystery is not anymore difficult to understand than anything else that we have in Scripture. All of Scripture is above and beyond us until the Holy Spirit teaches us. But this word “mystery” is a very important word in the NT because it identifies truth and purposes which God has always had in mind, but which He did not reveal until it was made known to the writers of the NT. It speaks of truth that is distinctively NT truth. So when you come to it in your reading of the NT it is like a flag sticking up from the pages of your Bible indicating that *this is new!* So we need to keep this in mind as we look at these two chapters which have to do with Babylon.

In chapter 17 we have, as I have indicated in our outline, “Babylon’s destruction described” (Rev. 7:1-18).

17:1 This is a verse which makes me believe that this follows the bowl judgments. One of the angels which had the seven bowls came to John and spoke to him, saying, “Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.” This angel (and it makes known different which of the seven he was) was an angel of judgment. And he is announcing judgment, “the judgment of the great

whore,” which, as the chapter clearly indicates, is the judgment of Babylon. This was clearly announced in the two preceding references to Babylon in this book. See again 14:8 and 16:19. Since 16:19 has to do with the seventh angel pouring out his bowl which led to the judgment of Babylon, the angel who appears here might be that seventh angel. And this would make chapters 17 and 18 a description of what took place when the seventh bowl was poured out.

Babylon is here called “the great whore.” See also verses 15 and 16, as well as 19:2. It is the same word which is translated HARLOTS in verse 5, and it is translated as harlot elsewhere in the NT. But this is the first time that the word appears in The Revelation. What is a whore? It is a woman who sells her body for unlawful sexual intercourse. But in the Bible it also pictures idolatry. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. It is giving honor and worship to someone or something other than the true God. This has led many to see in Babylon a religious system. She has caused people to turn to herself the adoration and worship which should only be given to God.

See indications of this in Jer. 2:20; 13:27. Ezek. 16 also speaks of Israel’s relationships with the nations, their trust in them, and all of the sin with them in which they were involved as adultery and whoredom. See Isa. 1:21-23.

She is “great” because of the extent of her power and the nature of the evil influence that she will exercise over all the world.

All of this is what we are seeing in our own country today. People turn to people instead of turning to the Lord, and as a nation we worship money, and position, and pleasure, but not the Lord.

She “sitteth upon many waters.” This is explained for us in verse 15 of this chapter where we are told that “the waters . . . are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” This speaks of the fact that multitudes of people of all races and languages and geographical locations have been deceived to give homage to the great whore, Babylon. Babylon dominates them, but it seems that they have willingly submitted themselves to her because of the benefits they have received from her. This is more fully explained in verse 2.

17:2 All levels of society have been affected by Babylon, “the kings of the earth,” and “the inhabitants of the earth.” These are the rulers and the ruled. The whole world essentially will become spiritual prostitutes. Evil will prevail. Godliness will almost become extinct. The kings do not trust the Lord, but trust in their alliance with Babylon. And the inhabitants of the earth become spiritual fornicators by “the wine of her fornication.” There will be no place for God as the restraining work of the Holy Spirit has ceased to keep men from ruining themselves with their pleasure-loving, greed for money, and God-less living. While wine is often associated with pleasure, yet intoxication (which is the meaning of the word “drunk”) renders people senseless, so idolatry affects the souls of people. They do not realize the deadly effect that idolatry has upon them. Actually, idolatry and fornication were almost always connected with each other.

This verse is designed to show the Apostle John the effect which Babylon has had upon the whole world before he sees Babylon as a woman, a harlot in verse 3. The first six verses give the vision which John saw, and the rest of the chapter, the explanation of the vision.

January 7, 2003

7:3 Contrast what is said here with what is said of Israel in Rev. 12:14. Here, the word “the” of “the wilderness” is not in the Greek text. Swete quotes Primasius who said that here there may be the idea of “the desolation of a life without God” (p. 214). In verse 1 this “great whore” is pictured as sitting upon the

people of the world; here she is sitting upon “a scarlet colored beast,” probably the first beast of Rev. 13. It shows her great power and influence in a political way, and, as Swete says, “it conveys the idea of splendor and distinction” (p. 215). But that distinction, as already indicated, is not good, but very, very evil, “full of the names of blasphemy.” Thomas suggests that the names of blasphemy suggest the claimed deification of the woman and her demand that she be worshiped.

The “seven heads and ten horns” were mentioned as belonging to the first beast in Rev. 13:1 to show his great political power, but here it would seem that this “whore,” to whom some expositors refer as a false church, also has great political power. Therefore, the whore, who is primarily a religious power, in sitting upon this scarlet colored beast, for the moment has full control over the power of the first beast. The “seven heads and ten horns” show the extent of the political power of the “great whore.”

What is blasphemy? There seems to be two ideas in this word. First, it is the denunciation of the true God in strong and bitter words, but it also can mean claiming Deity. Kings derive their authority ultimately from God, and so to blaspheme God is to claim to assume the authority that He has over the kings of the earth.

17:4 The great whore was very glorious to look upon with her garments of purple and scarlet upon which were stones of gold, precious stones, and pearls, with a golden cup in her hand. Outwardly it all appeared to be very glorious and good, but the cup which she holds in her hand was “full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.” This does not mean that the beast and the kings and the people of the earth will realize her true nature. This is the vision that is given to John by God so that those who read this book will have the true information about what is going on.

This is like comparing what the world sees as compared with what the child of God understands because of the revelation that we have in the Word of God. Satan worship and demon worship have always been prominent among men. People can even joke about the Devil. But the Bible tells us the truth about Satan beginning with Genesis 3. And the Bible tells us the truth about sin. Sin to the masses of people is not something to be avoided for fear of its consequences as well as the judgment of God, but it is something to seek, to enjoy, and to experience to the full. People feel that they can do what the Bible condemns without any fear of its dire consequences as revealed in Scripture. But they find out the awful effect of sin by experience, and often when they find that it is too late and utterly impossible to forsake. Sin is abominable to God, all sin. And sin is filthy in the sight of God. We learn this from the Bible. We can learn far more about sin from the Bible than we can from experiencing sin because sin not only damns us, but it blinds us to its true nature and to its true consequences both now and for all eternity. Men laugh at the doctrine of an eternal hell, but they will learn when it is too late that the Bible is true, and that they were totally deceived.

Notice the word “full” in verse 3, and again here in verse 4 – “full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.” This means that this was all that there was to this great whore. She is not a mixture of good and bad, but she is totally bad. Any-thing that might appear good, as her outward appearance which we have here, was only to add to her ability to deceive, and to justify God judgment upon her.

What is an abomination? It is that which is detestable to God, that which He hates, that which He abhors, that which is loathsome in His sight. On one occasion when the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees, he denounced them with these words in Luke 16:15:

15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Solomon said this in Prov. 16:5: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord . . .” In Prov. 15:8 he also said, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord . . .” So it is not just the obvious

evil that is abominable to the Lord, but that which only pretends to be good. The great whore might make herself attractive to men, but she was totally wicked and defiled in the sight of God. In Isa. 64:6 we read:

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Those who try to make themselves acceptable to God by what they do, rather than by what Christ did when He died on the Cross, are abominable in God's sight.

So this great whore will be second only to the Devil himself, the personification of evil, all that God despises, and all that defiles people. She may dress herself in all kinds of finery, but in reality she is a fornicator.

17:5 Obviously the great whore did not appear with this name written upon her forehead, but God wrote it there for John to see so that he would understand, and be able to tell us the real truth about "BABYLON THE GREAT." The truth is out! She is not only a harlot, but she is THE MOTHER OF ALL HARLOTS." Some expositors do not believe that the word "MYSTERY" should be capitalized, as it is not a part of the title of the great whore, but, as we have seen, a word which indicates that a divinely kept secret has now been revealed. Fausset said of this word that it is "a spiritual fact heretofore hidden, incapable of discovery by reason, but now revealed."

How could she be "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" when she appears here in the end times? Well, as we have seen, she did not just appear in the last days. She begin in Gen. 10 and 11 in what we might call the early stages of human history, but her true origin was in Genesis 3 with the appearance on earth of the Devil, and Satan. But let us look for a moment at Gen. 11:1-9. (Read.) To be "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" she was responsible for giving birth to, and supporting, spiritual harlotry throughout the whole earth.

But Babylon was also "THE MOTHER OF . . . ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." And where did abominations get their first rise and begin to multiply? It was from ancient Babel. Babylon has given birth to all the idolatry, and to all that is abominable to God religiously, and to all the accompanying sins among all of the nations of the earth! What an indictment!

There have been other harlots, but Babylon is the mother of them all. There have been other abominations, but Babylon is the mother of them all. This helps us to understand what God said as it is recorded in Gen. 11:6:

6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Verse 6 gives us the last part of the vision. The explanation begins with verse 7.

17:6 Robert Thomas says of this verse in contrast with the verses before this, that "it is not just what she promotes, it is also what she opposes that makes her an object of judgment" (II, 290). She hates Jesus! And so she attacks the people of God. Very few people like to talk about God, but they are more inclined to interpret according to their own religious views. Many Christians do not seem to understand that when Moslems speak of God, they are not talking about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but they are talking about Allah. And the same is true of other religions who have their own gods. But there is only one way to interpret "Jesus." Christians are hated and called bigots because they say that there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. But that is the absolute truth. "The saints" and "the martyrs of Jesus" are two expressions which apply to the people of God, and they express that which is so despised by the great harlot and all of her followers. "Saints" is the prominent name for the people of God in this book. See 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; here in 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9. "Saints" are holy people, and who believe in living holy lives. The basic idea in the word "saints" is that of separation, separation to God and separation

from the world. "Martyrs" are basically witnesses, those who bear testimony of the Gospel by life and by speech. But so many believers died for their faith and for their Lord that the word witness took on the meaning of martyrs. For the great whore to be drunk on the blood of these people of God, indicates that which gives her the greatest pleasure. Nothing pleases her more than to see the people of God die! She hates them because she cannot tolerate Jesus!

January 13, 2003

The last statement of verse 6 is not as clear as it could be. John did not admire the mother of harlots, but he was amazed at her. Actually the word "wondered" and the word "admiration" have the same root. The first is a verb and the second is a noun. And so it could be translated, "I was amazed at her with great amazement." The NKJ is closer to the original than the KJV. The NKJ reads, "I marveled with great amazement." The NASB has, "I wondered greatly," but there is a note in the margin which says that "greatly" is lit. "with great wonder." So that would be the closest to the original.

The vision actually ends here, and the interpretation of the vision begins in verse 7.

17:7 The angel asked John why he was marveling, but then said that she would explain the mystery of the woman and the beast who carried, or supported her. The beast is the first beast of Rev. 13 which has seven heads and ten horns. The angel's explanation occupies the remainder of chapter 17.

MacArthur suggests that what John did not understand was the connection between the two figures, the woman and the beast. It had been revealed to him previously that the whole world would worship the first Beast, the Antichrist. In this present vision it seems that the woman is the prominent one, and so John did not see how the two would fit together.

17:8 Robert Thomas quotes an expositor names Moffatt who gave a very helpful division of the chapter.

Most of the chapter is given over to the beast; the last verse to the great whore. In discussing the beast, the angel spoke of:

- 1) the beast himself in v. 8.
- 2) his heads in vv. 9-11.
- 3) his horns in vv. 12-14.
- 4) the waters in v. 15.
- 5) the horns again in vv. 16-17.
- 6) the woman in v. 18.

This eighth verse seems to cover the scope of the beast's career. We are told in 13:3 that one of the heads of the beast was wounded, then healed, so that the whole world marveled at the beast. Here the angel told John that the beast "as, is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit. Evidently it will be said that when the Beast was wounded, that he died, and then was raised back to life. This is the Antichrist's false claim to have been resurrected. Chapter 13 does not say that he died, but that one of his horns was wounded, and then healed. Evidently he will be cast into the bottomless pit and then go into perdition, meaning ultimately, the lake of fire. This is not what the people on the earth will have expected, those "whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world," and so they are amazed! They will realize then that they have placed their hope in an impostor. This will be the master deception of the Devil who has been a liar and a deceiver from the very beginning.

Sin has made man both a deceiver and subject to deception. We can see every day we live how deceived

people are about truth and error, right and wrong. If left to himself, man will always choose what is wrong. And that will surely be the case of those who follow the Antichrist and Babylon, the Great, the Mother of harlots.

17:9 This is a very difficult section, and we can only speculate as to the exact meaning of what will actually be involved among the nations of the earth in the last days. But we can derive some encouragement from the words, "Here is the mind that hath wisdom." This means that the true interpretation of the mystery is being given and that no other interpretation is to be accepted. It is a call for John to pay close attention, and for those who read this book to do the same. It is very likely that we can only understand it in part, but that those believers who live through the Tribulation will be enabled to understand what is going on in this plan and purpose of God.

Going back to the description of the beast in verse 7, who has seven heads, we are told here that they are seven mountains. It has been popular to link the beast here with Rome, the city built on seven hills, as it is often described. But "mountains" are used in OT prophecy to describe kingdoms. For example, Isaiah 2:2 has this to say:

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:2-4).

See what Jeremiah predicted about Babylon under the figure of a "destroying mountain" in Jer. 51:24-25:

24 And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.

25 Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain.

17:10 The "seven heads" and "seven mountains" and "seven kings" all seem to refer to the same thing which can be described as seven empires. When John saw this vision, five were history, one was in existence at the time, and there was one yet to come. MacArthur suggests that the five that "are fallen," are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. That one that was at the time John saw this vision, was Rome. The one yet to come must be Babylon restored (this is my suggestion) because in verse 11 we have an eighth kingdom, which is the kingdom of the Beast. The seventh which was yet future in John's day, and has probably been future even up to now, will only continue for "a short space," *i.e.*, for a brief time. It would fall within the time of the Great Tribulation, and probably the last half of the Tribulation which will be the time of greatest judgment.

17:11 The eighth king is "of the seven," *i.e.*, he will not only be like them, but will represent them, combining all that has been anti-God and anti-Christ among the Gentile nations throughout the history of this world.

What is his destiny? Will he be successful in his opposition to God and His purposes for the earth? No! He "goeth into perdition." This is hell which has been "prepared for the Devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). One by one the empires of the earth have risen, achieved great glory, and then have fallen. The seventh and the

eighth will end the same way. This passage, while not saying so specifically, is very clear on the overcoming power of God, and the ultimate triumph of all of the purposes of God. However, the opposition will be intense in the last days, and this is brought out in verse 12.

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17:12 The angel then tells John that the ten horns are also ten kings “which have no kingdom yet.” These are evidently ten kings who will arise during the Great Tribulation, which will be a part of the kingdom of the Antichrist. Their reign, although it originally looks very powerful, perhaps overwhelming, will not last very long: “one hour.” This does not mean sixty minutes, but definitely limited, much shorter than their appearance would indicate that they will be able to rule. However, they will rule long enough to overthrow the Harlot. See verse 16 of this chapter. The words, “receive power,” or *authority*, indicates that they rule as a part of the empire which the Antichrist will establish, and that they are under the Antichrist. They will be what are sometimes called, puppet governments.

17:13 There will be ten of these kings, but they will work as one to carry out the will of the Antichrist. That is all that they will be concerned about doing. They will be united in their purpose, their resolve, their intention. It will probably be true that no tyrant has ever had the continuous and strong support that these ten kings will give to the Beast. The word for “power” here is not authority, but δύναμις. However, the word used here for “strength” is the Greek word for *authority* – ἐξουσία. They receive their authority from the Beast, but that power will then be exercised in carrying out His will. This is probably related to the ten toes of the image whose feet were partly of iron and partly of clay. See Dan. 2:33, 41-43. If so, it indicates that they will be different and united in some respects, possibly their language and their culture, but there will be one place where there will be no disunity at all, and that is in their strong desire, and the exercise of their power, to see that the will of the Antichrist is done.

We need to keep in mind that *always* throughout history, every king, regardless of who he is, and regardless of how powerful he is, how much support he has, *always exercises his (or her) power within the limits of the will of God, and under His sovereign power.* God is the One Who puts them up, and God is the One Who determines how long they will be in power, and God is the One Who puts them down.

17:14 Here we see what the goal of the Beast, the Antichrist, is. It is to do away with “the Lamb,” our Lord Jesus Christ. What arrogance man can be guilty of, that he would even entertain the idea that he could overthrow the Son of God! The problem is men do not believe that He is the Son of God. This is why the Jews sought to kill Him when He was here on earth, because He claimed that God was His Father, a claim which they rightly understood that He was claiming equality with God. See John 5:17-18; 10:29-33.

This is probably the war that was spoken of in Rev. 16:13-16, and which is described also in Rev. 19:17-21. But in this latter passage, our Lord is described, not as the Lamb, but as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16).

The Lord is referred to here in Rev. 17:14 to emphasize that He is the Redeemer, the lowly Jesus of the Gospels Who came to take away the sins of the world. And so it seems to suggest that the issue that will be hated during the time of the Great Tribulation, is the issue that is facing increased opposition in our day, that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, that there is no other Savior but our Lord.

All of this is what the Apostle Paul had reference to when he wrote his second epistle to the church of the Thessalonians. Cf. 2 Thess 2:7-12:

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:7-12).

We need to meditate on the titles of our Lord that are given to us here in Rev. 17:14. He is “the Lamb.” He is “Lord of lords.” He is the Master of all masters, the Owner of all owners, the Lord of all lords. He is “King of kings,” the Sovereign over all sovereigns. According to 1 Pet. 5:2-4, with reference to the church, He is the Shepherd of all shepherds. What an amazing Savior we have!

Then Antichrist will have with him ten kings. Notice how they are described who are with the Lamb. “They that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” Stated in chronological order the saints are “chosen” first, before the foundation of the world. In time they are “called” by the Lord and to the Lord. And their lives give evidence that they are “chosen” and “called” because they are “faithful.”

John MacArthur has stated it this way in Vol. 2, p. 171 of his commentary:

The terms are rich in their definition of believers as the eternally elect, **chosen** in the Son before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); the **called**, summoned in time by the Father to repentance and faith that saves (John 6:44); and **faithful**, demonstrating the true saving faith, the genuine eternal life that endures by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). The Lord Jesus Christ will effortlessly crush the greatest armed force ever assembled when He returns with His elect and the holy angels (Matt. 24:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:7).

There is a general call as our Lord said in Matt. 22:14, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” But Robert Thomas points out in his commentary that in Paul’s writings God’s call is always effectual, or effective, in bringing the elect to Christ. Those who are chosen, respond to the call; all others do not. From these words we can see that salvation during the Great Tribulation is still the same. In fact, there is only one Gospel regardless of the time period in human history we may be considering. There is only one Gospel, only one Savior, only one way to God. The world despises this truth, but it is the truth nevertheless. Cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 4:14: “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”

January 20, 2003

17:15 I have already commented on this verse in connection with verse I of this chapter where we are told that “the great whore sitteth upon many waters.” It seems to me difficult to say whether the submission of the peoples of the earth is voluntary, or an enforced submission. Perhaps, since evil will prevail as never before, people will submit voluntarily to the great whore and to the beast because there is really no other way that they will be able to survive.

Thomas mentions in his commentary that usually “water” in The Revelation means literal water. But this verse shows that it is used in a symbolic way here. One very familiar verse which speaks of the wicked as water, is Isa. 57:20-21:

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked (Isa. 57:20-21).

Jude spoke of the wicked as being like “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame” (Jude 13a). In Psalm 18 David said that “the floods of ungodly men made me afraid” (Psa. 18:4b). And on down in the same Psalm we read in verse 16: “He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters,” speaking of how the Lord had delivered him from his enemies. In Psalm 124 David was saying what would have happened to him and those who were with him if the Lord had not rescued them:

4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

5 Then the proud waters had gone over our soul (Psa. 124:4-5).

The figure of speech, “waters,” plus the words “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues,” all indicate that the power and authority of the harlot will be universal. However, verse 16 tells us about the uprising of the ten kings against the harlot. And verse 17 explains why they rebel.

17:16 Remember as we are told in verse 13 that the ten kings are loyal to the beast, the Antichrist. From their point of view, the harlot is in competition with the Beast. And so the kings in reality “hate the whore.” And they do four things to her:

1) They “shall make her desolate.” They says in his lexicon that this means that the kings of the earth will “strip her of her treasures.” The same word is used at the end of Rev. 18:19. For Babylon’s treasures, see verse 4 of this chapter. All of her wealth is confiscated by the ten kings.

2) They also “shall make her naked.” Her garments are also mentioned in verse 4. This means further humiliation for the great harlot. It was very common for thieves not only to take the possessions of the one they were robbing, but also their clothing. In the parable of the Good Samaritan that the thieves who attacked the man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho “stripped him of his raiment” (Luke 10:30). The kings did not show the slightest bit of mercy with the great harlot. After taking her wealth, they even took her clothing.

3) Then the kings “shall eat her flesh.” This means that they will kill her. This is Babylon’s doom.

4) Finally, they shall “burn her with fire.” What is lacking after they eat her flesh, will be completely destroyed so that there is nothing to bury. The kings in their devotion to the Beast wish to destroy everything that might keep the memory of Babylon alive. MacArthur says that the “graphic language of extreme violence is used to make clear that” the henchmen of the Antichrist will utterly and completely obliterate all vestiges of the false religious system” (II, p.172).

But why will they do it?

January 21, 2003

17:17 Up to this point in chapter 17 it seems that the “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” and the Beast have everything going their own way. Then trouble develops between them, and the Beast is the Victor. But now, as is the case so often in Scripture, the curtains are opened and we see God Himself as the One Who is directing all that is going on. Why will the ten kings rise against the great whore and destroy her? Why is their victory so complete? It is because they have become instruments in the hand of God for the accomplishing of His will. God is not any more in their thoughts than He has been in the lives of most men throughout human history, but God is there nevertheless, and God is working out all things according to the counsel of His own will, not theirs! He is the One Who put in the hearts of the kings to do what they will have done. And it is God Who has given them the victory. And not only that, but it is God Who has given them such oneness of heart. And it is God Who caused them, not to claim the victory for themselves, but to “give their kingdom unto the Beast.” And it is God Who is going to see that His words, given through His servants (such as the Apostle John and many others) “shall be fulfilled.” Nothing that God has ordained will fail. So, just as Joseph’s

brothers thought that what they were doing was their own will (and it was), yet in a far greater sense God was using their evil deeds ultimately for their own blessing. Here the picture is one of total judgment. How foolish anyone is to ignore God in the first place, and then to ignore His Word. Man is not in charge. Neither kings, nor presidents, nor dictators, nor any combination of them, is determining the outcome of world affairs. It is all of God!

This all gives a different interpretation to Rev. 17:13, doesn't it? On the surface it looks like they are doing their own will. And they are! But in reality they are carrying out that which God determined to be done before the foundation of the world. God does not make up His mind and will to react to the will of men, but He is always in charge, and it is always His will that shall prevail.

This was true even in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, wasn't it? Do you remember what Peter told that crowd of Jews on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon that small company of believers? Listen to his words:

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

A little after this, after Peter and John had been released after being told that they were not to speak nor to teach at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18), they went back to the church and this, in part, was what they said as they prayed:

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:27-28).

What is this doctrine? It is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Even today with all of the negotiations that are going on between us and Saddam Hussein, and between us and Korea, who is in charge? God is! It is His will that is going to prevail. And this comes down to your life and to my life. God is in charge. No one can possibly understand history who does not understand the sovereignty of God. Does this make God responsible for all of the evil that is in the world? Absolutely not! It simply and truly exalts Him as the One Who rules and overrules all that men do in order that His purposes will be accomplished.

Solomon wrote many years ago words that are still true because they were and are the words of God. I am speaking of Prov. 19:21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand."

Through Isaiah the Lord had these words to say to His people:

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it (Isa. 46:9-11).

When Pilate was questioning our Lord during His trial, Pilate spoke strongly to the Lord, but the Lord answered him in even stronger words. What both said was true, but the words of the Lord were the final words:

10 Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to

crucify thee, and have power to release thee?

11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin (John 19:10-11).

Unregenerate men have always scorned the Word of God. The children of Israel were more inclined to hear the false prophets than they were the prophets of God because the false prophets told them what they wanted to hear. But time and time again they were made to realize that the true prophets were telling the truth of God which always will prevail. Let us take our comfort from the Word of God. The Word of God shall stand. Our Lord Himself said,

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18).

The more people neglect or ignore the Word of God, the greater are the mistakes that they are going to make. This is why we are having all of the trouble we are having in our country today, because we are not paying attention to what God has said in His Word, especially about sin. And things are going to continue to fall apart until we start to listen to God's Word.

17:18 In the last verse of chapter 17, we turn back again to the woman who is "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH," who is called here "that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." We have seen her glory and great power here in chapter 17, but also her complete downfall. As we move on into chapter 18 we are going to see the details of her judgment by God. Henry Swete said in his comment on this verse:

His vision [*i.e.*, the vision given to John] sounds a note of warning which may well be taken to heart by any great metropolis [or we could add, any nation] which prostitutes its wealth and influence to base or self-seeking ends (p. 226).

People generally don't learn the lessons of history because they do not recognize the God of history Who has spoken in His Word.

Now we come to the second point under the heading:

8. The judgment of Babylon (17:1-18:24).
 - a. Babylon's destruction described (17:1-18).
 - b. Babylon's destruction explained (18:1-8).

18:1 At this point in the vision given to the Apostle John, another angel appears. Angels are messengers, and this angel has a message to proclaim, first to John, and then to all who will ever read this book. John heard the voice of the angel; we are to read the angel's words which were not only revealed to John, but have been written by John and preserved by God so that we have the angel's message approximately twenty centuries later.

This angel has "great power." The Greek word is *authority*. And that authority is God-given authority. It is the same authority which always accompanies the Word of God. It is evidence of the truth of the Word as well as the power of the Word.

"And the earth was lightened with his glory." This does not mean that the angel was Deity, but the glory of God was upon him as a messenger from God. It must have been something like this that the men who were disputing with Stephen in Acts 6 experienced. This is what is said about them and about Stephen:

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an

angel (Acts 6:15).

For the whole earth to be lightened by the presence of the angel, was not meant to glorify the angel, but to call attention to the angel's message. This illustrates Psalm 119:130, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." "Entrance" means *opening*. Again quoting Psalm 119, this time verse 105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." David said in Psalm 36:9, "For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light." The wisdom of God far surpasses the wisdom of men. The wisdom of man is not only limited, but fallible. The wisdom of God is true, unchangeable, infallible. The wisdom of man will pass away; the wisdom of God is eternal.

All that is said about this angel in verse 1 of chapter 18, is meant to indicate not only the importance of his message, but the unbelievable content of his message. We had a prophetic indication of this back in 14:8.

18:2 The angel's message was evidently for all the world to hear because "he cried mightily with a strong voice." The MSS differ somewhat on this verse, but the point seems to be that the angel's message could be heard everywhere. However, not everyone would hear it, and not all who heard would believe it.

The verb of the message is repeated because it will be thought that Babylon was so great that it would never fall. Babylon herself will have this attitude that she is indestructible. Her fall is thought to be impossible because of her greatness. But that is what makes her fall so amazing. And so everyone will know that there is no mistake about this, the verb is repeated: "is fallen, is fallen." We learn from Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams that he had two dreams which actually amounted to the same thing for two reasons:

- 1) "Because the thing is established by God, and . . ."
- 2) Because "God will shortly bring it to pass."

This latter point is emphasized in verse 8 by the statement, "Therefore her plagues come in one day . . ."

Babylon has always been godless and wicked, but her true character was not known by most people. However, with her fall, the truth is out! She has been great, but not good. She who felt herself to be invincible is not seen to be taken over by demons. She has become the Devil's headquarters, the command center for all of his demonic activity. At the same time it is "the hold," or the prison, "of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." It appears that the words "foul spirit" and "unclean and hateful bird" are synonymous expressions which have to do with demons. And the fact that they are in "the hold," or *prison*, is an indication that they are held there against their will. These words are still prophetic because the actual judgment comes later in the chapter.

Thomas, quoting other expositors, makes this statement in his commentary:

These words are a reminiscence of the judgment pronounced against ancient Babylon (Isa. 13:19-22 14:11; 47:1-15; Jer. 50:39; 51:1-5). Ancient Babylon fell in 539 B.C., but this was not the ultimate fulfillment of OT prophecies. For John this awaited a future consummation at the end of world history (II, 316).

The words "foul" and "unclean" in this verse are the same word in the Greek. Thayer says in his lexicon that demons are so described 23 times in the Gospels, Acts, and here in The Revelation. Because they are "unclean," they are not ceremonially acceptable to God, not fit to stand in the presence of God.

The birds here must be birds of prey. Birds are linked with Satan in the parable of the sower in Matt. 13:4 and 19. Birds are not limited to the earth, and so they are as such representative of demons. They are not only unclean, but "hateful," or *hated*. Demons are not loved, but rather detested and despised as birds of prey who

wait to consume their prey. We learn the truth about the Devil and demons from the Word of God. The world either denies their existence, or perverts them into being something even good rather than the evil creatures that they are.

So Babylon is not of God, but of the Devil and all that is evil.

It is important for us to understand that those who disregard what their consciences tell them about sin, who do what they want to do instead of doing what is right and good, are only playing into the hands of the Devil. And when they want to turn from their sins, they find that they cannot. They are held captive. And during the Great Tribulation the evidence of this will be world-wide as we learn from what is said about “all nations” in verse 3.

8:3 The widespread influence of Babylon upon the nations, the kings of the earth, and the merchants of the earth is cited here as one of the major reasons, if not *the major reason*, for Babylon’s judgment. And we have cited before that the reference to fornication means that the love that men should show toward God has been prostituted and turned toward idolatry. One form of idolatry is covetousness as we are told in Col. 3:5. An idol is anything that we worship. Pleasure can be idolatry. We are all susceptible. People also worship money. The importance of guarding ourselves against any form of idolatry is seen in the final word that the Apostle John gave at the end of 1 John: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). We can’t be warned too often about idolatry.

February 10, 2003

Notice that this verse speaks first of the nations, then of the kings of the earth, and finally of the merchants of the earth. And it is important to see what is said about all of these, but especially of the kings and the merchants. All is related to Babylon. Babylon is the great corrupting power of the last days.

The Greek word at the beginning of verse 3 is ὄτι, and would be better translated *because*. And so this explains God’s judgment upon Babylon. And so not only is Babylon judged, but all who have sided with her and depended upon her are to be judged. God is left out of the picture completely. Babylon operates as though there were no God, and the kings and merchants of all of nations follow in her footsteps, and so they will share in her judgment.

“The abundance of her delicacies” is an interesting combination of words. “Through the abundance” is lit. *out of the power*. “Her delicacies” are her wantonnesses. This describes a person who lives extravagantly, and usually immorally, without any regard for what is just and right and humane. Drunkenness, immorality, and riches are combined here in this verse. MacArthur calls the world of Babylon “commercially prosperous, but morally bankrupt” (II, 180). Wealth is often looked upon as evidence of the blessing of God, and sometimes it is. But people who make money their objective in life are setting their hearts upon that which can vanish overnight, and can cause corruption and despair, and ultimately life itself. We ought to be aware of the many examples we have even in current society of the many troubles which are associated with money.

So the angel’s message includes all of verses 2 and 3.

18:4 At this point the Apostle John hears another voice. And it seems that the message given by this voice is found in verses 4 through 24 – to the end of the chapter. At first it might seem like it was God speaking, but since God is referred to throughout the message in the third person, it is probably true that the message was given by an angel, but it was a message delivered on behalf of God. Remember the statement made about this book in the very first verse of chapter 1, where the book is described as one which God “sent and signified

it by his angel unto his servant John.” This is similar to the way in which the prophets of the OT preached. They gave the message as from themselves, and yet usually prefaced it with, “Thus saith the Lord.” God’s message to His people during this Tribulation period is similar to the message that He has always had for His people, a message of separation from the world. And He explained through the angel two reasons why they should be separated from the world of Babylon:

- 1) “That ye be not partakers of her sins.”
- 2) “That ye receive not of her plagues.”

Now we don’t get that kind of a message from the world. The world is always trying to pull us in. The world wants us to all be one. But one very important part of our salvation is that Christ died to save us from the world. Paul, in writing to the churches of Galatia, reminded them that our Lord Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world,” or age, “according to the will of God and our Father (Gal. 1:4).

We are told in Scripture not to love the world.

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The same message is given to us in Rom. 12:1-2:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

When our Lord was here on earth, He told His disciples:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:18-21).

And for a last passage, let me read to you 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1:

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Some time soon read also how the Lord prayed for us in our relationship with the world in His high priestly prayer, John 17. He has called us out of the world. We are in it, but not of it. The way the people of the world live, ignoring God, rejecting the Bible, seeking money and pleasure and possessions and power. We are not to

live like that. We are to live to please God, to glorify Him, to do His will. We are to get our directions from the Word. Our mission in the world is to spread the Gospel and to seek to turn people to Christ.

Robert Thomas says in his commentary on this verse that the verb “come” is an aorist imperative “expressing the urgency of the call” (II, 320). And then he adds from another commentator (Johnson), “It is a call to leave the enticements of idolatry, self-sufficiency, reliance on luxury, and violence against human life” (*Ibid.*). John MacArthur says that it is “a call for God’s people to disentangle themselves from the world system” (II, 180).

This address to “My people,” *i.e.*, the Lord’s people, is another indication in this prophecy that people are going to be saved during the Great Tribulation, and among these will be both Jews and Gentiles. And although the power of sin and all forms of godlessness will be strong, the people of God are not compromise at all with sin lest they fall under the judgments that will come upon the world.

18:5 Is this like another tower of Babel, only instead of being made of bricks, it is made of sin. The first tower reached into the heavens so that it could be seen from great distances. But this tower will reach all of the way to heaven – a distance so great that it has never been measured, and cannot be measured.

Jeremiah has given us this word concerning Babylon in his day:

9 We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies (Jer. 51:9).

God does not forget the good works of His people, we learn from Heb. 6:10. But neither does He forget the sins of sinners. The reason that men think that God does not see them when they sin is because they do not know Him, nor do they know His Word. Solomon said, and it is still true, that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3).

“God” in this verse is actually *the God*, “the only and true God” (Thayer, p. 287).

“Her iniquities” is lit. *her unrighteousnesses*. It speaks of sin as a violation of God’s laws. He is the One Who determines what is right and what is wrong. And His standards do not change! How significant these words are in the light of the present trend to make morality relative, meaning that nothing is absolutely right and nothing is absolutely, and under all circumstances, wrong.

God forgives sin, and He is the only One Who can forgive sins. But where people are defiant and unrepentant there is nothing for them to expect but judgment, eternal judgment.

18:6 God not only knows sins, and remembers them, but the day is coming when He will judge them. And the Lord Who is the divinely-appointed Redeemer, will in that day be the Judge of all men. When Paul was preaching in Athens on Mars’ Hill, he concluded his mess with these words:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

But with respect to Babylon, cf. Isa. 47:1-15 (read), and Jer.50:23-46 (read).

It often seems that wickedness prevails and that righteousness is continually being defeated. But that time is coming to an end. The Lord is making a record of all of the evil that is going on in the world, and of all that

has gone on, and He will reward the evil doers. Sin carries with it its wages. Cf. Rom. 6:23. And this will not only be seen in the judgments God brings upon the earth, and specifically the judgment of Babylon, but the judgment of unbelievers in hell, the lake of fire. Cf. Rev. 20:7-15 and 21:5-8.

The words of verse 6 are terrible words. God is going to judge the sins of Babylon (and the sins of all sinners) far beyond all that anyone can now comprehend. The voice from heaven is speaking here of the way Babylon has martyred the Lord's people, and especially the people of Israel among whom are the elect of God. The punishment of Babylon (and of all sinners) is to be with interest. Lit., *double her double*. This was in accordance with the Law. Cf. Ex. 22:4, 7, 9. See also Matt. 7:2. All of this emphasizes what we read in Heb. 10:31, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

18:7 This verse gives us more reasons for God's judgment upon Babylon. "She hath glorified herself." God has made men, all men, for *His glory*, no their own, and so when men glorify themselves they are robbing God of that which belongs only to Him. How careful we need to be about any statements which indicate that we can do anything, we can overcome any obstacle, we can handle any problem! Without the Lord and His blessing we can't do anything. Man's pride is abominable in the sight of God. The greatest example that we have ever had on earth is the example of our Lord during His time here on earth. Cf. Phil. 2:5 ff. And we are to have the mind of Christ. We are to humble ourselves before the Lord, and if there is any exalting to be done, He will do it. Cf. Jas. 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:6-7. But Babylon goes in the opposite direction. Even our failure to recognize God and our dependence upon Him, is a manifestation of human pride which God will judge!

On pride, cf. Prov. 16:18-19:

18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

19 Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Also see Rom. 1:21-25:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

But a second thing is said about Babylon: "she . . . lived deliciously." The NKJV renders this word "luxuriously" and "sensuously." We have the same verb in verse 9. It speaks of wanton behavior. Wantonness includes by definition immorality, a total lack of chastity, a scorn for righteous behavior, extravagance. It is unrestrained sin which inevitably brings on the judgment of God. It is the rejection of all that is good and right and pleasing to God. Such a life does not produce joy and satisfaction, but rather "torment and sorrow." And then the angel quoted from Isa. 47:8 and 9 which we read a few moments ago.

This is the way many people in America feel about our country. We have been prosperous. We claim to be the mightiest nation on the face of the earth. It is to many people incredible that it could ever be otherwise with us. We call upon God to bless America, but we have no idea that we need to change if we are to continue to have His blessing. September 11 was a disaster that most people could never hit us. But it did! And worse things can be ahead unless we humble ourselves before God, change our ways to bring them in line with God's ways, and turn from our sins.

But look at verse 8 with its “therefore.”

18:8 What does the lifestyle of verse 7 produce? Plagues. Death. Mourning. Famine. And finally, total judgment by fire. But be sure to notice the timing: “in one day”! And where is all of this coming from? It comes from God: “for strong is the Lord Who judgeth her.” How people hate for you to say that September 11, 2001 was a judgment upon America from God! But what else could it be? Babylon will be the greatest, and yet she will fall under the judgment of God and not be able to do anything to escape from it.

The world did not believe that God was going to destroy life on the earth with a flood, but that is what God did! Sodom and Gomorrah did not know that in one day they would all be killed and their cities reduced to ashes. But it was! See “one hour” in this chapter, verses 10, 17, 19. When God moves in judgment, He can move with incredible speed. Remember what we read in Jer. 50:23-25:

23 How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!

24 I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD.

25 The LORD hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of the Lord GOD of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans (Jer. 50:23-25).

Men do not consider God, and so they do not know the power of God. It is omnipotent, sovereign power. There is no one greater than God. All of the nations of the earth are as nothing in comparison with God. And because there is widespread unbelief that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, there is further intellectual and moral blindness among men as to God’s surpassing power. If the world were filled with a million Babylons, it would be nothing for God to destroy them all in one day, or in one hour, or even in one minute. How important it is for us to get these truths well established in our hearts and minds!

We have been considering the judgment of Babylon. Now in verses 9 and 10 our attention is turned to the kings of the earth.

18:9 “The kings of the earth.” The ungodliness of Babylon has spread throughout the whole world. They have turned away from the true God to worship gods which do not even exist, and they have fallen into a most ungodly lifestyle as a result: total wantonness! When they see the smoke of her burning, and it will be shown throughout the world on television, they “bewail” and “lament” because they know that their only hope is gone. *But notice that there is no indication that any of the kings will be thinking about repentance for sins and turning to the Lord.*

To bewail is to weep audibly and uncontrollably. Thayer says that it is to cry as a child. This same verb appears in verses 11, 15, and 19.

To lament, Trench says (p. 239) is a “more violent manifestation of grief,” such as beating upon one’s breast and wailing. There is no way in which the kings with all of their luxury and power can find comfort in this distress. Verse 10 continues to tell us upon the effect that Babylon’s destruction has upon the kings of the earth.

18:10 Robertson explains the first statement of this verse, that the kings were “afraid to draw near . . . They feared the same fate” (VI, 440). Notice that the same thing is said of the merchants in verse 15, and of the shipmasters and their crews in verse 17. “Alas, alas” is lit. *woe, woe*. The hopelessness of the situation became more and more apparent as the full realization of what was taking place was impressed upon them.

Babylon was “great” because of its great importance all over the world and because of its prominence. The stability of the whole world rested upon Babylon. At least this is what every king believed. No economy could possibly survive the downfall of Babylon. But it was also “mighty.” And here the same word is used that was used of God in verse 9. It shows that the kings believed that the power of Babylon was the greatest power on earth, and possibly the greatest in the whole universe! To see Babylon fall blasted all of their hopes for the present as well as the future. The kings see the finality of Babylon’s judgment and the suddenness of her judgment, and they are completely overwhelmed!

But now we turn to “the merchants of the earth,” and what is said about the merchants continues down through the first statement of verse 17.

18:11 The economy of the world will be so tied in with the prosperity of Babylon that when Babylon falls, the business of the world comes to a total standstill! Business comes to a complete halt! And we can imagine how serious this would be. And here again, no one would even have imagined such a possibility! Their grief and despair are just like that of the kings of the earth.

18:12 Beginning with this verse and going down through verse 14 we have a list of the products which had made the merchants of the earth rich. Fourteen items are mentioned, some like “precious stones” and pearls are in the plural.

Probably the only one in this verse that needs any explanation is the “thyine wood.” It was a tree grown in North Africa and exported around the world that had many uses. Incense was made from it, and it was also used for decorative inlays in woodwork, such as on table tops.

18:13 The list continues here in verse 13. Another fourteen items are listed. The chariots are not for warfare, but simply four-wheeled carriages used by almost everyone for transportation.

The word translated “slaves” is lit. *bodies*, since a slave’s body and his strength was what determined his value. On “the souls of men, Swete says that this points to “the brutal pleasure of the amphitheatre” and “means little more than ‘human livestock’” (p. 235). It could be translated *the lives of men*, indicating the sacrifice of human life for pleasure. That we see that the more pagan and materialistic a society becomes, the less value is placed upon human life. God will at last put all of this to an end.

18:14 These are specialty items which were no longer available.

18:15 The reaction of the destruction of Babylon upon the merchants is the same as the kings, and some of the same words are used.

February 17, 2003

Notice that, like the kings in verse 10, the merchants also “shall stand afar off” because they fear that what has happened to Babylon, will happen also to them. If Babylon the Great has fallen, then in the minds of the kings and the merchants, *no one is safe!* And the same two words which were used in verse 11 of the merchants, are used again here. They were “weeping and wailing.”

We are constantly being told that money is the answer to our problems, “and after that is MasterCard!” But it is apparent in this chapter that money does not buy peace. We also see that there is nothing permanent about riches. Solomon, the great King of Israel, said long ago,

5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (Prov. 23:5).

Neither the kings nor the merchants care at all about God. They set their minds on earthly things. The Apostle Paul was speaking of this worldly crowd when he wrote Phil. 3:18-19:

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

The Bible has much to say about riches, and most of it is bad. There have been, and still are, rich men and women who nevertheless love the Lord, and seek to honor the Lord with their money, but they are the exception, and not the rule. In our SS lesson for last Sunday we had a warning against riches: “But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation” (Luke 6:24). Whatever enjoyment a rich person gets out of his riches, it is only for this life. Money can’t buy salvation. Money cannot buy peace. The rich man has no assurance at all that what he has today, he will still have it tomorrow. During the Great Depression of the 1930's many rich men committed suicide. With their money gone, they had nothing left. Contrary to many of our TV commercials, the Bible says, “Labor not to be rich” (Prov. 23:4). The Apostle Paul issued the same warning in his first epistle to Timothy where he referred to the idea of unregenerate men who supposed “that gain is godliness.” These might even be men who had found their way into a church. But then Paul went on to say this:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

So as we go through the book of The Revelation, let us not miss the warnings connected with that terrible time on the earth. Paul knew that even with Timothy there would be the temptation to serve the Lord for what he got in return, and so he told him to “flee” from the love of money, and to pursue instead “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Tim. 6:11). That is great advice for all of us.

So in a world and at a time when God’s people will be killed for their faith, kings and merchants will go on pursuing their own power and riches, blinded to the truth by their lust for riches. And most of them will go into eternity without either their money, and without Christ. What a pathetic sight is pictured here of the kings and of the merchants!

18:16 However, the merchants are not only standing as far away from Babylon as they can, gripped with fear, “weeping and wailing,” but they are also talking (as the angel here predicts). What are they saying?

“Alas, alas” – Compare the words of the merchants here with the words of the kings in verse 10. This is the same word which is translated “woe” in Luke 6:24, 25 (2x), and 26. It is an exclamation both of present distress and also of the apprehension of greater trouble to come. With all of her glorious apparel – “fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls” – kings and merchants considered her invincible. But with both the kings and merchants, what added to their dismay, was that it all happened in such a short time. See the next verse.

18:19 “For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.” We could say that all of this collapse happened

while the kings and merchants were looking on. In verse 8 it was “one day.” In verse 10 and here it is “one hour.” I don’t think we need to be concerned with whether Babylon fell in a sixty-minute period, or in twenty-four hours. *The point is that it happened in an unbelievably short time!* And the riches which were to prominent before, *were gone!!!*

Even in our day we know that when big businesses begin to suffer, people start to lose their jobs. During the Tribulation the layoffs will not be announced ahead of time, or carried out little by little. But just as the downfall was sudden, so the layoffs are sudden too. The “shipmasters” are those who own the ships. The “company” is a reference to the passengers (which would also have been a source of income to the shipmasters). The “sailors” are the crew. In the days in which this book was written, the main source of travel and of business overseas would have been by ship. And so when we make the application to the way things are today, it means that world-wide business will completely collapse. It predicts a time the likes of which the world has never experienced, like most, if not all, of the other judgments which the Lord will bring upon the world at that time.

Notice that the sailors are like the merchants and the kings, standing “afar off,” not wanting to get too close lest the judgment fall on them too. Verses 18 and 19 show that the reaction of the shipmasters and passengers and sailors is just like that of the merchants and the kings.

18:18 The kings (18:10), the merchants (18:16), and now in this verse, the shipmasters, etc., all declare that Babylon was a “great city,” but at this point she is “great” no longer. Thomas says that “the implied answer to the question here is ‘no city.’ Babylon that represents all that a city can be in the realm of materialism is no more!” (II, 340).

18:19 The grief that is expressed here by the shipmasters is practically identical to that shown by the kings and by the merchants. Those who owned ships had become wealthy as a result of what Babylon had done for them. But suddenly even the prospect of any recovery is gone, and the mourning of the shipmasters is great!

“Costliness” means that the shipmasters were able to charge high prices for their services, but they could not do that any longer because “in one hour is she made desolate.” “Desolate” means laid waste. Babylon was ruined and there was the definite feeling among the kings, merchants, and shipmasters, was that Babylon was destroyed beyond any hope of recovery. This was final.

18:20 The downfall of Babylon, because of her world-wide influence, will go down in history as one of the most momentous event of all time. It will certainly be second to the downfall and final judgment of the Devil himself. But it is to be a cause of great rejoicing even for the saints in heaven. We don’t know much about what people in heaven know with regard to events of the earth. But they will know about Babylon because an angel will tell them, the angel which started speaking in verse 4. What a day for rejoicing it will be with the forces of evil begin to fall under the mighty hand of God! And that day will surely come. All we know today is for things to get worse and worse. The Devil and evil seem to have things going their way, but we must not lose sight of the Lord. This is a day more than ever for us to keep our minds stayed upon the Lord. The people of the world may not be talking about the Lord, or figuring Him into the current situation, *but He is there, holding everything in check, and working out His purposes for His own glory, and for our good.* The ultimate victory is the Lord’s, and that never has been, and never will be, in question.

This verse tells us why the destruction of Babylon has taken place. “Rejoice over her.” The prayer of Rev. 6:10 has been answered. The situation in Rev. 11:10 has been reversed. The people of God in heaven are now rejoicing, and this will include the Tribulation saints who have been martyred for their faith. But the fact that

the “holy apostles and prophets” are mentioned, means that the judgment of Babylon is to right wrongs which have been going on ever since the church came into existence. Several commentators have suggests that the heavenly songs of the first five verses of chapter 19 are the response of the Lord’s people in heaven to the angel’s exhortation here in verse 20.

What has happened? Why has Babylon fallen? Who caused it? The answer: “God hath avenged you on her.” It is nothing else than a judgment of God, a righteous judgment, a judgment that was fully due. The kings and the merchants and the shipmasters and owners, have not said that this is what it is, but the angel says so! Thayer said that this means that God is vindicating His people by the judgment He has inflicted on Babylon. Babylon and the kings, etc., are not getting anything that they do not fully deserve. And we know that this is not the only judgment that they are going to receive. Hell is still ahead for them. Lit. translated, “God hath avenged you on her,” is *God hath judged your judgment on her*. God has shown Himself to be on the side of His people, and against Babylon and all who support her. This statement has the meaning that God had imposed on Babylon the sentence that she had passed on the people of God.

18:21 This mighty angel takes symbolic action which is meant to describe God’s judgment upon Babylon.

What is a millstone? Two millstones, rolling against each other, were used to crush grain. But the word also is used, as it is here, to speak of a heavy weight, or burden. The Lord spoke of a single millstone when he spoke of offending a little child. Matthew’s account of what He said is in Matt. 18:6:

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

The same is found in Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2.

In our verse in The Revelation it is a stone like a millstone. The fact that it is taken up by a mighty angel is an indication that it is heavy. A millstone does not float. It sinks, and carries anything attached to it to the bottom of the sea. This means that even though Babylon has been restored from its former greatness, it will never recover from this judgment of God. And so our verse says, “that great city Babylon [shall] be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” In the Greek there is a double negative, οὐ μὴ, which is an intensive negative, and it means that there is not the slightest possibility that it will ever exist again! This double negative is found five more times in verses 22 and 23. In four of the instances this double negative is translated by the words “no more.” And in those verses we will also learn what the destruction of Babylon will mean.

On the final destruction of Babylon, cf. Isa. 13:19-22 and Jer. 50:35-46.

18:22 “No more” Babylon means no more music, no more business, no more food.

18:23 It will also mean no more light, no more marriages.

In the latter part of verse 23 and in verse 24 we find three specific reasons for God’s judgment upon Babylon. The first because the merchants became the great men of the earth. This means that money-making was the major objective of the city, and so of the world. This would have been for power and for position, for pleasure, and for possessions. Any city can be evaluated by seeing who its great men are. That is, what do children growing up in a city aspire to be. It was not the godly man whom people aspired to be like, but the rich man, the business man. These were the mighty men of Babylon and Babylonian culture throughout the world.

The second reason given here for the judgment of Babylon was her “sorceries.” The Greek word has to do with the administration of drugs. It has to do with witchcraft, soothsayers, fortunetellers, the occult. And through

these the whole world was deceived. Instead of seeking God and His wisdom, Babylon became as we learned in verse 2 of our chapter, “the habitation of demons.” Actual Devil worship is the highest form of sorcery. Sorcery is defined as the use of power gained from evil spirits. So Babylon will be a stronghold of all that is wicked and harmful.

The third reason is given in verse 24:

18:24 Babylon will be judged, never to exist again because she has had as one of her major objectives the complete destruction of the people of God. Cf. Rev. 17:7. Remember what we learned in verse 5: “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

If the saints in heaven are called upon to rejoice that Babylon is fallen, then we who know the Lord on earth should rejoice not only in the ultimate and final fall of Babylon, but in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ Who one day soon will come conquering and to conquer, and will be recognized not only as Jesus the Christ, the Redeemer of sinful men, but as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Paul’s word to the church at Rome seems appropriate at any time, but especially today as we rejoice in the power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am referring to Paul’s words in Rom. 13:11-14:

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Tuesday Bible Class – Trinity Bible Church
February 24, 2003

We come now to the last point in our outline under:

IV. “The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter” (Rev. 4:1-22:5).

We have had:

- A. **The throne in heaven (Rev. 4-5).**
- B. **The Great Tribulation (Rev. 6-18).**

And now we come to:

C. The Events which follow The Great Tribulation (Rev. 19:1-22:5).

The first of these is:

1. The marriage of the Lamb (19:1-10).

With the destruction of Babylon and the judgment which it caused among all of the kings of the earth, and all of the merchants of the earth, and all of the shipmasters who were the mainstay of the business of the earth, in their alliance with the merchants and kings, there is cause for great rejoicing. The word “Alleluia,” which is a form of *Hallelujah*, occurs four times in this chapter: vv. 1, 3, 4, 6. Translated it means, *Praise ye the Lord*. A. T. Robertson reminds us that “fifteen of the Psalms begin or end with this word” (VI, p. 447), and sometimes they both begin and end with this word. This is one of the things that every child of God is to do continually. We learn this from Heb. 13:15:

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

John MacArthur points out four reasons we have in Scripture for praising the Lord:

- 1) We are to praise Him because of His glorious attributes. One example of this in Scripture, which is repeated many times is Psa. 107:1, “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”
- 2) We are to praise the Lord for His mighty works. We should praise the Lord for His works in creation. There is a verse in Rev. 4:11 which teaches this: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”
- 3) We are to praise the Lord for the many blessings He gives us each day. Cf. Psa. 68:19, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.” Notice that among His blessings are the blessings of salvation.
- 4) Finally (and we often overlook this), we are to praise the Lord for His judgment upon the wicked, and this is what those who make up that “great voice of much people in heaven” are doing here in Rev. 19:1 and 2. See also Deut. 32:43, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.”

Paul, in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, wrote, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Thus, thanksgiving to God and the praise of His Name are to be dominant characteristics of all of the children of God.

But now to the text.

19:1 It seems that we need to take the praise which takes place here in chapter 19 as the response in heaven to the words of verse 20 in chapter 18. And the rejoicing is not only because Babylon is defeated, but

also because she will never exist again. It will not be like many wars on earth where a nation is defeated only to rise again to become a greater threat than ever. There has been very little to rejoice about since the beginning of chapter 6, but the time for Alleluias has arrived. Matthew Henry says, "Their prayers now are turned into praises, their hosannas end in hallelujahs" (VI, 1176).

John MacArthur summarizes what has taken place in chapters 17 and 18, and how it is related to chapter 19 in the following words:

The particular target of God's wrath was Antichrist's worldwide religious, political, and economic empire, symbolized by its capital city of Babylon. Babylon's destruction was described in detail in chapters 17 and 18. The destruction, which caused dismay and mourning on the earth (18:9-11, 15-19), now brings joy to heaven. With the devastation of its capital city, Antichrist's empire was dealt a fatal blow. The final destruction of the world's forces will take place shortly at Armageddon (19:11-21) (II, 195).

Another word in addition to "Alleluia" which is emphasized in this chapter, is the word "voice." It is used five times in the first ten verses. See vv. 1, 5, 6 (3x). Contrast what is here with 18:22 and what was lacking there.

The words "after these things" indicates a change, or a turn, in this book. John hears a sound from heaven, "a great voice of much people." It is not the sound of mourning, but of great joy. They are praising the Lord. Just who they are is not clear until we read down through the passage and we note inverse 4 the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. Then in verse 6 it speaks again of "a great multitude" corresponding with "much people" here in verse 1, and their sound was "as the voice of many waters" (v. 6). This would indicate people from the nations. So it seems that this "much people" would be the saints in heaven, and probably the angels of God as well. They are all praising the Lord.

"Alleluia," or "praise ye the Lord" as it appears in the OT. But the Hebrew form would be Hallelujah. Strong calls it "an adoring exclamation." It is also an exhortation, a commandment. And the words which follow here in verse 1 tell what they were to do in praising the Lord. "Salvation" here can mean a deliverance as from Babylon, but it is all a part of the greater work of salvation. However, whether we are talking about deliverances in particular situation, or the greater work of salvation, salvation must be ascribed to God alone. The "glory" all belongs to God, as well as the "honor" for such a great work (some MSS omit "honor"). Obviously the defeat of Babylon took great "power," power which all recognized as having come from "the Lord our God." And in this instance it was very evident to all in heaven that only God could do what had been done, and what He does He always does for His own glory.

How wonderful it would be if we looked upon our deliverances and all of the blessing that come upon us as coming directly from God, and then that we would offer Him our Hallelujahs and our words of praise!

19:2 "True and righteous are His judgments." This is actually a quotation from Psa. 19:9 where we read in the latter part of the verse, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Psa. 119:137 says, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments." When the angel of the waters poured out his bowl of judgment upon the earth and all of the rivers and fountains of fresh water were turned into blood, we read this in Rev. 16:5-7:

5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy

judgments (Rev. 16:5-7).

“True and righteous” suggests that God’s judgments are always what the sins deserve. He is a just Judge, never in any way being inconsistent with His own righteous and holy character. The reason that people often curse God in times of judgment is because they do not understand how abhorrent all sin is to God, how abominable!

The Lord was dealing with Babylon on two counts. First, because of how she had brought the world into idolatry and into all of the gross sins which go along with idolatry. Second, because she had killed His servants. Both of these are mentioned in Rev. 18:23b-24. The world will never be able to understand how precious the Lord’s people are to Himself. The Lord told the people of Israel through the prophet Zechariah, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8).

19:3 Those in heaven begin with Alleluia, and continue with it here. What is said here about the smoke of the fire which destroyed Babylon, does not mean that the smoke would be visible eternally, but it is a way of saying that her judgment was final. Those in heaven were not only thankful that God had judged Babylon, but that it was a permanent judgment.

The rebellion against God which began in the heaven with the sin of Satan, and spread to the earth in the Garden of Eden, is now drawing to a close. It will not end until the judgment of the Great White Throne. But the destruction of Babylon was evidence that the outcome was certain.

19:4 The “four and twenty elders” are mentioned in Rev. 4:4,10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; and here. We read about the “four beasts,” or living creatures, in Rev. 4:6, 8; 5: 6, 8, 14; 6:1, 6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; and here. The four living creatures are angelic beings, and the elders may be to, although there are those who believe that they represent the church in heaven. But whatever is the right interpretation, here they are adding their “Alleluia” to the others as they fall down and worship God on His throne. Matthew Henry believes the elders represent the church, and that this shows the harmony that exists between the church and the angels as they worship the Lord. There is no question but that all of the saints in heaven and all of the angels are united in offering their praise to the Lord. These two groups were worshiping God at the beginning of the Tribulation, and at the end they still find Him, and Him only, worthy of their praise.

The “Amen” in connection with the “Alleluia” is not, according to a quotation from Hort in Swete (p. 10) does not express resignation, but confirmation and declaration, not *so be it*, but *that is it!* So it greatly strengthens the Alleluia. This phrase, “Amen. Alleluia,” comes from Psa. 106:48:

48 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen.
Praise ye the LORD.

Sin is to come short of the glory of God. On the other hand, we have been created for God’s glory. All through history God has constantly been robbed of the glory which belongs to Him and to Him alone. We see here how a great change is coming about. We are seeing God glorified. He is being exalted. Angels and men are happy to give God glory, and God is delighted to receive it. Let us not wait until that day before we day by day live for His glory, and take great delight in saying to God continually from our hearts, “Hallelujah”!

February 25, 2003

19:5 The voice that John heard in this verse was not the voice of God because, whoever it was, he spoke of “our God.” It was probably the voice of an angel. But with this cry, the victory song was completed and the marriage song begins. But the theme is the same: “Alleluia” – “Praise our God.” It is addressed to all

who are “His servants.” This would include angels as well as human beings. They are described as those who fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is one of the greatest themes of Scripture. This word can mean those who are afraid of God and are frightened by Him, but it also mean (and this is the meaning here) those who stand in awe of Him, those who show the greatest reverence for Him, and those whose love Him so much that they are fearful of displeasing Him.

Deut. 8:6 gives us an idea of what it means to fear the Lord: “Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.” We all should remember Prov. 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Another helpful verse in understanding the fear of the Lord is Prov. 8:13: “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”

But this is not only an OT word; it is a NT word as well. We read that after Saul of Tarsus was saved, that
31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (Acts 9:31).
One of the main problems of those who do not know the Lord is that “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). In 2 Cor. 7:1 Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to perfect holiness “in the fear of God.” And in Eph. 5:21 Paul told the church at Ephesus that they were to submit themselves to each other “in the fear of God.” In Phil. 2:12 when Paul told the believers in Philippi to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” he was speaking of fearing God and trembling before Him lest they displease or grieve Him in any way. There are many NT passages which speak of fearing the Lord, but let me give you one more that is right here in this book of The Revelation. In Rev. 15:3 and 4 we have what is called “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. It goes like this:

3 . . . Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest (Rev. 15:3b-4).

We fear God because of Who He is. And we fear God because of who we are. The more intimately we know God, the more we will fear Him, which means to honor Him, love Him, seek to please Him, to obey Him, to trust Him, and to do all that we do that we might glorify Him. And this applies to all Three Persons of the Godhead. One reason I don’t like to be called “Reverend” is because Psa. 111:9 says, “Holy and reverend is His name,” God’s name, and then in the following verse we have these words:

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever (Psa. 111:10).

So we are fearing the Lord when we praise and adore Him.

I commend the fear of the Lord to you as one of the most important subjects in all of Scripture. To help you, you might want to read Jerry Bridges’ book, *“The Joy of Fearing God,”* and John Bunyan, the author of “Pilgrim’s Progress,” has also written a book with the title, “The Fear of God.” Jerry Bridges called Bunyan’s book, “pure gold.” If you don’t learn anything from our study of this book of The Revelation but the tremendous importance of fearing God, our time here will have been well spent.

But going on, who are “the small and the great.” This can refer either to age or to influence. It includes those who are young, and those who are old, and everyone in between. But it also means those who are prominent, and those whose names may not be well known. MacArthur says that these words “transcend all human categories and distinctions” (II, 200). To God the praise of all of His creatures, human and angelic, is very, very important! “The small and the great” is just another way of saying “all.” We may be “small” in the eyes of men, but our praise is of the greatest importance to the Lord.

19:6 John heard the response to the voice which had said, "Praise our God." And he described it in three ways: 1) as "the voice of a great multitude"; 2) "as the voice of many waters"; and 3) "as the voice of mighty thunderings." The sound was loud, but harmonious and beautiful, while at the same time awesome! God is being glorified. His purpose in creation and in redemption is being fulfilled, and He is being given the glory that is due His Name.

What were they singing? "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." The Devil has sought to overthrow God. And he has been joined by countless fallen angels, the demons. Wicked men have hated God and have lived in rebellion against Him. But the all-powerful Lord God has never ceased to reign. He is the Almighty God! There is none greater than He. In fact, He is greater and more powerful than all of His enemies combined! This is true now. It always has been true. And it will continue to be true throughout the endless ages of eternity!

Let this same praise be in our hearts today. The United States is not in charge. Saddam Hussein is not in charge. Ben Laden is not in charge. The French and the Germans are not in charge. Neither China nor North Korea nor South Korea is in charge. THE LORD IS IN CHARGE! "Alleluia: the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

The latter part of this chapter describes the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Read verses 14-16. What a different picture we have here of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came the first time in the greatest humiliation; He is coming the second time with power and great glory. Then He will be visibly and physically present on the earth. And the truth that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" will take on a new and very convincing presence. The Lord came to the earth the first time, born of the virgin Mary; He is coming to the earth a second time, at the close of the Great Tribulation, as King of kings and Lord of lords. However, in the epistles of the NT those of us who are a part of the church will be caught away when the Lord comes "in the air," but does not actually touch the earth. This will be between His two comings to the earth. The church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Matthew 24 and 25 are descriptive of what we have here in Rev. 19, but 1 Thess. 4:13-18 is entirely different. It is important to keep these distinctions in mind as we study this book.

March 3, 2003

19:7 The purpose of Satan has always been the complete defeat of the purposes of God, and for that reason his fiendish activities have always been directed against the people of God. We have read in Rev. 18:24 that "in her [Babylon] was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." And before that in Rev. 17:6 we read, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." The Apostle Peter wrote to believers in his day who had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire for their faith, and he told them:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian church, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). And then after speaking about the various parts of the armor, he added, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," or *of the wicked one*, meaning the Devil.

So there is great cause for rejoicing when it will be seen that the Enemy will finally be defeated. His work is

not over yet at this point in history (meaning here in Revelation), but with the announcement of “the marriage of the Lamb,” it is known that the end of the Devil’s work is in sight.

The words of praise here are not directed to the Church, nor to Israel, but to the Lord Himself. The final new heaven and new earth will not be the result of the Church’s work. We have seen in Rev. 2 and 3 how needy the church was in John’s day, and it continues to be very needy in our day. No, the purposes of God are to be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who is coming to reign upon the earth, or, as He is called throughout this book, the Lamb. So the honor is to be given to Him, and the saints, and probably joined with angels, will “be glad and rejoice.” Why? Because “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

In 2 Cor. 11:2 the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers about one major thing that he had been used by God to do when he had led them to Christ, a truth which has been sadly neglected in our day. This is what he wrote:

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).

He meant that through the preaching of the Gospel, and the salvation of those who had been saved under his ministry, they like all believers in the Church had been joined to Christ in anticipation of what was about to take place, “the marriage of the Lamb.”

Also in Eph. 5 Paul used language which spoke of the Church’s relationship to Christ as that of a husband and wife. Paul was instructing husbands concerning their relationship to their wives, and he did it with these words:

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Here in Rev. 19:7 we are told at the end of the verse that “his wife hath made herself ready.” She will do this by being submissive to the Lord and His work in her, but the Lord is actually the One Who prepares the Church for that glorious day. Jude was speaking of this in Jude 24 and 25:

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.
Amen.

When we look at the Church at any period in church history, and then read about what we are going to be like in the end times, and throughout eternity, we know that some major, major changes need to take place. But by the grace of God, as the Apostle John taught in his first epistle, “we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Paul told the Philippians church that he was “confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). And in the second chapter he told them why he was so confident: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all have a part in our final glorification.

The readiness of the Bride is described further in the next verse.

19:8 “And to her it was granted,” or *given*. In our marriages today it is a part of the bride’s family’s expense

to buy the wedding gown. But here we see that the wedding gown is a gift from the Bridegroom, the Lamb. As I have emphasized in the last verse, the Lamb prepares His bride for the wedding. He arrays her “in fine linen, clean and white.” Let’s remember that these are all figurative expressions for the perfection of the Bride. “Fine linen” means *the best that can be bought!* “Clean and white,” spotless, speaking of absolute perfection. We noticed in 2 Cor. 11:2 that Paul wanted to present the believers of Corinth to the Lord “as a chaste virgin.” All of the saints, regardless of who we are, have been defiled by sin. Our cleansing took place after we are saved, positionally at once, but practically, throughout the years of our salvation as we have continued to grow in the Lord. So by grace we are so completely cleansed from our sin that in Christ God looks upon us as free from all sin.

Here the Apostle John went on to explain that “the fine linen” pictures “the righteousness of the saints.” When we are saved we are declared righteous before God in Christ. That is our standing although in our daily lives we are not totally righteous. But as we walk in fellowship with the Lord, we become more like the Lord, and the righteousness of God becomes more and more evident. This comes about as we “walk in the Spirit” as we read in Rom. 8:3 and 4:

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Our text here in Rev. 19:8 speaks of righteousness as an outer garment, a wedding dress, but actually “the righteousness of saints” is first of all an inner righteousness which manifests itself outward as we become more and more like Christ. The former is imputed righteousness which is the same for all believers; the latter is imparted righteousness which varies from believer to believer, and is dependent upon the faithfulness of our walk with the Lord. But at the marriage of the Lamb, the bride’s righteousness will be complete, perfect.

19:9 The one speaking here must be the same one who spoke to John in verse 5, and from verse 10 it seems that this is an angel. He tells John to write, and what to write. This must apply to all that John has heard and seen from the beginning of chapter 19. Twelve times (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5) John is told to write, and once (10:4) he is told not to write. So it is clear that the message of this book was to be preserved.

We come here to another of the Beatitudes of this book. This is #4 of seven. See the others in 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 20:6; 22:7,14. It is the Greek word μακάριος. It is used fifty times in the NT. It speaks not only of that which makes a person happy, but that which leads to the highest good, the greatest benefit. Often that which makes us happy for the moment, does not benefit us in the long run. But there is that which makes us happy and, at the same time, is a great benefit to us. And we have to think as it is used in Scripture that it means that which is good for us spiritually, good for us in our relationship to God. Here it is, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” That is, it will not only make them happy, but it will do them good.

This beatitude has to do with those who “are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” This is generally taken to mean *those who are guests as distinguished from the Bride.*

There is an interesting passage in John 3 that may shed some light on this beatitude. It has to do with the ministry of John the Baptist and the time when some of his disciples were jealous for him because it seemed like people were going to the Lord to be baptized instead of coming to John. This is the passage in John 3:25-29:

25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled (John 3:25-29).

John the Baptist spoke of himself not as the bride, but as a friend of the bridegroom. This, of course, was before the Church had been brought into existence. But it suggests that there are those who are saved who are not a part of the Bride of Christ. This being the case, then those who “are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” would be saints who are not in the Church. They would be OT saints, which would include those who were saved during our Lord’s ministry on earth, but who were not alive on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. John the Baptist himself would be in that group. So also would those saved during the Great Tribulation.

But some would say, “Why should those saved from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture of the Church be given such a place of honor which is not given to the others?” Well, John the Baptist’s attitude showed that this was not a problem to him. John MacArthur suggests that we could ask the same question regarding the place that Israel had in the OT. “Why should such a place of honor be given to them, and not to all of the nations?” And his (John MacArthur’s) answer is a good one. He said, “The only answer to both questions is that God sovereignly purposed that it be so” (II, 204). In addition, we must not overlook the fact that the angel said, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Just as it brought joy to the heart of John the Baptist when the people were going to Christ instead of to him, so those who are guests invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb will rejoice with the Lamb and the Bride and not be jealous of the Bride.

There are many things about the end times that are not really clear. In interpreting Scripture we need to remember Deut. 29:29:

29 The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

“The secret things” are things which the Lord has not seen fit to reveal. They are not in the Bible, either in the OT or in the NT. What has been revealed is in the Bible, and it belongs to us and to our children. We have plenty to do with what has been revealed, and we must not presume that we know what God has not seen fit to reveal.

But let us go on. Then the angel proceeded to say, “These are the true sayings of God.”

The word “sayings” is the translation of the Greek word *λόγοι*, which means *words*. Is this a statement of divine inspiration? I believe that it is. It means that John was to write down what he had heard and seen because this was the true, the genuine, Word of God. They are actually God’s words, and not the words of an angel (although an angel delivered some of them), nor were they the words of the Apostle John (although he was the one who wrote them down). And they without a doubt will be completely fulfilled.

We must remember that the Apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos where, humanly speaking, it must have seemed to him in his old age, that the Word of God was farther from fulfillment than at any time in his life. And so this statement about the genuineness of the words he was to write, that they were really from God, was given for the encouragement of his own heart.

19:10 The old apostle was so overwhelmed with joy and gratitude that he fell at the feet of the angel who was

speaking to him, and expressed such gratitude that it bordered on worship. John knew better than to worship an angel, but sometimes any of us can be so grateful for the way some servant of the Lord has ministered to us that our gratitude can come very close to worship. But this must not be! The glory for every blessing we receive, for every encouragement that comes to us (and we all need encouragement) – the glory and the thanks always must be given to God. The Lord made this very clear to the Devil when the Devil, in his third temptation of our Lord (according to Matthew's account, did as we read in Matt. 4:8-10:

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

And so the angel said, "I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." Both angels and saints in one way stand on the same ground. We are to be dedicated to "the testimony of Jesus." And so we do not worship one another, but we "worship God." And there is no greater way for us to worship God than to bear faithful testimony to His Son. Worship means humbling ourselves before Him. Worship is submitting ourselves to Him. Worship is to adore God, and to praise His glorious character. But worship, if it is to be acceptable to God, must come from the heart. We "must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Worshiping God is not just limited to an act, but it is the way we are to live.

Finally, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Prophecy is preaching. Prophecy is given to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophecy and the Gospel are to be inseparable. It is not life saving to hear about angels. The Apostle John never saved anyone. Only Jesus can save. He came "to save His people from their sins." This ultimately is the purpose of the revealed Word, to exalt Jesus and to direct sinners to Him as the one and only Savior.

March 10, 2003

We now come to the second major event which follows the period of the Great Tribulation. It is, in fact, the event which will usher in the establishing of the Kingdom of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, *the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

The first event was: the marriage of the Lamb (19:1-10). This event takes place in heaven. The second is:

2. The second coming of Christ to the earth (19:11-21).

(Show where this fits in to the order of events from where we are today – in the "mystery" period of prophecy.) John was told in Rev. 1:19 that he was to write "the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." What John had seen was a vision of Christ which we have in chapter 1. The things that were at that time are described in chapters 2 and 3 in our Lord's letters to the seven churches. They described conditions which generally have been, and will be, characteristic of the church throughout the present church age. The things which shall be "hereafter" probably means after the church is gone. When we come to chapter 6 where the judgments begin that are to be brought upon the earth, in chapter 5 when John wept because no one was found worthy to open the seals, one of the elders told him that he was not to weep because "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book." That is not a title that has to do with the Lord's relationship to the church, but to Israel! And this would lead us to a twofold purpose of the Tribulation:

- 1) That the first of God's purposes in the Tribulation is to bring Israel, or the elect in Israel, to Himself.
- 2) That the second of God's purposes in the Tribulation was to judge the world for their sins, for their rejection

of Christ, and also for their treatment of Israel. The stage, so to speak, is set for this in the world in which we live today. The Moslem world is determined to exterminate Israel. And yet we can't say that "this is it"! But we know from the NT that we are to be looking expectantly for the Lord's return when He will come to remove the Church from the earth. The Great Tribulation will follow. We in the Church may have to suffer before the Lord comes "in the air," but not in the Great Tribulation. There is nothing about the church in the book of the Revelation from the time we leave chapter 4 until we get to 22:16 and 17 where in verse 17 the Church is referred to as "the bride."

What we are now reading about in this latter part of Rev. 19, is what the Lord spoke about in His Olivet Discourse. Cf. and read Matt.24:29-31; 25:31-46.

Personally I believe that in studying prophecy we have to keep distinct what the Word reveals about Israel, as compared with what reveals about the Church, and what it reveals about the Gentile nations. And I believe that the Apostle Paul recognized those distinctions when he wrote to the Corinthian church, and admonished them with these words found in 1 Cor. 10:32: "Give none offence, neither to **the Jews**, nor to **the Gentiles**, nor to **the church of God.**" The Church is not in the OT. It was still future when He told Peter "this rock will I build my church," the rock of Peter's confession of Christ as "the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). It is not biblically correct to speak of Israel as the church in the OT. Nor is it biblically correct to call the Church, spiritual Israel, or Israel in the NT. There is not difference in the way we are saved. Christ is the only Savior. But just as God did not always have the same purpose for the men and women in Scripture, so it should not be thought strange that He has a different purpose for these three major groups in Scripture.

But now let us get to this wonderful section of Scripture – Rev. 19:11-21!

19:11 After he was told to worship God and not the angel, John "saw heaven opened." This, of course, was in a vision given to him, but it was a true revelation of what would happen some day. John was not told *when it would happen*. We are to understand that it will take place at the close of the Great Tribulation, but we do not know when that will be. It is certain that no judgments like those predicted in this book, have yet taken place, so we know that we are at least seven years away from the return of Christ to the earth.

He saw "a white horse," the first white horse that he had seen since 6:2 when the Lamb opened the first seal when there was a rider on a white horse who "had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). Swete says in his commentary that a white horse is "the emblem of victory" (p. 250). Thomas says in his commentary, "At His first coming, He sat upon a donkey (Matt. 21: 4-7), but in the day of His ultimate triumph He will sit on a white horse." *This is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ!* How do we know? By His Name. He is called "Faithful and True." In Rev. 3:14 in His letter to the church of the Laodiceans, the Lord identified Himself as "the faithful and true Witness." In Rev. 1:5 our Lord is called "the faithful Witness," and in 3:7 He is called "He that is true." What do these two adjectives tell us about our Lord Jesus Christ?

Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, or dictionary, says that "faithful" describes one who is worthy to be trusted, one who can be relied upon. This means that He will not deceive. And the word "faithful" is strengthened by the word "true" because "true" means that He is real, He is genuine. His witness never falls short of the truth, is the explanation that Swete gives to us in his commentary (p. 59). You never have to think twice about the words of the Lord Jesus because He cannot lie! We don't pass judgment on His words; His words pass judgment upon us. "Faithful and true" are words which describe our Lord's ministry, and in particular His teaching, His spoken ministry.

We ought to realize here that in this passage (19:11-21) our Lord is given four names. The first is here. The second is in the next verse, verse 12. The third is in verse 13. And the fourth is in verse 16.

Continuing with verse 11 we are told that “in righteousness He doth judge and make war.” Righteousness has always characterized everything that the Lord has done, everything that He has said. And this will not change when He comes to the earth the second time. His judgments are just, and how He will carry those judgments out in warfare, will always be in righteousness. Our Lord never has been unjust in anything that He does, and we need to realize this in His dealings with us. There is a man in our church family who, when I ask him how he is, he always answers, “Better than I deserve.” That is true of every one of us.

Dr. Walvoord commented on this verse:

Even a causal study should make evident the remarkable contrast between this event and the rapture of the church. At the rapture Christ meets His own in the air, and there is no evidence of immediate judgment upon the earth. By Contrast, Christ here is coming to the earth with the specific purpose of bringing divine judgment and establishing His righteous rule (p. 275).

19:12 This verse further identifies this rider as our Lord Jesus Christ because in the vision John was given of our Lord in chapter 1, it is said in verse 14 that “his eyes were as a flame of fire.” This is repeated in 2:18. Such eyes speak of great anger, but they also indicate the ability penetrate into the hearts of His creatures. Solomon wrote in Prov. 15:3 that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the good and the evil.” And Heb. 4:13 says,

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

“And on His head were many crowns.” These are not the crowns of a victor, but the crowns of royalty. Thomas had this to say:

The dragon has a diadem (the word used here in verse 12) on each of his seven heads (12³) and the beast on each of his ten horns (13:1), but this warrior has . . . ‘many crowns’ on His head (p. 385).

It shows that our Lord is sovereign over all nations and their kings. And so it assumes that His coming will result in His absolute authority over all of the earth.

And here we find that He has another name, a name which is not disclosed, “a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself.” This shows the inability of men, even of godly men, to understand fully the unique Person of Christ in which we have human nature and the divine nature joined together in Him. This ought to remind us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 11:27 where it is recorded that He said,

27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

See this same comment in Luke 10:21-22. From the time that the Lord was with the doctors in the synagogue at the age of twelve, where He was asking and answering questions, all through His earthly life, people were continually amazed at the things that He taught, and at the miracles which He performed. His enemies tried to charge Him with sin, but the best they could do was to bring false witnesses against Him. The Apostle John could only say,

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

This name certainly gives expression to the glorious Person of Christ.

But He has yet a third name, and this time it is a name which appears only in the writings of the Apostle John as a Name or Title of our Lord Jesus Christ, “The Word of God”! Cf. John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; 5:7; and here in

Rev. 19:13.

19:13 The Lord appears with His garment dipped in blood. There have been various interpretations suggested by different men regarding the blood in the Lord's garments. Some say that it was the Lord's own blood. Others say that it was the blood of His people, the saints. But the majority of commentators seem to prefer the idea that this is the blood of His enemies. And for this they go to the opening verses of Isaiah 63:

1 Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

2 Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?

3 I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

4 For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

And this seems to fit the picture here. This is a picture of our Lord, but coming for judgment. The vesture dipped in blood anticipates His final victory.

And His Name is called, "the Word of God." He has ever held this Name, as we learn in John 1:1. He was the Word when He was born and all of the time that He was on the earth. And He will come as the Word when He returns to rule and reign upon the earth. As such He is God's Messenger to men, the One Who reveals the Father, and the One Who will come to exercise the judgment of God upon the earth. Christ is the Creator, the Sustainer of what He has created. He is the Redeemer of sinful men, and He is the coming King. This positively identifies the rider upon the white horse as our Lord.

19:14 But He will not come alone. The "armies . . . in heaven followed Him upon white horses." These must be the saints of previous ages, just exactly who they are we cannot say. But we are told in 19:8 that the Lamb's wife was clothed in "fine linen, clean and white," the very words that are used here. And in addition in 19:8 we are told that "the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." So this is an army of saints, not of angels. But it does not seem that they will be needed to fight because of what we read in verse 15.

19:15 The Lord by Himself will be sufficient to overcome the nations. And He does this by the "sharp sword" which goes out of His mouth. We all know, or should know, that one of the symbols used in Scripture for the Word of God is a sword. For example, Heb. 4:12:

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In writing about the armor which all of us are to put on, Paul in Eph. 6:17 wrote, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

And so it is not surprising that we read in 2 Thess. 2, beginning with verse 7,

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (2 Thess. 2:7-10).

For all of those people who have ridiculed the Word of God, and have wanted to have nothing to do with it,

they will have an opportunity to see when the Lord comes how powerful His Word is. They could have learned it from creation, and they could have learned it from salvation, but since they didn't, they will learn the power of the Word in judgment to their great and final dismay! To "smite" them means that many will be killed, and that those who are not killed will be totally subdued even against their will, and with a "rod of iron" the Lord will make sure that they do His will! Thayer said that the "rod of iron" "indicates the severest, most rigorous, rule" (p. 560).

The millennial reign of Christ will not be a perfect state, but will be a reign of enforced righteousness which the Lord Himself will enforce against all possible opposition of men. It will be totally different from today when people insist on having their own way, and rebel against all authority. In our Lord's letter to the church of Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29), the Lord said this:

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father (Rev. 2:26-27).

The Lord Himself "treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." This is where His garments will be "dipped in blood." "The fierceness and wrath" is lit., *the fury of His wrath*. Jonathan Edwards was able to portray a little of what this will mean when he preached his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

But notice here that God is referred to as the "Almighty God." See v. 6. Saints find the omnipotence of God a cause for great and lasting praise; sinners will find it the greatest terror they have ever faced.

19:16 The Lord's garment is mentioned again, this time to give us His fourth name, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." All the kings of the earth, and all of the lords of the earth will finally be subject to the Lord Jesus Christ Who will be King of all kings and Lord of all lords. See Rev. 17:14. Again we see the supremacy of our Lord over all other rulers. Lords are those who have power and authority under kings and on their behalf. Today this would include governors, mayors, military leaders, anyone with power designated to them by the kings. Probably all kings have wanted to be a king of kings, and so have partially succeeded. But only the Lord Jesus Christ will have sole claim upon this title.

Now you notice that we have four names in this chapter for our Lord Jesus Christ":

- 1) He is called "Faithful and True" in verse 11. And these words are used of a Witness.
- 2) "A name written, that no man knew, but He Himself" in verse 12.
- 3) "The Word of God" in verse 13.
- 4) Finally, "King of kings, and Lord of lords" in verse 16.

Do you see anything especially significant in these names? Probably the last two should give us a clue.

The Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in the Gospel of John as "the Word of God." He is portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew as the coming King of Israel. In the Gospel of Mark we see the "faithful and true" servant of God, especially in His witness. And in the Gospel of Luke we have more of an emphasis upon the humanity of the Lord, especially with reference to His birth, but we see through His life on earth how men, even His disciples, had trouble figuring Him out. There is, of course, much overlapping in the record of the four Gospels, and so what applies to one is not necessarily excluded from the others. But perhaps this helps us to understand why we have four Gospels instead of one. One reason certainly is because of the unique importance of Jesus Christ in all of the Word, and especially in the details of His life upon the earth. The glory of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming is a reflection and confirmation of the special prominence He has throughout the Word of God.

Even the title of the book we are studying here shows that the outstanding feature of this book of the Revelation is not the order of events outlined in the book, nor even the terrible judgments which it records. But it is in a special way, The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Without any doubt, Jesus Christ is the main theme of all of the Bible.

March 11, 2003

19:17 This is what Psalm 2 predicts. Reference is made to this also in Ezek. 39:17-22. This seems to be that which was predicted in Rev. 16:14. This is the battle at Armageddon. It is a battle in which the Lord Himself and by Himself takes on the nations which are gathered against Israel in one final attempt to destroy that nation. But the outcome is never in doubt. And here we see that an angel, standing in the sun. This probably means, in the light of the sun. There will be no darkness here. Conditions seem to be right for the success of the kings of the earth. But this angel knows that the Lord will be victorious. And so he summons all of the birds "that fly in the midst of heaven" to gather together for "the supper of the great God." Here we see how the Creator will call His creatures, all birds, even those who are not usually given to eating the flesh of dead creatures, to come to "the supper of the great God." Thus there is no question as to what the outcome of the battle will be.

I should point out that some expositors feel that the battle, or preparation for battle, that is described in Rev. 20:7-10 is the battle of Armageddon. Since the Bible does not say specifically, we are left to our own judgment as to which is the true Armageddon. The outcome is the same in both cases: the Lord is the Victor and the nations of the earth are defeated. But there is a thousand years separating the two battles.

19:18 Here "the supper of the great God" is described. It will include kings, captains, *i.e.*, military leaders, the "mighty men," the armies, plus horses and their riders, and the last part of this verse indicates that "all men, *i.e.*, everyone "free and bond, both great and small," will die. Time has run out for the nations of the earth as they face "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (v. 15). This is evidence of the truth of Isa. 40:15-17.

19:19 Then John in the vision given to him sees all of the nations and their armies which are gathered together against our Lord Jesus Christ, the rider on the white horse. But this does not necessarily mean that they see the Lord. But He is the One they will be fighting against, and against "His army."

19:20 At this point Babylon is gone, but the beast and his false prophet are still doing their evil work. The false prophet had been very successful in deceiving those who had received the mark of the beast and had worshiped the image of the beast. These people thought that they were preserving themselves when they received the mark of the beast, but actually they were sealing their own doom eternally.

Both the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone, and the amazing part of their destruction is that they remain alive in that lake of fire which is hell.

19:21 Everyone else was killed, not by the armies of heaven which were with the Lord, but by the Lord Himself! That is, they were killed by the "sword" which "proceeded out of His mouth." What tremendous evidence this is of the full truth of Heb. 4:12 and many other passages which speak of the power of the Word of God. See Isa. 55:10 and 11:

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

We usually think of these verses as having to do with the fulfillment of God's purposes in bringing salvation to the lost and blessing to the people of God. But it has its application also when the Lord sends out His Word to bring judgment upon those who are wicked.

What a mighty Savior we have! There is nothing impossible with Him. He is able to do exceedingly more than we can ask or think, more than we can ever imagine. And this is why the most critical issue in the war we are contemplating with Iraq is whether or not the Lord is with us, on our side. The war we are contemplating will be nothing compared with the war that is spoken of here in Rev. 19, but it is still extremely critical that we have the blessing of the Lord. The Lord doesn't need our help, but we really need His!

"All the fowls were filled with their flesh." The call which this angel issued in verses 17 and 18 was a call that he had received from the Lord, a call which men would have scorned as being utterly ridiculous. But as is always the case with the Word of God, the prediction came true, and there wasn't a single bird that was not completely satisfied with what it had to eat!

Dr. Walvoord summarized what happens here in the latter part of Rev. 19 with these words:

The present age reveals the grace of God and suspended judgment. The age to come, while continuing to be a revelation of the grace of God, will give conclusive evidence that God brings every evil work into judgment and that those who spurn His grace must experience His wrath (p. 281).

March 17, 2003

It is disturbing to read such an otherwise excellent expositor as Lenski who declares that all of this is symbolical, and that the beast and the false prophet are not real people living in human bodies. According to him it merely represents the overthrow of "antichristian power and propaganda" (*Revelation*, p. 560). He called the beast and the false prophet "two potencies," and then added: "The two potencies are very much 'alive' and powerfully active. They are 'alive,' but that does not mean alive in *physical* bodies, but 'alive' as terrible potencies . . . The bodily forms with which chapter 13 pictures them are symbolical, beastly, non-human; these hellish potencies could not be present as being human, least of as being clothed with *physical* human bodies" (*Op. cit.*, p. 561). He says that the armies of heaven are like attributes of Christ (p. 554).

But to be consistent if the beast and the false prophet are just symbolical, then we are forced to say the same thing about the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage. Lenski is an example of a man who can be very, very helpful in arriving at the meaning of other books of the Bible, but who resort to all kinds of ridiculous and fanciful interpretations when it comes to the book of the Revelation. I think that it was Dr. Sutcliffe, the first President of Multnomah, who used to say, "When common sense makes good sense, seek no other sense." If Lenski were consistent in his interpretation of this chapter, then we would have to make the same application to Christ that he does to the other persons mentioned in the chapter. But thankfully he doesn't spiritualize the return of Christ. Why can't a false prophet be a false prophet, a real human being? They were in the OT, and Paul wrote of them in the NT as if they were real people – and they were!

But let us go on now to:

3. The Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6).

Those who deny that there will be a literal reign of Christ on the earth for a thousand years, point out that it is only mentioned in one chapter, Revelation 20. *But it is mentioned here six times!* See verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. This will be a time when Christ will reign on the earth. See the latter part of verse 4 and the latter part of verse 5. From the place that this is given in The Book of the Revelation, we can see that it comes after the

glorious return of Christ to the earth, and the return of Christ follows the Great Tribulation. Remember that the return of Christ we read about in chapter 19, is His return to the earth. The NT makes it very clear that what we in the church are to be looking for is the return of Christ “in the air.” So the prophetic order of events from where we are today is:

- 1) The rapture of the church. Cf. Phil. 3:20-21; Titus 2:11-15; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 1 John 3:1-3. If the coming of the Lord for His church were not imminent, why would we be told to be looking for His return?
- 2) The Great Tribulation.
- 3) The return of Christ to the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- 4) The reign of Christ for a thousand years on the earth.

But let’s see what the Apostle John was directed by the Holy Spirit to write about what the Lord will be doing when He returns to the earth.

20:1 The “bottomless pit” is only mentioned in this book of The Revelation – twice here in chapter 20 (vv. 1 and 3) – and five times before this chapter: 9:1, 2, 11 (read vv. 1-12); 11:7; 17:8. Another name for the bottomless pit is *the abyss*, taken from the Greek: τῆς ἀβύσσου. It has been called Satanic headquarters. In Luke 8 when the Lord delivered the demon possessed man from the demons, you will remember that the demons “besought Him that He would not command them to go out into the deep” (Luke 8:31). The word for “the deep” is in the Greek this word *abyss*. So there are expositors who believe that they were pleading with the Lord not to send them into the abyss. In Unger’s Bible Dictionary this comment is made:

Myriads of demons will be let loose during the period of Tribulation to energize age-end apostasy and revolt against God and His Christ, but will be shut up again in this prison together with Satan at the second advent of Christ (20:1-3).

The angel had “the key to the bottomless pit,” indicating that it was controlled in heaven. The “great chain” was “intended to hold a prisoner of no ordinary strength” (Swete, p. 260). Note here that Satan is not omnipotent, but that even an angel can take hold of him and keep him in.

20:2 This angel “laid hold” of the Devil and held him fast (is the meaning of the word according to Thayer, p. 359). And he bound him for a thousand years, and he did it with apparent ease. So we see that the Devil is not invincible. Satan himself will be held in the bottomless pit for the time of the millennium.

The Devil is described here in much the same way that he was described in 12:9, as:

- 1) “The dragon,” a word which may be descriptive of the serpent, a creature which was terrible beyond what anyone could possibly image.
- 2) “That old serpent,” the word “old” pointing apparently back to the Garden of Eden, the same serpent, sly, wise, and a deceiver by nature.
- 3) “The Devil,” a false accuser and slanderer, one who aggressively attacks his enemy.
- 4) “Satan,” emphasizes the fact that he is an adversary. Hell was prepared for the Devil and his angels (see Matt. 25:41), and it is his purpose to take everyone with him that he possibly can.

So what he was in the beginning, he still is at the end of the Tribulation period. He is to be held in the abyss for all of the one thousand years. And, looking ahead, we can see that the thousand years will not make any change in him either.

20:3 After binding Satan, the angel casts him into the bottomless pit, shuts him up, and puts a seal on him so that he cannot deceive the nations until the end of the thousand years. Notice that there is a strong indication here that the primary object and purpose of Satan is deception, to “deceive the nations.” That was

obvious when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. He deceived her about God and about what He had said, about the Word of God. He sought to deceive even the Lord Jesus Christ when he tempted Him. He is a master at deception. And verse 8 of our chapter tells us that as soon as he is released from the bottomless pit at the close of the millennium, he goes out to deceive the nations again.

Evidence that Satan is a deceiver is seen in what is said about what Ananias and his wife Sapphira did in Acts 5. The fact that Satan is a liar and a deceiver is supported by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ found in John 8:44:

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Note also what we have in 2 Cor. 4:3 and 4:

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

So the Devil not only is a liar, but as a liar he blinds the hearts of men to the truth, and in particular to the truth of the Gospel. His object is to keep people from being saved.

Then remember what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 11:13-15 where he was speaking about false teachers. Listen to his words although probably most of you will remember them.

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

The object of teaching the Word of God is to open the minds and hearts of people to the truth of God's Word and the Gospel. In 2 Tim. 2 the Apostle Paul had these words for Timothy:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Add to these words what Paul had written to the believers at Ephesus about their lives before they were brought to Christ and saved:

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3).

And the Apostle Peter's words help us to see the basis of the Devil's deception:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The Devil hates the Word of God. Often he will even use the Word of God to deceive people, as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden, and as he tried to do even with the Lord when he tempted Him. The Devil knows what the Psalmist wrote in Psa. 119:130, that "the entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding

to the simple.” The simple are people who do not know the truth. All people by nature have a stronger inclination to believe a lie than they do to believe the truth. Only the Holy Spirit can convince anyone that God’s Word is the truth. We are born again by the truth (1 Pet. 1:23), and we are sanctified by the truth of the Word (John 17:17). When the Lord told the parable of the sower, recorded for us in Matthew 13, He said concerning the seed which was sowed on stony ground,

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side (Matt. 13:19).

You and I need to understand that the Devil is behind everything that is being done today to keep people from hearing the Word of God, and especially from hearing the Gospel. He hates the truth and is always doing all that he can do to destroy the truth.

But then John wrote, “and after that he must be loosed a little season.” That word “must” should attract our attention. It is the word *δεῖ* which speaks of something that is a divine necessity because it is ordained by Him to be. In Revelation it is used in 1:1; 4:1; 10:11; 11:5; 13:10; 17:10; here; and 22:6. But why *must* Satan be released so as to gather such a massive army against God. See 20:7-8. Thomas, evidently referring to what Homer Hailey has said, makes this suggestion:

Through his release the whole universe will see that after a thousand years of his imprisonment and an ideal reign on earth, Satan is incurably wicked and men’s hearts are still perverse enough to allow him to gather an army of such an immense size (II, 411).

Therefore it will be seen that God is absolutely just in casting the Devil into the lake of fire that where he, the beast, the false prophet, and all unbelievers will “be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (20:10).

But perhaps there is another reason. The release of Satan will show that even after a thousand years of the personal reign of Christ upon the earth, *the hearts of men are not changed*. When the millennium begins, everyone on the earth will be saved. But during those thousand years people will be born who will not be saved. So even with that passage of all of that time, and living in a world of enforced righteousness, the hearts of many will be ready to respond to Satan when he seeks after the millennium to make war with God.

Some believers feel that Satan is bound now, and that we are actually in that period where Christ is reigning upon the earth. If Satan is bound now the way the world is going, how could it be worse if he were free to act? MacArthur lists many things that are said about Satan’s work in the epistles which indicate that he cannot possibly be bound now. This is the evidence that MacArthur gives:

Satan plants lying hypocrites in the church (Acts 5:3), schemes against believers (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11), disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive people (2 Cor. 11:14), attacks believers (2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:27) and must be resisted (Jas. 4:7), hinders those in the ministry (1 Thess. 2:18), and leads believers astray (1 Tim. 5:15) (II, p. 235).

We could add to that list 1 Pet. 5:8-9:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

So let us not think for a moment that Satan is bound now. He would love for us to believe that so that our guard will be down and he will be able to do whatever he wants to do. There is no other way to explain what is going on today than that we are in a great battle with the Devil and the forces of evil.

March 18, 2003

20:4 During this time when Satan is bound in the bottomless pit, the Apostle John “saw thrones.” At the end of this verse, and also at the end of verse 6, we see that these were thrones upon which were sitting those who will live and reign with Christ for this thousand-year period. The emphasis in this verse is upon those who had been martyred because of their testimony concerning our Lord, and because of their testimony for the Word of God. The use of just the Name “Jesus,” indicates that their testimony expressed their belief not only in the Deity of Jesus, but in the purpose of His first advent into the world, “for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). They had refused to worship the beast and his image. They had refused to receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads, or on their hands. And so they had been killed. But now they are back sitting upon thrones. Their defeat at the hands of their enemies has been changed into a glorious victory.

But there also may be others sitting upon these thrones during the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. When the Apostle Paul was rebuking the Corinthian believers because they were going to law against each other before unbelievers, he said,

2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (1 Cor. 6:2).

And we can add to this verse 2 Tim. 2:12 and Rev. 2:26; 3:21; and 5:10.

The Lord also told His apostles,

Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).

Even in Daniel 7:27 we have a statement which seems to indicate that OT saints will share in the coming kingdom on earth. This is what Daniel 7:27 tells us:

27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

We can't say for sure that all of these prophecies will be fulfilled at this time, but it is may be that they will. The saints who will be treated as the scum of the earth especially in the Tribulation, but to greater and lesser degrees all through human history, will be enthroned with our Lord and reign with Him during this millennial reign of our Savior. Actually we don't have all of the details in Scripture to be sure that we are putting the pieces together in the right way. Especially in the study of prophecy, we need to remind ourselves constantly of Deut. 29:29. (Quote.) God hasn't revealed everything to us, but He has given us everything that He wants us to know, and that we need to know, until the day when we are with the Lord. Then it shall be, as the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 13:9-10:

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

And then he added two verses later:

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13:12).

So, to continue, there will be a resurrection when the Lord returns to reign upon the earth, but not of all the righteous who have died, as we learn in the next verse.

20:5 The Bible teaches that everyone who has ever lived will be raised from the dead. And there generally are two resurrections: a resurrection to life, and a resurrection to death. For example, we have this

statement about resurrection in Dan. 12:2:

2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

He did not say that these resurrections will take place at the same time, nor did he say that all who are raised to life, will be raised at the same time. It is generally thought that those who are raised at the time of The Rapture, are included in the first resurrection. And so not all who are raised to life will be raised at the same time, but they all will be a part of what is called in this verse, "the first resurrection." Probably what John was referring to when he wrote that "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished," is the resurrection referred to especially in verses 12 and 13 of this 20th chapter of The Revelation. Here and in verse 6 we have the only two times that this expression, "the first resurrection," is used in the whole Bible.

March 31, 2003

When the Apostle John added at the end of this verse, "This is the first resurrection," he was not referring to the statement that he had just made before that because *the second resurrection* (a term which, incidentally, is not found in the Bible) will be a resurrection to judgment, which will not be "blessed." Verse 6 makes it clear that it is the "first resurrection" that is "blessed and holy."

20:6 So the Apostle John was referring here to all who have a part in "the first resurrection." But, of course, the emphasis is upon those mentioned in verse 4. They are the saints of the Great Tribulation who had laid down their lives for the Gospel and for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word "blessed" marks this verse out as one of the seven beatitudes of the book of The Revelation. Actually this is #5. The four which come before this are in 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9, and the two which follow are in 22:7 and 14. As I have mentioned before, it is the Greek word, μακάριος. And it means *happy*. The people of the world think that they know true happiness, but that is impossible unless and until people come to the Lord. David spoke of "fulness of joy" and "pleasure for evermore" in Psalm 16:11. God in His grace does give all people pleasure and certain degrees of happiness, but true happiness is only in the Lord, and in some cases, as with the Tribulation saints, their happiness does not find its greatest measure until they are with the Lord, but that is even increased when they are raised and share with the Lord in His reign.

Trench says that the main idea in holiness is separation, and that separation from the world means separation "in God's purity" (see pp. 331, 332 in his *Synonyms*). It is not sin that brings happiness, but holiness.

It is interesting that here blessedness and holiness are joined together. It is true even now that the people who have the most happiness are the people who are the holiest. Whatever joy unbelievers have is certainly limited to this life because there is no joy after death. Physical death for them will be followed by "the second death," which is eternal death. "The second death" is described in 20:14 and 21:8. See also 2:11. "Power" here is authority.

Note the special honor that they will have. They will be "priests of God and of Christ." But as wonderful as that will be, that is not all. They shall reign with Christ during the whole millennium. We are not told what their part will be in the reign of Christ, nor exactly what their priestly ministry will be, but on the latter Robert Thomas says that their priesthood "will consist of the privilege of unlimited access to and intimate fellowship with God" (II, 422).

Now we come to:

4. The release and final judgment of Satan (20:7-10).

20:7 You may remember that when we were considering verse 3 where we are told that Satan would be bound for a thousand years and cast into “the bottomless pit,” or the abyss, that I called attention to the fact that “after” the thousand years, “he must be loosed a little season.” As I have mentioned to some of you, that little word “must” is a very important NT word. Let me remind you again what Thayer has to say about it in his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. A lexicon is just another word for a dictionary. It is the Greek word *δεῖ*. This is what Thayer says about it on p. 126 of his lexicon. He says that it is a “necessity established by the counsel and decree of God, especially by that purpose of His which relates to the salvation of men by the intervention of Christ and which is disclosed in the OT prophecies.” In other words it is a “must” because God has said that it *must* take place! It is not only inevitable, but absolutely necessary in the plan and purpose of God. When the Lord told Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7), he was not simply telling him that he needed to be born again, but that by the sovereign counsel of God he would most certainly be saved. When in John 3:30 we read that John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I decrease,” He was saying that it was decreed of God that when the Lord appeared, his ministry would come to an end.

But why would we be told here in Rev. 20 that Satan would be bound a thousand years, and then be released, as we read here in verse 7 that he will be? I believe if we go on reading we will see why.

20:8 What does he do when he gets out of the abyss? He does exactly what he was doing one thousand years before – deceiving the nations! And if anything, he is more intent than ever to try to deceive the whole world. “The four quarters of the earth” means *the whole world*. Now just consider this for a moment. The Devil is given 1,000 years to think about what he has done. If he had any regrets at all for what he had done, causing all of the trouble in the world that sin brings with it, including unhappiness, crimes, broken homes and ruined lives, wars, and finally human sickness and death, he would have had plenty of time to regret it, to repent, and to change. But the truth is that he couldn’t wait to get out so that he could continue to do what he has always done since he first rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven.

The Devil is powerful, but he is not omnipotent. He doesn’t know everything, but there is one thing that he does know, and we were told that in Rev. 12:12 that “he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” He knows that his days are numbered. But instead of showing signs of a change, he gives evidence that after 1,000 years he hates God just as much as ever, and he is just as determined as ever to do what he can to drag everyone into hell that he possibly can.

But I want to give you another reason why he “must be loosed a little season,” but first what about “Gog and Magog”?

These two names occur in Ezek. 38:2, but attempts to relate them to our text in Rev. 20:8 have not been successful. Dr. Walvoord quotes T. B. Baines, who was evidently a British writer who wrote a commentary on Revelation back in 1911 about the time when Bible prophecy began to attract the attention which it has had now for almost a hundred years. But he drew some interesting contrasts between Ezekiel 38 and 39 when compared with Revelation 20, which shows that the two passages are not talking about the same thing even though they use the same names. This is what Baines wrote in his commentary almost a hundred years ago. Beginning with this passage in Revelation, he said:

Gog and Magog are here used in a wider sense than in Ezekiel, and their invasion differs in time and details, though agreeing in character and object, with that which he foretells. Exekiel predicts an incursion [upon Israel] by a great northern power called Gog, which, from certain geographical indications, is easily identified with Russia. [Today we might just as accurately say, Iraq.] In the

Revelation, however, Gog and Magog are used to designate the nations, not merely from the north, but from all parts, “the four quarters of the earth.” Again, the invasion named by Ezekiel is at the beginning of Christ’s reign; that in the Revelation at the end. The hosts in Ezekiel, too, fall on the mountains, and their bodies are buried; whereas the forces assembled in the Revelation are devoured by fire from heaven (quoted by Walvoord, p. 303).

Robert Thomas says, after pointing out some of the same contrasts between Ezekiel 38 and Rev. 20, draws this conclusion:

The most that one can discern from these names is that they are emblems for the enemies of Messiah during the end times (II, 423).

However, one similarity that may exist between Ezekiel 38 and Rev. 20 and the use of Gog and Magog in both passages, would be that the object of the opposition in both cases is the nation of Israel. And since the number here in Rev. 20 is “as the sand of the sea,” this implies that this will be the greatest army ever assembled to do away with the nation Israel.

And this brings me to my second point as to why the release of Satan is a “must.” It shows that even with the reign of Christ upon the earth for a thousand years, when people are forced to submit to His rule, the hearts of many (“as the sand of the sea”) remain just as prone to be deceived, and just as ready to take sides against God and the Lord Jesus Christ. When the millennium begins, everyone on the earth will be saved. But there will be people born during the millennium who do not trust the Lord, probably millions of them. And they will be the ones Satan will stir up to wage war against the Lord and the people of God. So even when people are forced to do right under the reign of the Messiah, their hearts will not be changed. This will be demonstrated by the release of Satan, showing that it is only by the Gospel of Christ that sinners can be transformed into saints, and that people can become “new creatures” in Christ.

April 1, 2003

Thomas gives this explanation in his commentary:

The final answer as to why God sees this as a necessity with its fruition in another rebellion, is hidden in the counsels of God . . . Yet one purpose may be a partial answer. Through his release the whole universe will see that after a thousand years of his imprisonment and an ideal reign [of Christ] on earth, Satan is incurably wicked and men’s hearts are still perverse enough to allow him [Satan] to gather an army of such an immense size (II, 411).

Dr. Walvoord includes two comments regarding the release of Satan after the millennium. The first comes from William Hoste. This is what he had to say:

The golden age of the kingdom will last a thousand years, during which righteousness will reign, and peace, prosperity, and the knowledge of God will be universally enjoyed. But this will not entail universal conversion, and all profession must be tested . . . Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his [Satan’s] temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptations, children of God and lovers of His will? Alas! It will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God (Walvoord, John, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 302).

Dr. Walvoord also gave four reasons for the necessity of Satan’s release after the millennium as suggested by Robert Govett:

Govett suggests four reasons why Satan must be loosed after a thousand years: (1) to demonstrate that

man even under the most favorable circumstances will fall into sin if left to his own choice; (2) to demonstrate the foreknowledge of God who foretells the acts of men as well as His own acts; (3) to demonstrate the incurable wickedness of Satan; (4) to justify eternal punishment, that is, to show the unchanged character of wicked people even under divine jurisdiction for a long period of time (*Op. cit.*, p. 303).

I mentioned at the beginning of our study of this book that one of the purposes was evangelism. The release of Satan after the millennium gives further proof that there is only one way that people can be changed, and that is through the transforming power of the Gospel. And so we can see why, at least in part, Satan must be released "for a little season." What a lot of wonderful truth there is to be discovered in just one little word: "must."

But this is a preparation for a war that will never be fought as we learn from verse 9.

20:9 The world has never yet seen such a universal rebellion against God and against His people as will be seen following the release of Satan. And we read here that the masses of humanity which Satan has assembled, will be primarily against "the camp of the saints . . . and the beloved city." This has to be the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. The word "camp" suggests not only a military camp, but a people who have prepared themselves for war. And the word "compassed" indicates that Jerusalem will be completely surrounded, and victory assured for the Devil and the nations of the earth. It looks like the King of kings Himself will be defeated.

And so it seems that at last the victory which Satan has sought on the earth from the time he tempted Eve down to these last days, is going to be achieved, that Satan will be the victor and the people of God finally and permanently defeated. And they would be defeated except for God. When the Devil has his goal in sight, then the Apostle John in the vision sees that "fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." The army of saints did not have to fight. It was an amazing expansion of what God did for the people of Judah in the days of Jehoshaphat, when Judah, greatly outnumbered, and certain to be defeated, suddenly witnessed as the Lord caused the armies of the enemy to fight each other until not a person in those hostile powers survived! Cf. 2 Chron. 20. Here the Apostle John saw the fire from God *devour* the enemy. The Devil's fatal mistake was that He did not remember the Lord. As one of the Puritans said many years ago, "If God is on your side, it makes no difference who your enemy is." From this passage we can say, "Even if the whole world is against you, if you have God on your side, victory is certain." This would be a good place to turn to Isaiah 40 and read about God and the nations. All of them to God are no more than a harmless drop of water in a bucket. We in America need to remember this today. The important thing in our conflict with Iraq is not how many are on their side as compared with how many are on our side, nor is it what weapons we have compared with the weapons that they have. The important thing is for us to make sure that we are on God's side, and that He is fighting for us. As Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

But this is not all that happened. Let us go on to verse 10.

20:10 This marks the end of Satan's terrible career. Satan, who had successfully deceived the nations of the earth, is now cast into the lake of fire, into hell, where the beast and the false prophet have been for a thousand years, and along with them "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Hell is not annihilation, but eternal judgment. Hell was actually "prepared for the Devil and his angels," the demons. Cf. Matt. 25:21 where the Lord called it "everlasting fire."

(Read 2 Thess. 1:3-10.)

We may have trouble understanding how people can be tormented in fire forever without being destroyed. But just because we can't understand how it can be, we had better not close our eyes and hearts to the plain teaching of Scripture. If we could fully understand the plain teaching of Scripture regarding hell, we would not only offer God our ceaseless praise for delivering us, but it probably would be impossible for us to sleep at night or think about anything else during the day, as long as we have loved ones who do not know the Savior. But there is a way of escape, and only one way. That way is through faith in Christ and His sacrificial death for sinners on the Cross. Read the book of Galatians again, and you will see why Paul wrote what he did in Gal. 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . ." Cf. John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 6:23.

April 7, 2003

Now we come to the last point in Rev. 20:

5. The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

These five verses give us one of the most solemn and frightening revelations to be found anywhere in the Bible. The words, "And I saw," indicate that this is a new and different revelation from what John had seen in the preceding verses.

John MacArthur has an excellent paragraph in his commentary as he began his comments on this section of the book of Revelation. Here is what he said:

This passage describes the final sentencing of the lost and is the most serious, sobering, and tragic passage in the entire Bible. Commonly known as the Great White Throne judgment, it is the last courtroom scene that will ever take place. After this there will never again be a trial, and [our Lord] will never again need to act as Judge. The accused, all of the unsaved who have ever lived, will be resurrected to experience a trial like no other that has ever been. There will be no debate over their guilt or innocence. There will be a prosecutor, but no defender; an accuser, but no advocate. There will be an indictment, but no defense mounted by the accused; the convicting evidence will be present with no rebuttal or cross-examination. There will be an utterly unsympathetic Judge and no jury, and there will be no appeal of the sentence He pronounces. The guilty will be punished eternally with no possibility of parole in a prison from which there is no escape (II, 245, 246).

12:11 What the Apostle John saw was "a great white throne." Dr. Walvoord mentioned in his commentary that thrones are mentioned more than thirty times in the book of the Revelation, sometimes the same throne more than once. But it seems that this throne, which is named, has not been seen before. It is "a great white throne," "great" because of its tremendous importance, and of the sovereign power that will be exercised by the One sitting upon the throne. It will be "white" because the judgment which will take place before this throne will be a holy judgment. Absolute justice will be done.

John does not identify the One sitting upon this throne, but in the light of John 5:22, it appears that this must be the Lord Jesus Christ. John 5:22 tells us, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." This does not mean that God never judges anyone, but the context in John 5 seems to indicate that the Lord there was talking about final judgments. In 2 Cor. 5:10 we have the judgment of believers referred to as being before "the judgment seat of Christ." That is a different judgment from what we have here, and probably is a judgment that will follow the rapture of the Church. But in both of these judgments Christ is the Judge.

However, here in Rev. 12:11, the Lord must appear in somewhat the same way that He appeared on the mount of Transfiguration, and in Rev. 1, and in Rev. 19. His glory is unveiled, and the result was that “the earth and the heaven fled away.” This seems to mark the end of this present world as we know it now, and opens the way for the “new heaven and new earth” that we will learn about when we come to Rev. 21. Our Lord did say when He was here on earth that “heaven and earth shall pass away.” See Matt. 24:35, Mark 13:31, and Luke 21:33. The Lord, of course, was not talking about heaven where He and the Father dwell with the holy angels and the saints of the past, but he was talking about all of creation as we know it now. And it is not amazing that this takes place when the full glory of our Lord is revealed. MacArthur calls this “the ‘uncreation’ of the universe” (II, 249).

You may remember how the children of Israel feared the presence of the Lord when He was giving the Law to Moses. We read this in Ex. 20:18-19:

18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

We even read in Rev. 6 when the sixth seal was opened that this happened, perhaps in anticipation of what we are learning now in Rev. 20. Listen to the word in Rev. 6:12-17:

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

These are evidences of the greatness and glory of God which we really cannot fully appreciate now. But we need to learn what a solemn thing it is when we come into the presence of the Lord to present our petitions and even our thanksgivings to Him.

Speaking of the statement in this verse, “and there was found no place for them,” that is, for the present heaven and earth, Donald Grey Barnhouse had this to say, agreeing with what many other expositors have said:

There is to be an end of the material heavens and earth which we know. It is not that they are to be purified and rehabilitated, but that the reverse of creation is to take place. They are to be uncreated. As they came from nothing at the Word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by the same Word of God (quoted by MacArthur, II, p. 249).

2 Peter 3:10-13 speaks of this event:

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

20:12 The sequence of events is hard, if not completely impossible, to understand. The heaven and the earth have been destroyed, and so where can the dead be standing. And what does it mean that they are “dead”?

The idea is that they are those who are *spiritually dead*. But the statements in verse 13 seem to indicate that those who have died will be raised from the dead to face the judgment of the Great White Throne. They are to be brought before this throne of judgment. This is one place where the “small and great” among the unredeemed will stand on the same ground, like God’s judgment on Egypt, where Pharaoh lost his son, and so did everyone else including the maidservant that was behind the mill. See Ex. 11:5. Neither position, nor wealth, nor one’s education or achievements, will exclude anyone from the judgment. Nationality will not mean anything in those days. The Jews who do not know the Lord, will experience the same judgment that Gentiles experience who do not know the Lord. The judgment may be more severe on some than on others, but what difference will it make if all are cast into the lake of fire. And the fact that many will have to be resurrected to face this judgment, very likely means that they will have bodies that are capable of enduring eternal fire.

Now these people are where most of them never thought that they would be. The atheists will be there along with those who have followed some heathen religion. And the people who have felt that they were living in such a way that they would have a good defense before God, will understand then that their works amount to nothing. They are not given any chance to defend themselves, nor is there anyone else who will defend them. “The books were opened.” Well, they had never heard of God’s books. They felt that they could live as they wanted to, and that not even God would pay any attention to them. And if anyone had ever mentioned to them “the book of life,” they scorned that as a ridiculous idea. But there they are before God, with nothing to say, and facing God’s books. And the books were opened. The record of their lives was there, and they will know that every charge that is brought against them is true, and that their names were nowhere to be found in that all-important “book of life.” Then they will know that “no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me,” as the Lord Jesus said. But they are there because they were not saved by Christ, and there is no possibility that any of them can be saved then.

What a dreadful, dreadful day that will be for millions upon millions of people who have not been saved from the penalty of their sins!

21:13 How many people have died thinking that “when you’re dead, you’re dead”? And how many people have there been who have felt that death is all that any person ever has to face. They don’t know that “it is appointed unto men once to die, **but after this the judgment**” (Heb. 9:27). Many people think that Hitler didn’t get all that he deserved because he died before anybody could get their hands on him. He may have thought the same. But when he died, he suddenly realized that he still had to face God in judgment, *and that he really didn’t get away with anything that he did*. It may be that Saddam Hussein is dead! I hope he is! But he is going to have to face God for every person he ever killed, every woman who was raped and then killed, and every child he has killed. It is all in God’s book, and this cocky killer will not have anything to say in his defense. He is going to listen to the Lord, and there is nothing that the Lord is going to say to Saddam that he will want to hear.

But you know what else we ought to think about when we read verses like these? What about that maidservant in Egypt who lost her boy just like Pharaoh did although as far as we know she may have been a very nice person who had not resisted God at all like Pharaoh did. You see, being a good person is not enough because

we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). There is not a just person on the earth who does good, but who has not sinned. And “the wages of sin is death” – eternal death in hell! But the good news is that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). The person who thinks he is good enough to go to heaven, is telling God that it was not necessary for God to send His Son to die for him. But it was necessary, extremely necessary, not only because of what we have done, but because of what we are: sinners!

Before the present heaven and earth are destroyed, the sea is going to give up its dead. Both the Greeks and the Romans attached great importance to a person’s place of burial, and at the same time were horrified at the thought that they might die at sea, where they might even be eaten by creatures in the sea. But with all of the problems that death at sea presents to our minds, *every person who has ever died in the sea is going to be resurrected. The same true of death and hell.* Literally this is death and Hades, or the state of death and the place of death, as Robert Thomas has expressed it. We know from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that there are two divisions in Hades. There is Paradise where we are with the Lord; but there is also Gehenna. But neither is the final state. Our loved ones who have died in the Lord, are with the Lord, but they are not in their glorified bodies until the Lord comes, and they are raised and glorified. There is much about both heaven and hell which are not really clear to us. But we do know that when people die in the Lord, they are immediately with the Lord and enjoying perfect peace and happiness. But when people who are not saved, die, they are immediately in torment, but awaiting the judgment of the Great White Throne. But the point of verse 13 is that every person who has died not trusting in Christ, not knowing Him as their Savior, *regardless of how they have died*, will be raised, given resurrection bodies, and judged accord to their works, which means judged according to the way they have lived. This is stated at the end of verse 12, and again at the end of verse 13. And so it is a point that the Holy Spirit wants us to notice.

20:14 In 19:20 we learn that the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. In 20:10 we learn that the Devil is cast into the lake of fire. And here in 20:14 we learn that all of those who died without Christ will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. We must no minimize how terrible this will be. No suffering which people experience on the earth, will even begin to compare with the suffering and torment of an eternal hell. We all struggle with this doctrine, but it is because we don’t fully realize how very, very terrible sin is with a holy God.

20:15 Our chapter concludes with “and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

None of the judgments that are written in this book from chapter 6 on, have come to pass. They are all future. But they are all just as certain to take place as the judgments that are recorded before this terrible time that is yet to come. And all of the bad stuff that exists in our world today, and which has always been here, will be present in an aggravated and unrestrained form in hell.

Concl: But before I close, let’s just take a peak into chapters 21 and 22 where we learn about the new heaven and the new earth, a completely new order altogether.

Verse 3 of chapter 21 tells us that in the eternal state we are going to live with God. Verse 4 tells us that there will be no tears in heaven. No death, and so no funerals. And if there is no sorrow, there will be no tears, and no pain. Verse 8 tells us the kind of people that will not be with us then. Verse 23 tells us that we won’t need the sun or the moon any longer because our Lord will be the light. And then look at verse 27 – no sinning and no sinners. And then turn to chapter 22, and verse 3 – no curse! In verse 4 we are reminded again that we will have the Lord with us. Verse 5 – no night again.

We will look into these chapters more in detail in the coming weeks, but we need to realize the reason that we are given all of this information, this truth from God concerning how things are finally going to be brought to completion. It is not just to satisfy our curiosity. But it is all to warn us, to warn us of the judgments that are coming upon this old world, and of the greater judgments which are going to follow for those who do not heed the warnings and turn to Christ.

So see Rev. 22:17.

Moses knew something that you and I don't know; he knew when he was going to die. He had led the children of Israel for 40 years. He wrote five books for them, one about their people before any of them were born, and four books about his time with them mainly during the last forty years of his life. He spent the last month of his life preaching to them. And then as he got closer to the end, and to the end of his speaking and his writing, this is what he said to them. You will find his words in Deut. 30:19-20a):

19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

20 That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days . . .

The Lord led him to do what he did so that they people would know that they needed the Lord, they needed to be saved. Well, this was John's purpose as well. He was warning his readers that judgment was coming, not just a series of terrible judgments as this period called time was coming to an end. But he was warning them of the eternal judgment that awaits all who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior, all who are not believing in Christ for their eternal salvation.

He has shown us the bad. Now in chapters 21 and 22 we are going to see the good that is ahead, but you will only miss the bad and secure the good if you have come to Christ, and taken "freely" of the water of life. May God grant that we all have come, or will come, to Christ that we might live forever with Him.

April 21, 2003

We come now to the last point under:

C. The Events which follow, or take place, after the Great Tribulation (19:1-22:5).

This is:

6. The New Heaven and the New Earth with the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5).

When we move from chapter 20 to chapter 21 we move out of time into eternity. The original heaven and earth passed away (20:11), and we find ourselves in "a new heaven and a new earth." Expositors are generally agreed that this is not the present heaven and earth renovated, but an entirely new order. And since it is really impossible for us to fully comprehend eternal realities from our present position on earth, we must not be disturbed or frustrated if we have a hard time visualizing how things will really be in the eternal state. But we can be sure that it will all be far more wonderful and glorious than we can imagine now.

Dr. Walvoord points out in his commentary that there are three times in this chapter where the Apostle John wrote about what *he saw*. These appear in 21:1, 2, and 22, and they point to the three main points in this revelation: the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem, and the fact that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." And we are reminded here in vs. 1

that “the first heaven and the first earth are passed away.” So this seems to emphasize that we are dealing with something that is completely new. Added confirmation of this is that in the Greek there are two different words for “new.” One is νέος; the other is καινός. The word that is used for the “new heaven and new earth, as well as for “the New Jerusalem, is καινός, which, according to Trench (p. 220) speaks of that which “is set over against that which has waxen old, and shows signs of decay and dissolution.” So this means a new and different heaven, a new and different earth, and a new and different Jerusalem.

The new heaven, or heavens, and new earth are only mentioned three other times in the Bible. The first is in Isa. 65:17:

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

The second is in Isa. 66:22:

22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

And the third is in 2 Peter 3:12-13:

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Putting the truth expressed in these three passages together, we see that the “new heavens and a new earth” will be so wonderful, so much greater and better than what we have now the “the former [what we have now] shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Second, that it will “remain,” *i.e.*, be permanent. It will not pass away. Third, it will be “new heavens and a new earth” where righteousness will dwell – a big difference from the world in which we now live.

Here in verse 1 is the only time the expression, “a new heaven and a new earth,” appears in this section, 21:1-22:5. The rest of the section is given to describing it.

“And there was no more sea.” This indicates how great the difference will be from our present world in which most of the earth is covered with water, water which has been the scene of countless disasters, and which manifests the restlessness and wickedness of this present evil world. Cf. Isa. 57:20-21:

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

21:2 Not all of the MSS have John’s name here, but the “I” obviously refers to the Apostle John because he is telling us of the vision he had of the New Jerusalem. A few moments ago I read to you from 2 Pet. 3:13 that in the new heavens and the new earth righteousness would dwelt, not just be there for a short time, and then go, and so it is not surprising that it is also called here, “the holy city.” In Rev. 11:8 it was called “Sodom.” In Isa. 1:9 and 10 the whole land of Judah was called “Sodom” and “Gomorrhah.” So the New Jerusalem will be greatly different from the old Jerusalem.

Can you imagine what it will mean to live in a place where there is no sin? We will learn more about this latter in this chapter, but it is a blessing even to contemplate such a thing now. None of us has ever lived in such an environment. We have always known the tragedy and heartache which is the result of sin. There will be no Sadam’s in the New Jerusalem, no Scott Petersons. Everyone will want to please God, and not be inclined nor able to do anything but please God. What glory God will take to Himself in the new heaven and the new earth!

The New Jerusalem came down “from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband.”

We know that in Eph. 5:23 we are taught that “the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.” And in Eph. 5:25 husbands are told to love their wives “even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.” But the same husband and wife relationship is used in the OT of the Lord’s relationship to His people of Judah. See Jer. 3:14. So it may be that this refers to the saints of all ages. Dr. Walvoord made this comment:

The subsequent description of the New Jerusalem in this chapter makes plain that saints of all ages are involved and that what we have here is not the church *per se* but a city or dwelling having the freshness and the beauty of a bride adorned for marriage to her husband (p. 313).

Hebrews 11:13 tells us that even Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

21:3 Notice that we have the word “heaven” verses 1, 2, and 3 of this chapter. But the word is not used in the same way in the three verses. In verse 1 it is used twice along with the word “earth,” but the first refers to the new creation, the second to original creation. Heaven in verse 2 is the dwelling place of God, and that is where the “great voice” comes from in verse 3. We speak of the sky above us as heaven, or the heavens. We also know that God dwells in heaven, that it is a real place where angels are and where the saints of all ages have gone at the time of death. Paul was speaking of this when in 2 Cor. 12:2 he spoke of being caught up into the third heaven. He also called it “paradise” in verse 4 of that chapter. From Isa. 14:12-14 where we have the five “I wills” of the Devil, we must assume that the second heaven must be the original dwelling place of angels.

But the Bible says a great deal about heaven, and how even the saints of the OT looked forward to going there. John MacArthur speaks of six great benefits that come to believers who have what he called “a genuine and strong longing for heaven” (II, 261):

- 1) It is one of the strongest indicators of genuine salvation.
- 2) It produces the highest and noblest Christian character.
- 3) It brings comfort and joy in trials.
- 4) It is a preservative against sin.
- 5) It will maintain the vigor of our service to the Lord.
- 6) It honors God above everything else.

Pages 261-263 makes excellent reading. It is there that MacArthur has gleaned from Scripture many wonderful truths about heaven. In years past believers thought, and many wrote, about the joys of heaven. Today it seems that we have become so attached to this world that we don’t think constantly and talk about heaven. If the Lord were to bless us with a spiritual revival, a true revival, not one supposedly worked up by men, but one given from above by God, perhaps heaven would be more in our hearts and upon our tongues.

What an amazing announcement is made from heaven, probably by an angel! Some have referred to this as *the first coming of God to the earth, the new earth*. Here we have the heart of God revealed. Perhaps you remember that the first tabernacle was made that God might dwell with His people. The unique thing about the New Jerusalem is that it holds the tabernacle of God, that He is not only with them, but He will “dwell” with them, and He will own the people of the New Jerusalem as His people, and that He will be their God. God will be satisfied when He has all of His people with Him. What peace and comfort it will bring to our souls if we only could understand how God delights in us, loves us, desires to be with us, and wants us to desire to be with Him. This third verse of chapter 21 is worth memorizing so that we can have it readily available to meditate on.

21:4 Verse 3 has given us some of the positive blessings of heaven, and verse 4 tells some of the negative aspects. In verse 3 we see that we will have a relationship with God then which is far greater than what we have now, and in verse 4 we see that the fruits of sin which are everywhere now, will be gone, and gone

forever. The good replaces the bad. And all of this is attributed to God. This is what God does.

All tears will be wiped away. Even when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He wept. See John 11:35. This world is a vale of tears. But there will be no tears in the Eternal State. The Greek says, lit., *every tear*. And there will be no more tears because there will be “no more death.” Imagine what that will be like! What an enemy death is! But in the eternal state, death will be swallowed up in victory! Cf. 1 Cor. 15:54. All of these are some of the fruits of sin. Some of the others are “neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”

There will be a complete disappearance of the curse of sin in the new heaven and the new earth. And we are told in the last statement of this verse *why!* “For the former things are passed away.” Thomas, referring to what Swete and Kiddle have said, points out that “the cancerous evils of the old creation, a creation ravaged by the inestimable damage of sin,” will be “banished” forever. See II, p. 446.

Dr. MacArthur reminds us that all of this is the fruit of the Cross of Christ. The Lord experienced all of these tragic results of sin, not because of His own sin, because He had none, but because of our sins! Cf. Isa. 53:3-6:

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And then MacArthur added:

The healing ministry of Jesus was a preview of the well-being that will characterize the millennial kingdom and the eternal state. The glorified sin free bodies believers will possess in heaven will not be subject to pain of any kind (II, 270).

21:5 In verse 3 we had “a great voice out of heaven” speaking about God. In verse 4 we are told what God will do in that eternal day. Now in verse 5 we are told what God says, and this continues down through verse 8.

God is described here as sitting upon a throne, just like John saw Him in Rev. 4. He is there in all of His majestic glory and power declaring, “Behold, I make all things new.” “New” is the same word that we had in verses 1 and 2. And so we are reminded again that what we are seeing and learning about is not a renovation of the old creation, but a work of God that is completely new.

Perhaps here is a good place to be reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus in John 14:

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

This should take us back to 21:2 where we have the word “prepared.” All that we are reading about now here in Rev. 21 may have been in the Lord’s mind as He spoke to His disciples in the final days of His life here on earth.

So what we are witnessing here in Rev. 21 is what God is doing. The fact that it is spoken of in John 14 as a work of the Lord Jesus, and here as a work of God, shows the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son, and gives further confirmation of the absolute Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we continue in verse 5, we see that it is God Who tells John to write. A permanent record is to be made by John of what he continues to see and to hear. And in this statement, "Write: for these words are true and faithful," is another statement in support of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. See also 22:6.

The Greek word for "true" is ἀληθινός. It is a word which is used twenty-three times in the books of John, and only five other times in all of the NT. Trench says that it in every respect corresponds to that which is signified by the name. It is real, genuine, the opposite of that which is mere fiction, false, and imaginary. So here we are not reading about that which is merely symbolic, that which points to something besides what we are reading, but what we have been reading about from the beginning of this chapter is really going to take place. Our understanding of what we are reading is that it points to a literal fulfillment. There is going to be a real new heaven and new earth, and a real New Jerusalem. God is going to do a work that is completely new. So we are not to spiritualize what we are reading. These are eternal realities. Sin is really going to be gone!

The word "faithful" (πιστοὶ in the Greek) means that as unbelievable as all of this may sound, it is really trustworthy. We can rely upon it as absolutely true and most certainly to be fulfilled. The two words together mean that it is the height of foolishness not to believe what God says. For God to say it, is enough for His people, but for Him to support His words by saying that they are "true and faithful," is to put them beyond any doubt whatever. This puts these words into the same category as what Peter called the Scriptures when he said that they were "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19). Truer, more reliable, more certain words, have never been written, than those that we find in all of Scripture. Therefore, let us put our trust fully in all of them.

21:6 "It is done" – So certain are these prophecies to be fulfilled, that we can look upon them as already finished! In the same way could the Apostle Paul in Rom. 8:30 speak of us as already "glorified" because it is so certain that we will be glorified that we can consider it *done, finished*, just as though it has already taken place.

And then to support the absolute trustworthiness of what John was seeing and hearing, God identifies Himself as "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It speaks of the eternal nature of God. He is actually without beginning and without ending. The fact that these words are used of the Lord Jesus Christ in Rev. 1:8 is further evidence of the true Deity of our Savior. Only Members of the Godhead are "Alpha," and only They are "Omega." Quoting MacArthur again, "God started history, and He will end it, and all of it has unfolded according to His sovereign plan" (II, 271).

The last statement of verse 6 seems to be out of place unless we understand that one of the main purposes of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is to awaken sinners to their need of salvation, and how they can get it. The thought behind this verse, coming from God, is that to read of what is coming, can and will be used by the Lord to draw people to Christ as their Savior. This invitation is repeated in 22:7. (Read.)

God has given to all of us physical life. But we were born in sin, and so physical life will end in death. But being born in sin, we are spiritually dead, without God, under condemnation, and headed for final judgment. But this great God about Whom we have been learning, is a God not only of judgment, but of grace and forgiveness and eternal life. So His purpose is that through His Word people may be awakened to their need, and made to realize that only Christ can give them life, eternal life. It is not to be earned, but it is a gift. And it

is a gift (as a gift by definition should be) without cost. It is free. It comes to us by grace. It cost our Lord Jesus Christ His life. So its value is infinite! It is completely out of the question that any man can save himself, and it is also completely out of the question that we can merit it in any way. God, and only God, can cause anyone to *thirst* for salvation which is here described as “the water of life.” This should remind us of John 4 where we are told of our Lord’s meeting with the woman of Samaria and how she was drawn to the Savior. But one interesting thing about this verse is the word “athirst.” Thayer defines this word meaning a person who painfully feels his or her need of salvation, and who eagerly longs for it, by which “the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened” (p. 153). In other words, we are confronted here with the Gospel and the message of salvation. There is no reason why God should save any of it. In fact, there are many reasons why we should *not* save us. We are under the judgment of God, and we deserve to be left there. And we would be if it were not for the grace of God whereby God gives us what we could never deserve and does not give us what we do deserve. Cf. Isa. 55:1 ff.; John 4:4, 7 ff.; 6:35; 7:37.

But thirsting for the water of life, is not something that we do on our own. It is God Who causes us to thirst. It is He Who enables us to see this world as the Psalmist saw it, “a dry and thirsty land where no water is” (Psa. 63:1). And then He draws us. See John 6:37, 44, 65; 12:32. Surely reading the last part of Rev. 20 and, in contrast to it, the first part of Rev. 21, hearts will be awakened to the reality of the Gospel message, and will come to Christ, trusting Him as their Savior.

The invitation continues in verse 7.

21:7 “He that overcometh” should make us remember the promises that were given to each of the seven churches in Rev. 2 and 3. The Apostle John who wrote Revelation also wrote the epistles which carry his name, and in 1 John 5:4 and 5 he defined who an overcomer is:

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5).

So an overcomer is one who is trusting Jesus Christ for his, or her, salvation. And the Apostle John speaks of “the world” as that which needs to be overcome. And overcoming the world involves overcoming “the god of this world,” who is the Devil. The Lord, in His parable of the sower and the seed, spoke of “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” which choke out the Word. Cf. Matt. 13:22. He also spoke of the Devil who snatches up the Word of God before it can take root in a person’s heart. And then you will remember that He also spoke of how people are turned away from Christ because of tribulation and persecution arise because of the Word, and so many are offended by that and turn away from Christ.

So the world with all of its attractions, deceptive attractions I might add, the world’s pleasures, all that the Apostle John described in 1 John 2:15-17, is what must be overcome. How can that be? Rev. 12:11 gives us some light on that subject:

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

“The blood of the Lamb” points us to the Cross, the death of Christ, and the Gospel. To declare our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take our stand upon His work at Calvary for us, is the only way for Satan to be defeated.

Three wonderful promises are given to the people of God in this verse:

- 1) They will inherit all things.
- 2) God will be their God.

3) And the overcomer will be a son (of God, understood).

When we are saved, we are given the Holy Spirit as a pledge, or guarantee, of coming into the fulness of our inheritance in Christ. Cf. Eph. 1:13-14:

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Cf. also 1 Peter 1:3-5:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The three adjectives that Peter used in verse 4 to describe our inheritance mean that *it cannot decay, nor can it be spoiled by anything else*, and that *it is eternal*. The certainty of our hope in Christ could hardly be expressed in a stronger way. Cf. Rom. 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Also we read in Gal. 4:7, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Our inheritance is to be with Christ, and to be like Christ, and to share with Him all the glory and privileges of heaven.

April 28, 2003

It ought to be of interest to us that our final glory will be a more complete revelation of and the fullest experience of what it means that God is our God and that we are His sons. And, of course, in the former expression coupled to the latter we see that if we are the sons of God (and we are), then God is our Father, our heavenly Father. For example, when the Apostle Paul was calling the believers at Corinth to a life of separation from the world, and separation unto God, he spoke of this very truth:

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

This does not mean that he was not their God before, nor their Father, nor does it mean that they were not His sons and daughters, but that in order to appreciate and enjoy what this relationship was, they needed to be living in separation from the world. When we pass from this old creation into the new heaven and new earth, then we will fully understand and fully enjoy this unique relationship which we have with God, a relationship like that which the Lord Jesus Christ has with the Father. And so it behooves us in our lives today to seek by God's grace to know in our daily experience what it means that God, the God of heaven and earth, the eternal God, is truly our Father, and that He wants us to come to Him as His precious and beloved children. And remember that we are not God's adopted children. We have been born into His family. We have His life in us. The Greek word translated "adoption" in the NT is not at all what we have in mind when we speak of adoption today. It ought to be translated *sonship*. *It means that we have been brought into God's family with the full rights and privileges of being sons.*

But now let us go on to verse 7 where we are told about those who are not in God's family.

21:8 (Read.) With this verse cf. 21:27 and 22:15. Other lists are given in Rom. 1:28-32; Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:2-5.

This does not mean that people who fall into the category explained in these verses could never have been saved, but it does mean that those who, when the end comes, are characterized by these sins, could never be considered to be the children of God. Note what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

No list of sins and sinners in the Bible is complete, but somewhere in the lists we all are to be found, and it is only by the grace of God that we are not included in every sin in every list. We have all sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), but how thankful we can all be for the restraining work of the Holy Spirit Who has kept us all from being as bad as we could have been.

It needs to be recognized that here in verse 8 we are moving into another category from what we have read about in the first seven verses of this chapter. There we were concerned with what believers will experience in the new heaven and the new earth. In verse 8 we are concerned with what unbelievers, those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, will experience. As you know, we are not in the new heaven and the new earth yet, and so verses like this should move our hearts with compassion for those who do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the eternal state there will only be two places where people will dwell. One is heaven; the other is hell. There is no third place, or fourth place, or more than that – just two! Every person who has ever be either in heaven or in hell. And here in verse 8 we are reading about those who will be in hell, “in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” That is where the Devil will be. And that is where the beast and the false prophet will be. They are not there yet, but that is their destiny. One reason that Word of God has been given to us, is to let us know how unspeakably terrible hell will be. And a second reason that the Word of God has been given to us, is to let us know how we can escape such a horrible judgment – and that is through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who know now that we will not be there because we are saved, have a great responsibility to spread the Gospel as far as we can, in order that others may see their need and trust in Christ and His substitutionary death on the Cross. But now let us spend a few minutes looking at these terms.

It is very interesting that the first word we come to is the word “fearful.”

We all know what it is to be fearful. No one escapes fear. Fear rules some people’s lives, but it has touched all of us. We fear disease. We fear death. We fear war. We fear financial reverses. We fear for the safety of our loved ones. We fear failure. We fear the future. When you get down to the basics of life, we don’t have control over anything, and so it is very possible for us to be fearful about everything. Sometimes it is impossible for people to enjoy the present because they are fearful about what might be around the corner.

Do you know where fear is first mentioned in the Bible? Please turn with me to Genesis 3 and I will show you. Let me begin reading with verse 8 which has to do with the time immediately following Adam’s sin in eating of the forbidden fruit:

8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Gen. 3:8-10).

Before that time Adam had not been afraid of anything! But suddenly he was afraid of God. Fear in human hearts is the result of sin. A man may deny that he is a sinner, but his fear shows that he is liar!

We as Christians have trouble with fear, and I do not deny that. But we also know the answer to fear, and that is that we know that we can trust the Lord. We don't have control over any circumstances, but God does! And He wants us to trust Him! Worry is one evidence of fear. Worry produces anxiety, and there is not real answer to anxiety but faith in the Lord. Adam failed to do what God told him to do, and his sin produced fear in his heart – fear of God! This is not the right kind of fear of God, but the kind of fear that will cause men in the last days to call for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them from the face of God and from the wrath of the Lamb of God. Paul was dealing with the problem of fear when he wrote Phil. 4:6-7. The opposite of fear is peace. Adam lost peace and gained fear when he sinned. And fear has been with us ever since. The Apostle John knew that one great answer to fear was in knowing how much God loves those of us who are His people. He expressed it this way in 1 John 4:18:

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Human psychology cannot deliver you from fear. Drinking cannot deliver you from fear. Getting absorbed in a career that you love, cannot deliver you from fear. Pleasure and possessions and all that money can buy for you cannot deliver you from fear. Deliverance from fear comes from knowing Jesus Christ as our Savior from the penalty and power of sin. It comes from the Word of God. (Cf. Ps. 119:165). Peace in life comes from first of all having peace with God. Peace comes from knowing God, and keeping our minds stayed upon Him. Cf. Isa. 26:3-4.

The Bible gives us more insight into the human heart than all of the books that have ever been written, and I find it *very* interesting that it is mentioned first in this list. A fearful person is a coward. Sin has made cowards out of all of us. The word which is used here in the Greek, *δειλοῖς*, basically means one who cannot stand up under testing. He does not know how to trust God. Sin has made us proud. We think we can handle anything. But when the real tests of life come, we learn that we can't handle anything by ourselves. It is obvious that we need the Lord.

What is the second word in the list? "Unbelieving." Just last night I heard a criticism of having a national day of prayer because of the separation of church and state. Who objects to a national day of prayer? The "unbelieving" – those who don't realize how much we need the Lord, those who don't give God the glory for our victory in Iraq. The unbelieving are those who don't read the Bible, and don't want to know what it says. They may say that they don't believe in God, but that is where they are lying, too. They don't believe in Christ. As far as God and the Bible are concerned, they don't believe anything that can change their lives. Paul wrote to Titus in Titus 1:15-16:

15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

How would you like to live in a place where there are only the "unbelieving"? What a fate that would be? No one in hell will ever have any peace about anything. So it is interesting that the Apostle John was given to understand that "the fearful" were in the lake of fire.

What is the third term that is used in verse 8? "The abominable." Who are they? Thayer mentioned in his

lexicon that this word is often used of idols and things pertaining to idolatry. But idolaters are mentioned later in our verse. There is no question that “the abominable” includes idolatry, but there are other things that are abominable to God. The book of Proverbs speaks of many that are abominable to Him. According to Prov. 3:32 perverse people are an abomination to the Lord, that is, those who depart from Him and His Word, those who object to the truth. Any form of wickedness is an abomination to the Lord, even to false weights and balances. See Prov. 8:7; 11:1. According to Prov. 16:5 a proud heart falls into this category. From Prov. 21:27 we see that it is an abomination to the Lord when wicked people try to worship the Lord with their sacrifices, and especially when they have an evil purpose in doing so. All of the hypocrisies of men fall into this category.

Next we come to “murderers.”

As a nation we have done as much as we can to put God out of our national life. And even more have we turned against the Lord Jesus Christ. What has it produced for us? A rash of murders – even fathers killing their wives and children, children killing their parents, children killing their teachers, police officers killed by criminals, random murders of anyone who they may decide to kill. The oldest son of our first parents was a killer. Some get away with their crimes for the present, but they are going to show up in the lake of fire. And when you think of Saddam Hussein and Adolph Hitler and their ilk, they are going to be there too. Not all accounts are settled in this life, but they will be at the Great White Throne and finally in the Lake of Fire.

And then we come to “whoremongers.”

Adultery has become a way of life in America. And this applies to married people, to young people and often even to children. Divorce has become so common that it does not seem to matter how many times a person has been married. It used to be an issue in our presidency, but no more! We had better be very thankful for the President we have because the way our country is going, we may never have another one like him – a man who loves his wife and is faithful to her. Prostitution is so prevalent that it will eventually be legalized. It has almost reached that point already. Even back in Bible times Paul recognized that fornication was so prevalent that you could not live in this world without coming into contact with fornicators. Cf. 1 Cor 5:9-11:

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

So occasionally people like this even show up in a church.

Next, “sorcerers.”

These are the Devil’s substitutes of the writers of Scripture. These are people who seek to be able to foretell the future, or to communicate with the dead, and they claim to do it through contact with the spirit world. They play right into the Devil’s hands. Instead of controlling evil spirits, evil spirits control them. The present interest in witches and witchcraft comes in this category. When people turn from the truth, there is no end to the evil they can become involved in. All such will have their place in the lake of fire.

And there is also a place in the lake of fire for “idolaters.”

Man rejects the true and living God of the Bible, but turns to false and dead gods who can’t see them, nor hear them, nor talk to them, nor do anything for them. Sin has made men into fools. Whether or not people worship

an image, they still can be idolaters of fame and fortune. Money can't buy everything, and neither can MasterCard. All idolatry is loath-some to God. He hates it with a perfect hatred. The first two commandments were addressed to idolatry. And when the Lord was asked what the greatest commandment in the Law was, His answer showed how abominable idolatry was in His sight. Over and over again did the Lord warn the Israelites about taking up with the gods of the Canaanites, and that that alone could mean their expulsion from the land the Lord had promised to Abraham. And yet idolatry has meant the eternal downfall of countless numbers of people – and more are yet to come.

Finally, “and all liars.”

In 22:15 liars are described as “whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” You will never find a single person who has never told a lie. When we go back to find the first lie in Scripture, we find this also in Genesis 3. Cf. Gen. 3:1-5. As we go on through Scripture we learn that Abraham lied, Jacob lied, Laban lied, Pharaoh was addicted to lying. We could call him a compulsive liar. When we go to the NT, we learn that Peter lied. False prophets and false teachers were liars. And how prevalent lying has become in America. Top executives have been caught in lies. Car salesmen are notorious for the lies they tell.

The purpose of lies is to deceive, and to get people to do what we want them to do. We lie to keep from being detected in some wrongdoing. The Lord Jesus said this to the Jewish religious leaders of His day,

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not (John 8:44-45).

The dictionary defines a lie as something we say which is not true and which is intended to deceive. Dr. Ironside told us at the Seminary that one good thing about telling the truth (and there are many such good things) is that you don't have to remember what you have told people. If you tell a lie, then you have to cover each lie with another lie, like Jacob did.

Here in 21:8 we have eight kinds of people mentioned. Perhaps most people fall into more than one of these groups. Only Christ can deliver us. These are all problems of the heart as our Lord pointed out in Mark 7:21-23:

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

As Jerry Bridges reminded us in our recent conference, all of us come to Christ not only with nothing to commend us to God for salvation, but with everything against us which demands that we be judged for our sins. And so God's grace means that He does not give us what we deserve to have, but instead He gives us what we could never deserve. However, there will be people right to the end of time who will prefer to believe a lie about their condition before God, and God's remedy, and so will spend eternity in the lake of fire. I hope that there are none of us here today who have minds and hearts closed to the Gospel of the grace of God.

As we move out of verse 8 and into verse 9, John continues to describe for us more about “the bride” mentioned in verse 2.

May 5, 2003

21:9 At this point that which was introduced in 21:2 is continued. There the New Jerusalem was mentioned, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Now we are

going to learn more about that New Jerusalem. It is important to note both the similarity and the contrast between this passage which we have come to, and that which was given to us in Revelation 17. There one of the angels of the bowl judgments showed John the judgment of the great whore, Babylon; here we have the vision of the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Some expositors try to reintroduce the millennium at this point, but the first verse of chapter 21 makes it clear that we are in the new heaven and the new earth. So it seems clear that we are still learning about the eternal state. Dr. Walvoord mentioned in his commentary that "the problem of symbolic interpretation comes to the fore perhaps more [here] more than in any other section of the book of Revelation" (p. 319). We, and even the Apostle John, are at a disadvantage in speaking of the eternal state because conditions obviously will be very different from what we now know in the present creation. So the Apostle John, directed by the Holy Spirit, explains what he saw in terms that we are capable of understanding. But we may find when this time comes that the new heaven and new earth are going to be so much greater and glorious than what we have at the present time, that the glory of the new could not be adequately expressed in terms which we now know. Therefore, we need to recognize that the new Jerusalem will be even more glorious than we are capable of understanding now.

But the angel called John to see "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

21:10 John was carried away "in the spirit," words characteristic of a vision. It is very likely that the Apostle John never left the isle of Patmos during the entire time that he was given the revelations of this book. But in seeing the vision it was like he was taken first here, and then there, throughout the book. He described it like being taken "to a great and high mountain" which was the case when the Devil tempted the Lord and took Him "up into an exceeding high mountain" (Matt. 4:8) where He could see all of the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. Now we know that there is no such place anywhere on our earth. So obviously there was something very unusual which Satan did with the Lord which we just cannot explain. We believe that it happened, but *how*, we do not know.

This new Jerusalem, called here "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, is coming down "out of heaven from God." Again, this may be what the Lord had in mind when He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2b).

So this is not a city constructed on earth. It has nothing to do with the earthly Jerusalem. There is no mention of the land of Israel in these two chapters. What we are learning about is an entirely new order.

21:11 This city had "the glory of God." This means that God was in it, and the city was radiant with His glory. John, in describing it, said that the glory was like a precious stone, like a jasper, "clear as crystal." The word which John used here could refer to diamond, or some say to an opal. The emphasis does not seem to be on its color, but upon its brilliance. And when he added, "clear as crystal," there is possibly the suggestion of its purity. See v. 27.

21:12 After noting the glory of the new Jerusalem, John saw the wall. He called it "great and high." In verse 17 we will learn how high. But in the wall there were twelve gates. At each gate were twelve angels. On each gate was the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Note the prominence of the number twelve in connection with the city. In addition to what this verse tells us, we learn in verse 14 that the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on the foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The city was foursquare, the length and breadth and height each twelve

thousand furlongs (v.16). The foundations of the wall were garnished with twelve precious stone (vv. 19-20). On each of the twelve gates was a pearl, twelve in all (v. 21).

The number twelve appears eight times in Rev. 21, and once in Rev. 22:2 where we read of the tree of life which will bear twelve manner of fruits.

Not any of the commentaries I have consulted has attempted to explain the meaning of the number twelve. One hinted at the idea that it might suggest *permanence*, which surely would be consistent with an eternal state. But this is only a suggestion. In its favor we are told that after the ascension of our Lord when the disciples were gathered together, Peter called attention to the fact that a replacement for Judas needed to be made. And he expressed it this way:

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection (Acts 1:22).

A replacement was necessitated by the predictions of Scripture that such a thing would be done. Cf. Psa. 109:8.

21:13 The twelve gates were located three each on the four sides of the city.

21:14 On the twelve foundations of the city were the names of the twelve apostles. This points to the church.

21:15 The angel who had spoken to John (see v. 9) had a golden reed with which he proceeded to measure the city, the gates, and the wall. The city is in v. 16. The wall, in vv. 17-20. The gates in v. 21a, and the street of the city in v. 21b.

21:16 The city was the shape of a large cube. And so the length, the breadth, and the height were all the same measurement: twelve thousand furlongs, which is approximately 1,500 miles. We have no idea that weights, measurements, etc. will be in eternity like they are now, but in order for us to get some idea of the enormity of the new Jerusalem, it is given to us in measurements they were acquainted with in the first century. Thomas in his commentary suggests that it would be like the area from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast. That would be an example of the foundation and the top. And if it were possible to lift such an area into an upright position, that would be what each side would be like.

21:17 We are concerned with the wall down through verse 20. There is some question as to whether the measurement given here has to do with the height of the wall, or the thickness of it. One hundred and forty-four cubits equals 216 feet, and it probably was the thickness of the wall. It is was not for security because there will be no enemies in the eternal state, but it was to set off the limits of the city. "According to the measurements of a man," means that when it mentions cubits, it means cubits as man normally thinks of a cubit, which also is the same for angels.

21:18 This verse is practically a repetition of verse 11. The wall was of jasper, or diamond-like, pure gold, and transparent so that the light from inside the city could be projected outside of the city. It is not possible for us to think of such a combination of materials but that is intended to indicate to us the indescribable beauty of the walls of the city.

21:19-20 Continuing on with the wall we are told that the foundations of it were "garnished" with all kinds of precious stones. "Garnished" is a translation of the Greek verb, κοσμέω, the verb from which we get our English word, cosmos. It means that they *were put in their proper order*, and that they formed a decoration for the wall. The first four stones are mentioned in this verse; the last eight are in verse 20. We

learned from verse 14 that there were twelve foundation stones, and that each one had the name of one of the twelve apostles. Here in verses 19 and 20 that each of them likewise had a precious stone.

This is reminiscent of the breastplate that was worn by the priest in OT times, only upon the stones of the breastplate were the names of the tribes of Israel. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (NT). The significance here would basically be the same. The people of God are all precious (like these stones), but they are all different. MacArthur had this to say about the foundations of the walls:

These brightly-colored stones refract the shining brilliance of God's glory into a panoply of beautiful colors flashing from the New Jerusalem . . . (II, 283).

Dr. Walvoord's comment was this:

The light of the city within shining through these various colors in the foundation of the wall topped by the wall itself composed of the crystal-clear jasper forms a scene of dazzling beauty in keeping with the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness. The city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything that man has ever been able to [make], and it reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God, but also His grace as extended to the objects of His salvation (p. 325).

We will have to see it in order to understand how absolutely breathtaking in its beauty it will be.

And now for the gates:

21:21 See the description of the gates in verse 12. The addition that is made here is that in addition to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, each gate has a pearl on it, or, as the text seems to suggest, the gates were made of pearl.

The significance of the pearl is similar to that of the onyx stones which were on the shoulders of the high priest upon which were inscribed the names of the tribes of Israel – six on one shoulder, and the other six on the other shoulder. Here they would signify how precious the people of God are, equally precious since a pearl represented each tribe. Pearls were of great value in ancient times. They were ranked highest among stones and metals. It is said that one reason Caesar tried to conquer Britain was to get their oyster beds where the pearls were formed. Its beauty is entirely natural. Men cannot improve upon what God has enabled the oyster to make. John Phillips who wrote a book on The Revelation, saw in the pearl an illustration of the Cross. The pearl is formed when the oyster received some injury from without, and thus Phillips saw in these oyster-gates a constant reminder of the sufferings of Christ which will be there for all eternity to keep the people of God reminded as to why they were privileged to share the unspeakable glory of the new heaven and the new earth for all eternity. It was because of Him Who suffered for us, thus making us unspeakably precious to our Lord Jesus Christ and to our heavenly Father.

The second part of this verse tells us about the streets of the city. "Street" is singular, but it represents all of the streets. They are like "pure gold," and yet "as it were transparent glass." That is not what like gold is in this world. It is not transparent. So the fact that it is in the New Jerusalem, is evidence of a far greater beauty and glory than we have ever experienced on earth.

As we come to the last six verses of the chapter, we are given more detail about what is in the New Jerusalem, and what is not.

21:22 We can assume that at this point the angel and the Apostle John entered the city, and they were surprised to discover that there was no temple there. Previously in this book the temple has been mentioned. Cf. 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17. The temple, and the tabernacle before it, was the place where God dwelt among His people. But the marvelous thing about the New Jerusalem is that the presence of

the Lord will fill the New Jerusalem. Every believer will enjoy His presence constantly. MacArthur says that “there will never be a moment when they [believers] are not in perfect, holy communion with the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (p. 284). Swete says that the presence of the Godhead in the New Jerusalem renders the New Jerusalem on vast temple. Worship then will be a way of life as it should be now. Cf. the Lord’s words to the woman of Samaria about worship in John 4:20-24. Cf. also Rev. 21:3. MacArthur also said concerning this time, “Life will be worship and worship will be life” (*Ibid.*)

21:23 This city will not have any need for the sun nor for the moon, and so it will have neither. Instead the glory of God and the glory of the Lamb will give it light. This ought to remind us that in Genesis 1 and the account of creation, there was light before the sun, moon, and stars were created. God was the light then, and He still is. The sun, moon, and stars are only light bearing bodies received continuously from Him Who is the Light of the world.

21:24 The word which is translated “nations” here, is ἔθνος, and it speaks of non-Jewish people; therefore, Gentiles. We have read in this chapter about Israel and about the church, but now the redeemed of the Gentile nations who are not in the church nor identified with Israel, will “walk in the light of it,” that is, in the light of the glory of God and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be complete oneness among all of the people of God. And the fact that these Gentile kings bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem, is an indication that in that city all social distinctions will no longer exist. There will be absolute equality in heaven. How it will delight the heart of our heavenly Father and of our Savior when there is complete and lasting oneness among all of us who are God’s people – “the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.”

So there will not only be perfect fellowship between every believer and God, but among all believers. It is hard to imagine that such a thing will be possible. But by the power and grace of God it will be.

21:25 I wouldn’t want to live in a house these days without a burglar alarm. But nobody will be in the burglar alarm business in heaven. There will be no need for it because “there shall be no night there.” Unregenerate sinners would not enjoy being in heaven because they love “darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19).

John Clements penned the words of that hymn,

In the land of fadeless day Lies the city foursquare;
It shall never pass away, And there is no night there.
God shall wipe away all tears;
There’s no death, no pain, nor fears;
And they count not time by years;
For there is no night there.

21:26 Not only do the kings bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem, laying it all aside, but the same is true of the nations of the earth. The Lord has an elect and redeemed people in all of the nations of the earth. People will be there from every kindred and tongue and tribe and nation, and they will bring their glory and honor into the city, and lay them at the feet of our Lord.

This expression speaks of how humility will characterize the people of God in the eternal state. We are so inclined to talk about what we have and what we have done, but in the New Jerusalem we will be talking about the Lord, Who He is, and What He has done for us. Pride and boasting and the insatiable appetite for power and possessions will be gone forever. Not only will we live in a new heaven and new earth, but we will be renewed as well.

21:27 We have been reading how perfect everything and everybody will be. Now we are told that there is nothing can defile us, nor anything that is abominable to God, nor anyone who makes a lie (like the Devil did in the Garden of Eden, and which men have been doing ever since. Peter tells us that our inheritance is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).

And the reason that sin will no longer be a possibility is because the only ones who will be in heaven are those who “are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Today we can be defiled in so many ways. It is the Devil’s business in this world to see that we are defiled. We can be defiled by what we see. We can be defiled by what we hear. We can be defiled by what we think. We can be defiled by what people do to us.

Abominations are everywhere around us, and sometimes even we are involved in them. Everything in this world that is displeasing to God is an abomination. No one will ever displease Him in heaven.

All lies will be gone. We lie to cover up our sins. We love to get our own way and to take advantage of other people. Nobody ever had to be taught to lie. We lie because it is our nature to lie. It is only by God’s grace that anyone tells the truth.

None of us can come close to imagining what it is going to mean when there is nothing around us, or within us, that can defile us, nor anything anywhere around us that is abominable to God, and where truth alone prevails in all of the circumstances of our lives. It is no wonder that after penning the words of this chapter, and the first part of the last chapter, that the Apostle John prayed, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” The Lord has been beseeching men to come to Him all through time. Now it is our turn to plead with Him to come for us.

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The revelation concerning the new heaven and the new earth continues through the first five verses of chapter 22. So it would have been better if the chapter division had been placed after 22:5 so that those first five verses would be a part of chapter 21. But the important thing is that we understand that 22:1-5 belongs to chapter 21.

22:1 Up to this point in the description of the New Jerusalem, attention has been upon the external part of the city. Now we are to have a brief glimpse into the internal part of the city. The main points that are emphasized are the pure river of the water of life which flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Thus far the picture is clear, but verse 2 is not as clear, and expositors have explained it in different ways. It is not very profitable to mention the different explanations that good men have given, but deal with the words as they are given realizing that we are talking about eternal conditions which will be very different from what we are used to in our universe today.

Our NT reading right now is in the Gospel of John. Actually today our assignment is the second half of John 4. Sometimes when the second part of a chapter is a continuation of the first part as far as the subject matter is concerned, I read the whole chapter at one time. John 4, as most of you know, is the story of the Lord and the Samaritan woman who met the well in Sychar, Samaria. She had come to the well for water, and the Lord asked her to give Him a drink. The Lord turned the conversation “living water,” or salvation. He told her that if she drank of the living water, not only would she never thirst again, but the water in her would become “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). I don’t see how anyone can dispute the fact that there is a connection between John 4 and Rev. 22. John saw “a pure river of water of life.” It comes out of the

throne of God and of the Lamb. Surely this pictures in the eternal state that we are dealing with the fulness of salvation, a salvation which always comes from “the throne of God and of the Lamb, *i.e.*, meaning that it not only comes from God, but is sovereignly administered by God and His Son, the Lamb (which also is our Lord’s title having to do with salvation). He is “the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world.” So we have a double emphasis upon salvation here in verse 1 of chapter 22.

The same emphasis continues in verse 2.

state time and day and night will be a thing of the past. Of course we know that often in Scripture things which go beyond our understanding are expressed in terms with which we are familiar.

Some expositors speak of twelve trees since this tree of life bears a different fruit every month. But the text here speaks of just a single tree with twelve different kinds of fruit. The tree of life is only mentioned in two books of the Bible – Genesis and Revelation. Cf. Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14. (Read these.) We have to say that there is a connection between the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were put out of the Garden of Eden so they could not eat of the tree of life, apparently meaning that if they did, they would have lived forever in their sins. The Bible does not say this, but it is what many Bible teachers believe since Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden.

Now this emphasis on salvation in both verses 1 and 2 of this chapter is in harmony with what the Apostle Paul wrote in Eph. 2:7:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

This explains one thing that we will be doing in the eternal state, learning more and more about “the exceeding riches of God’s grace in our salvation. “Twelve manner of fruits” goes with the words, “exceeding riches.”

Even the leaves will be beneficial. This does not mean that there will be sicknesses among the nations in the eternal state, but it pictures our salvation as ultimately meaning deliverance from all sin and its consequences. Sin and sickness and death are certainly that from which we will ultimately be redeemed. And that is what John went on to say in verse 3.

22:3 “No more curse” has to do with sin and all of its disastrous effects upon all of us as human beings. Our bodies will be immortal and incorruptible. Sin will be a thing of the past, and the same is true even of temptation. Sin is what has separated us from God. The reason that John gives us in verse 3 that there will be “no more curse” is because “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it” to guarantee that no curse shall be able to enter in. Cf. also Rev. 21:27. The Devil will not be there, nor will there be any possibility that he could come. He is in the lake of fire under the eternal judgment of God.

“And His servants shall serve Him.” Service now involves toil, and also brings on persecution. But in the eternal state there will be no one there but the Lord’s servants. And serving God and the Lamb throughout eternity will be one of our greatest joys. Our service here has many flaws in it, but not so in eternity. Then we shall serve Him flawlessly.

22:4 A great part of our glorification will be the constant enjoyment of the presence of God and of Christ. There will be no more broken fellowship, no sin by which our heavenly Father, or our Savior, will be

grieved. And His Name will be in all of our foreheads. Seiss had this comment on the meaning of God's name in our foreheads:

In the courts of kings, the most honored servants and favorites wear badges and marks in token of the king's confidence, favor, and affection. The noble knights have their ribbons; and those whom the king delighteth to honor have their chains of gold about their necks, the rosettes, their indications of standing with their sovereign. So these all have the Name of the All-Ruling Lamb upon their foreheads, showing exaltation, honor, and blessedness of the very highest degree. They are the enthroned princes of the eternal realm, the servants of the Supreme God, the very organs and expressions of the everlasting Throne (p. 510).

22:5 "And there shall be no night there" – repeated from 21:25, and for emphasis. One purpose for the night is that we might get rest for our bodies. But in eternity will not need that kind of rest. Our bodies will be glorified. Candles, light globes, will no longer be needed. Even the sun will exist no more because the Lord God will give us light, and with Him there will be no power failures. What a constant manifestation there will be in the eternal state of the total sufficiency of our God in all things.

And it is on this note that the prophecies of this great book come to an end. All that remains is for the Apostle John, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to conclude what God had been pleased to reveal to him about the coming glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember the title of this book: not the revelations of future events, but the revelation of Jesus Christ. Just as the book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, so in many ways this book of The Revelation is the continuation and completion of all that John wrote in his Gospel. And we will see in the Apostle John's concluding remarks how completely overwhelmed he was by all that he had seen and all that he was command to write. So let us turn now to the conclusion of the book.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
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V. The Conclusion (Rev. 22:6-21).

John MacArthur gives the following survey of where we have been in this book, as we come to the conclusion and application of the message of the book:

Verses 6-21 of this chapter form the epilogue to the book of Revelation. Having taken the reader through the amazing sweep of future history all the way into the eternal state, all that is left for John to record is this divine postscript. By this point in the Apocalypse, all the glorious and gracious purpose that God ordained before the foundation of the world have been attained. The devastating judgments of the Tribulation have been carried out, and their memory will remain only in the torment of the damned. The Lord Jesus Christ will have returned in blazing glory, executed His enemies, and reigned on earth for a thousand years. All rebels, both angels and humans, will have been sentenced to their final, eternal punishment in the lake of fire. The present universe will have been “uncreated,” and the eternal new heaven and the new earth created, in which the King of kings will be reigning with His Father. The holy angels and the redeemed of all ages will be dwelling in eternal bliss with Him in the new creation, particularly in heaven’s capital city, the New Jerusalem. From His throne in the center of that majestic city, the brilliant, blazing glory of God will radiate throughout the re-created universe. Absolute and unchanging holiness will characterize all who dwell in the universal and eternal kingdom of God. They will constantly praise, worship, and serve Him throughout eternity in an environment of perfect peace, joy, and fulfillment (II, 290-291).

Seiss gives a similar survey in his commentary, and then adds:

And it only remains now to give a few closing particulars with reference to these momentous Revelations, that men may attend to them with that reverence and faith which of right belongs to them. May God help us to hear, learn, and inwardly digest them to our abiding consolation! (pp. 512-513).

The first point of this epilogue I have called:

A. The divine affirmation of the book (Rev. 22:6-13).

22:6 Probably the majority of people in every generation are inclined to dismiss this book as pure fantasy, or as the hallucinations of an old apostle who had just lived too long. But here, and two times before, we are told that these words are “faithful and true.” Cf. 19:9; 21:5 and 22:6. Twice these words are used as a title for our Lord. Cf. 3:14; 19:11. In defining these words, “faithful and true,” Swete, in explaining them, had this to say:

These great sayings which concern the future of humanity and the world must be seen to rest on a secure basis; men need to be assured that they are not only worthy of confidence [“faithful,” are worthy of our faith], but answer to the realities which in due time will enter into the experience of life [“true”] though for the present they cannot be fully realized or adequately expressed (p. 279).

This book is not only a revelation about our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is a revelation from Him. The revelation itself is not only worthy of our full acceptance, but so is the Lord. And the word is a true revelation of true people and true events, but our Lord is the true God, and we see in Him those evidences which show that He is truly the Son of God. These words here in verse 6 were probably spoken by the angel who had been showing John what he had seen, and what was predicted for the future. Angels have no question about who Jesus Christ is, nor do they have any doubts concerning the Scriptures.

Compare this verse with Rev. 1:1. (Read.) So the book begins this way, and ends this way. But here in this

verse we have the angel's testimony concerning the complete reliability and authority of this book of prophecy. Now let us turn in verse 7 in which we have the testimony of our Lord Himself.

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22:7 The Lord Himself is speaking here. "Behold, I come quickly." After more than 2,000 years how are we to explain these words? Cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-18. In terms of time, we would not say that it is "quickly." But comparing 2,000 years with eternity itself, 2,000 years is nothing more than two days. The delay from our standpoint in time, would tend to make us feel that these prophecies are not reliable. But, as God counts time, the time is short. But even from our standpoint, we often remark about how quickly time passes by. And so this expression, "Behold, I come quickly," is intended to keep all of us in a state of constant expectation of the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Dr. Walvoord mentioned in his commentary with regard to the word "shortly" in verse 6 and the word "quickly" here in verse 7, that the events of this book could not only take place at any time, but also that when they start, it will be sudden. And we can add that once they start, the movement of events will be amazingly fast. People who wait, perhaps saying, "When I see these things start, then I will do something about my relationship with God and with Christ," may be waiting too long.

Another way in which the end of this book is identified with its beginning, is that we had the first beatitude of the book in Rev. 1:3; here is the sixth, and we have the seventh and last in 22:14. The others are in 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; and 20:6.

Those people are blessed who keep the sayings, or words, of the prophecy of this book. The word "keep" (τηρέω) means *to guard* or *protect* what has been revealed in this book. As time goes on more and more will be inclined to question its dependability, but a special blessing, special happiness, is to be experienced in the lives of those who continue to hold to its truth, its complete reliability. As MacArthur has pointed out, this is one way in which we as the people of God are to persevere. Cf. 14:12. Regardless of how long the coming of the Lord may, to us, be delayed, we are to persevere in believing the truth, and standing for the truth, and defending the truth. Thayer says that τηρέω suggests also "present possession" (p. 622). And so we are not to abandon this truth, but we are to continue to believe it and to know that in God's time it will all be fulfilled.

"The sayings of the prophecy of this book" – See the same expression in vv. 10, 18, 19. Any revelation from God can properly be called *a prophecy*. That applies to events which have taken place as well as those which are predicted for the future. The prophets were preachers, and in OT times a man, such as Daniel, was not considered to be a prophet if he did not preach. But here in the book of Revelation, the prophecy has to do with events that are yet to come and people who are yet to appear upon the earth. And so at the beginning of this book, and at the end, the promise of blessing is repeated.

Now, while this promise of blessing is given to those who keep, or guard, the book of the Revelation, the same responsibility applies to all of the Word of God. MacArthur made this point:

Believers are called to guard or protect the book of Revelation. It must be defended against detractors who deny its relevance, against critics who deny its veracity and authority, as well as against confused interpreters who obscure its meaning. In fact, all Scripture is to be guarded (II, 294).

But we do not defend it by arguing with those who deny that it is the Word of God; we defend it by proclaiming it against the opposition and criticism of those who would draw us into a debate. The Word is living and powerful and sharper than any twoedged sword. And, under the blessing of the Lord, the preaching of the Word carries with it the power to convict people of its truth, and even to convey the faith to accept the teaching

of Scripture as the true Word of God.

So the Lord Jesus, the One Who is coming, places His stamp of truth and authority upon all that is written in this book.

22:8 Here we come to the testimony of the Apostle John. He confirms not only that he saw these things, but that he also heard everything that was said and all of the sounds that were made. And although he saw and heard things that he had never seen nor heard before, and things which no one else had ever seen nor heard before, yet he was firmly convinced that what he had written was in truth the Word of the living God.

In reading these words about John, most people who are acquainted with the writings of the Apostle John, will remember his use of these verbs, *see* and *hear*. Cf. 1 John 1:1, 3. In 1 John he was telling about what he had seen and heard in his personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry on earth. Here in the book of the Revelation, he was writing about things that were yet to come. But he is just as convinced of the truth of what was yet to be as he was of that which had already taken place.

And here, when it had all been completed, he fell down to worship. Let me just take it that far for the present. One evidence that we are understanding the truth even as we read it, is that the truth of God's Word produces in our hearts an attitude of worship, not argument. And he did something here which he had already done in chapter 1, and which he did not do in any of his epistles, nor in the Gospel which bears his name, he gave his name: "I John." Cf. also Rev. 1:1, 4, 9. The Apostle John, the human instrument through whom the Holy Spirit has given us this amazing revelation, was thoroughly convinced, and here adds his testimony to that already given by the angel and by the Lord Himself. But he does it, not by what he says, but by what he does – falling down to worship.

He had been in this position before (where he had on the spur of the moment to worship the angel who had been with him during this time). Cf. 19:10. John knew that he was not to worship angels. But you and I who have never been where he was as he saw these visions, cannot appreciate how overwhelming such an experience must have been to him. Notice the humility of the angel in the following verse.

22:9 The angel told John not to do two things, but to do one other. One negative is in verse 9, and the other in verse 10. Here he was told what he had been told before: not to worship the angel. And then the angel told him why. Basically it was because though angels are greater than men, yet in their relationship with God, they stand on the same ground as the people of God. And he said three things about himself:

- 1) "I am thy fellowservant."
- 2) I am "of thy brethren the prophets."
- 3) I am "of them which keep the sayings of this book."

This angel placed himself on the same level with John. He was God's servant, and John was God's servant. The angel also put himself along with others who had been servants of God in giving the Word to the people of God. Finally, the angel put himself in line with those who would receive the blessing of God because he identified himself with those who "keep the sayings of this book." Actually angels are ministering spirits, sent forth from God to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation. See Heb. 1:14. There was a tendency on the part of some Jews to worship angels because angels had been God's instruments for giving them the Law. It is quite amazing that in our day, people who will not worship God, nor His Son Jesus Christ, will nevertheless worship angels. None of the elect angels allow anyone to worship them, and we should be careful that we are never guilty of taking glory to ourselves instead of giving it all to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to worship God? Primarily it focuses attention more upon the attitude of our hearts and

humbling ourselves before the Lord even more than what we say. Only as we recognize the greatness of God and of Christ and our nothingness in comparison, can our words possibly please Them. It is not to be just an act, but a way of life. In John 4 in our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman we have one of the most important chapters in the Bible on the subject of worship. John MacArthur pointed out that

worship is a major theme in the Apocalypse (cf. 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 15:2-4; 19:1-6). . . God alone is the only acceptable Person to worship [by which I am sure that he would include the Son and the Holy Spirit]. The Bible forbids the worship of anyone else, including angels, saints the Virgin Mary, or any other created being (cf. Col. 2:18).

Worship of creatures is a sign of our depravity. And it provokes the judgment of God. Cf. Rom. 1:18-25.

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This was the second time that John had to be rebuked for at least attempting to worship the angel. Cf. 19:10. We need to notice how alarming it was to the angel on both occasions that he might be worshiped. Many expositors have been critical of John for what he did on both occasions. Matthew Henry says that it shows the humility and faithfulness of John that he would leave on permanent record for others to read that for which he would be criticized.

Dr. Walvoord pointed out in his commentary that "worship" is an aorist imperative. And so it is a command to worship God, but also it carries with it the idea that we are to worship only God!

22:10 Then the angel went on to tell John not to seal "the sayings of the prophecy of this book." It was not just for John that this revelation was given. Obviously it was given for the seven churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. But it has been a very important book for all believers from the day John wrote it down to the present day. The reason that angel gave for not sealing the book is that "the time is at hand." John was writing in the same dispensation in which we are living, that of the church, or that when the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be more prominent than in any past age. So "the time is at hand" would mean that there would be no other dispensation or age separating where John was with the events which will make up the Great Tribulation. Today in the epistles we are taught to look for and to expect momentarily the coming of the Lord for His church. But after that, and immediately after that, the events of Rev. 6-22 will take place as they have been revealed in this book.

But the angel did not mean that the book was to be left open for further additions. That will be clear when we get to verses 18 and 19. The book is finished. And knowing this will help us in understand verse 11.

Therefore, this is an important book, a very important book, for believers of this present age to read and to be acquainted with.

22:11 The connection of this verse with verse 10 is that obviously people are to read it, those who know the Lord especially, but also those who do not know the Lord. The hope is that reading this book will bring the unsaved to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But if an unsaved person reads it, and then says that this is not the only way, and that there have been other revelations, or later revelations, then he can expect to remain in his present condition and suffer the consequences in eternal judgment. After God has revealed what He has revealed in this book, there is nothing more that He is going to say. And so if the unregenerate are waiting for more, or looking for something else that will not require that they turn from their sins, then it must be said, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." A final invitation is about to be given. See v. 17. If the message of the Gospel is rejected, the doom of the unsaved will be sealed. There is no other salvation.

In the same way, those who are saved, and are “righteous” and “holy,” can be assured that with Christ as their Savior, they are securing in the fold of salvation. There does not need to be more. The Gospel of Christ is all that is needed.

An “unjust” person will also be “filthy.” On the other hand, a “righteous” person will be a “holy” person. So the first two terms describe the lost; the second two terms describe the saved. An “unjust” person is one who habitually sins against God. And the effect of unrighteousness is filthiness, people who are morally dirty and defiled. In the same way righteousness leads to holiness. Paul taught this in his letter to the church at Ephesus. See Eph. 4:22-24:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

22:12 Here we have the Lord Jesus Christ speaking. His words would be a warning to the unjust that the time is short, and that they must not delay in coming to the Savior. For Him to come “quickly” obviously did not mean that He was about to come then, but it did mean, and does mean, that when He comes it will be suddenly, and for most people, unexpectedly.

In 20:12 and 13 we read about the judgment of the wicked. They will be judged according to their works. Here the word is “rewards,” but also will according to their works. But this seems to be rewards for the righteous. This can be tied in with the Lord’s promises to the overcomers in His letters to the seven churches in Rev. 2 and 3. The Apostle Paul also referred to this in 1 Cor. 3:10-15:

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

We need to be sure that we are building with gold, silver, and precious stones, not with wood, hay, and stubble.

22:13 Cf. Rev. 1:18 and 21:6. The first, “Alpha and Omega,” the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are His names. The two following expressions explain and emphasize the meaning and the importance of the first: “the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” Dr. Walvoord pointed out that there are various combinations of this title in 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 21:6 (as noted above). They speak of the eternal nature of the Lord Jesus, but also of His immutability as in 1:8, “which is, and which was, and which is to come.” The meaning is the same as the description of our Lord in Heb. 13:8, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” What He was in Genesis 1, He continues to be in Rev. 22, and He is the same from Genesis, all through the Bible to Revelation. There is much, much comfort for all of this in these great truths, and the unchanging nature of our Lord is a truth giving major support to the unchanging character of the Word of God. This is deep and wonderful theology. “Christ is the beginning and source of all things as well as the goal and consummation of all, in a word, the eternal God” (Walvoord, pp. 335, 336).

22:14 In this verse we are told about those who are in the city; in verse 15 those who are outside of the city. It seems that the reading of this, the seventh and last beatitude of this book, should be, “Blessed are they

who wash their robes,” rather than what we have in the KJV, “Blessed are they that keep his commandments.” And doctrinally the alternate reading is better because we do not have the right, the authority, to enter the city because we keep our Lord’s commandments, but because our garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. But if you accept the authorized reading we can say that only true believers keep the commandments of the Lord.

But let us not let the different textual reading cause us to overlook the first word in both reading, the word, “Blessed.” The new Jerusalem will be the place of true happiness, a place where nothing to cause unhappiness will ever be able to enter in. King David understood this wonderful truth as he wrote in Psa. 16:11:

11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

But this will be only for those who are in the city. What about those outside? See v. 15.

22:15 This is the fourth description of the unsaved that we have in these last two chapters of the Revelation. See Rev. 21:8, 27; 22:11a, and here.

“For without,” *i.e., outside of the city*, but not necessarily just outside of the gates. Here are described the people who have no right to end, and who never will be inside. The place where they will be is hell. Who can read a list like this and turn away and say that sin is not something that we all need to be concerned about. Sin is the reason for the judgment of God, and everybody needs to pay attention to these words so that they will understand why they need to be saved. “For the wages of sin is death, but . . . (Rom. 6:23).

After Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, had made a similar list of sins himself, went on to say this:

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6).

“Dogs” – This was a term of disgust that Jews used for Gentiles, and Gentiles used for Jews. Walvoord said that refers to “men of low character” (p. 336). Swete says in his commentary, “No one who has watched the dogs that prowl in the quarters of an Eastern city (Ps. lviii [lix] 7, 15) will wonder at the contempt and disgust which the word suggests to the eastern mind” (p. 308).

“Sorcerers” – The word refers to the use of drugs and delving into the occult. Satan worship would come under this heading.

“Fornicators” and “murderers” are often found connected with each other.

“Idolaters” are joined with covetousness in Col. 3:5.

“Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” Even today we talk about a person who has been living a lie. He pretends to be something that he is not. He is a hypocrite.

We tend to categorize sins, indicating that some are worse than others. We would be inclined to say that a liar is not as bad as a murderer. And the Scriptures give us some justification for doing this. But sin is sin. And all sinned must be judged. Whether a person is a liar or a murderer, he is doomed for eternal judgment unless he turns to Christ. There is only one Savior for either person. They are outside of the city, and will not be allowed in.

22:16 Our Lord speaks again. If “I, John” (v. 8), is authoritative, then “I, Jesus” is the highest possible

authority. Seiss says that “this Book is nothing but a base and blasphemous forgery . . . or it is one of the most directly inspired and authoritative writings ever given” (p. 513). But then he added, “But a forgery it cannot be” (*Ibid.*). From the time that it was written, the seven churches and the church in succeeding generations has considered it the work of the Apostle John who wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is consistent with the rest of Scripture in showing us how God will bring all things to a climax in fulfillment of previous promises, and to the honor and glory of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. And here, on the highest possible authority, our Lord Himself adds His own *imprimatur*, His own endorsement, that all that is written in this book is “faithful and true.” So this is not only a Revelation of Jesus Christ, but a Revelation from Jesus Christ, which, as verse 1 of this great prophecy says, “God gave to Him,” and which “He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.” So this verse (22:16) tells us what 1:1 has recorded that the Lord sent His angel “to testify these things in the churches.” And how did our Lord identify Himself? As “the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” What do these terms mean?

First we need to notice the words, “I am.” In the Greek this is emphatic: ἐγὼ εἰμι. And so this “I am” is to be added to the other I am’s of our Lord which are found in the Gospel of John:

- 1) “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).
- 2) “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).
- 3) “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58; 9:5)
- 4) “I am the door” (John 10:7, 9).
- 5) “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).
- 6) “I am the resurrection, and the life (John 11:25).
- 7) “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
- 8) “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 5).

These tell us what our Lord was when He was here on earth, but the “I am” also means what He always has been, and what He always will be.

So these words, “I am the root and the offspring of David,” indicate the same: what He was when John wrote this book of The Revelation, what He always has been, and what He always will be. As “the root” He was David’s ancestor; as “the Offspring of David,” He was descendant from David. “Consequently He fulfills all the Messianic promises connected with David’s family” (Thomas, II, p. 510). Swete says that our Lord with this title was claiming to be “the beginning and the end of the whole economy associated with the Davidic family” (p. 309). Cf. Rev. 5:5; Isa. 11:1.

As “the bright and morning star,” Thomas said, “He is explicitly the brightest star in the whole galaxy. He is the One whose return will remove the cold and dark hour before the sunrise and bring in the perfect day of God” (*Ibid.*). Our Lord’s glory outshines all others, and His coming heralds the beginning of a new day in a new heaven and a new earth.

22:17 There is no doubt but that the last statement of this verse is an appeal of people to come to Christ. But it may be that in the first statement, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come,” we have the Holy Spirit and the saints calling for the Lord to return. The second statement is more individual, and probably refers to each individual believer who *hears* the message of this book. He, or she, too, is to call for the Lord’s return. But the third statement is addressed to those who are “athirst.” Thayer says that the verb *to thirst* describes those “who painfully feel their want [lack] of, and eagerly long for, those things by which the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened” (p. 153. Cf. John 4:13-14:

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

The one who thirst is to “take of the water of life freely.” “Freely suggests that there is no reason why such a blessing should be offered to those who are thirsty, but it also suggests that the offer is a free offer, by grace, as a gift. What a picture of salvation this is! And, as we read this verse today, the offer still holds.

It is interesting to see that the desire for the Lord’s return, and a desire to see people saved, are not inconsistent with each other. Both of these desires should be on our hearts until the very time that the Lord comes for us.

22:18 This verse sounds a solemn warning, and a second warning is given in verse 19. Both emphasize what a dangerous thing it is to tamper with the Word of God.

The first warning is to those who would add to this book. Religionists and cultists add to the Word. To do so manifests, not a greater insight into future events, but is glaring evidence that those who add are not saved, and will fall under the judgments predicted. It seems that this also is an indication that no further revelation is to be given. Prophecy has come to an end with the Apostle John’s writing of this book.

22:19 The second warning has to do with those who would deduct anything from this prophecy. Expositors tend to skip over this verse since it seems to indicate that it is possible for a person to be saved, and then to lose his salvation. We know from Scripture that this is not possible. Once a person is truly saved, that will never change. What this verse seems to suggest is that the person that is referred to here is a person who claims to be saved, but his actions demonstrate not only that he is not saved, but that by tampering with the Word of God, all possibility that he will ever be saved is gone, and gone forever!

And so a person who dares either to add to the Word, or to take away from the Word, is demonstrating that he, or she, is not a true child of God.

22:20 This verse indicates that there is a third group: those who accept this book as it is, and whose hearts are set on the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise that He is coming to make all things new. And for the encouragement of their faith, He repeats His promise: “Surely I come quickly.”

“Surely” is a strong affirmation of the Lord’s promise. It is similar to *verily*. The promises of a new heaven and a new earth mean nothing without the Promiser. “I come quickly.” He is not going to send an angel, nor is He going to be represented by one of the prophets or one of the apostles. He is coming Himself, in Person! And then it is that the Apostle John adds another “come” to those we had in verse 17. “Amen [so be it]. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” The Apostle John, the beloved disciple, has full confidence in the promise of his Lord. Only here, and in the best reading of verse 21, is the Lord called, “Lord Jesus.” How many times has this ejaculatory prayer been repeated since this book was first written. Whether we are talking about the rapture of the church, or the Lord return after the Great Tribulation, the hope of the saints of all ages is in the certain coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

22:21 While we wait we have a need every day of the grace of our Lord Jesus. He has grace is a limitless supply, the favor of God upon His people, His strengthening grace, His free and abundant grace. Paul found God’s grace sufficient for all of His needs, and so will we. And one of the most amazing things about God’s grace is that He gives it when we least deserve it. How much better if we get it just because the Lord Jesus sees that we need it and want it.