

# FREE BIBLE COMMENTARY

**YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE!**

## ***Hope in Hard Times — The Final Curtain: Revelation***

By Dr. Bob Utley, retired professor of hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation)

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# ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

AB	Anchor Bible Commentaries, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols.), ed. David Noel Freedman
AKOT	Analytical Key to the Old Testament by John Joseph Owens
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts, James B. Pritchard
BDB	A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (4 vols.), ed. George A. Buttrick
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols.), ed. James Orr
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSOA	The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation (The Jewish Publication Society of America)
KB	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner
LAM	The Holy Bible From Ancient Eastern Manuscripts (the Peshitta) by George M. Lamsa
LXX	Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
MOF	A New Translation of the Bible by James Moffatt
MT	Masoretic Hebrew Text
NAB	New American Bible Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible: New English Translation, Second Beta Edition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (5 vols.), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
OTPG	Old Testament Passing Guide by Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks and Colin Smith
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SEPT	The Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
TEV	Today's English Version from United Bible Societies
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Robert Young
ZPBE	Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols.), ed. Merrill C. Tenney

# A Word From the Author: How Can This Commentary Help You?

Biblical interpretation is a rational and spiritual process that attempts to understand an ancient inspired writer in such a way that the message from God may be understood and applied in our day.

The spiritual process is crucial but difficult to define. It does involve a yieldedness and openness to God. There must be a hunger (1) for Him, (2) to know Him, and (3) to serve Him. This process involves prayer, confession and the willingness for lifestyle change. The Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process, but why sincere, godly Christians understand the Bible differently is a mystery.

The rational process is easier to describe. We must be consistent and fair to the text and not be influenced by our personal or denominational biases. We are all historically conditioned. None of us are objective, neutral interpreters. This commentary offers a careful rational process containing three interpretive principles structured to help us overcome our biases.

## **First Principle**

The first principle is to note the historical setting in which a biblical book was written and the particular historical occasion for its authorship. The original author had a purpose, a message to communicate. The text cannot mean something to us that it never meant to the original, ancient, inspired author. His intent—not our historical, emotional, cultural, personal or denominational need—is the key. Application is an integral partner to interpretation, but proper interpretation must always precede application. It must be reiterated that every biblical text has one and only one meaning. This meaning is what the original biblical author intended through the Spirit's leadership to communicate to his day. This one meaning may have many possible applications to different cultures and situations. These applications must be linked to the central truth of the original author. For this reason, this study guide commentary is designed to provide an introduction to each book of the Bible.

## **Second Principle**

The second principle is to identify the literary units. Every biblical book is a unified document. Interpreters have no right to isolate one aspect of truth by excluding others. Therefore, we must strive to understand the purpose of the whole biblical book before we interpret the individual literary units. The individual parts—chapters, paragraphs, or verses—cannot mean what the whole unit does not mean. Interpretation must move from a deductive approach of the whole to an inductive approach to the parts. Therefore, this study guide commentary is designed to help the student analyze the structure of each literary unit by paragraphs. Paragraph and chapter divisions are not inspired, but they do aid us in identifying thought units.

Interpreting at a paragraph level—not sentence, clause, phrase or word level—is the key in following the biblical author's intended meaning. Paragraphs are based on a unified topic, often called the theme or topical sentence. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the paragraph relates somehow to this unified theme. They limit it, expand it, explain it, and/or question it. A real key to proper interpretation is to follow the original author's thought on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis through the individual literary units that make up the biblical book. This study guide commentary is designed to help the student do that by comparing modern English translations. These translations have been selected because they employ different translation theories:

1. The United Bible Society's Greek text is the revised fourth edition (UBS4). This text was paragraphed by modern textual scholars.

2. The New King James Version (NKJV) is a word-for-word literal translation based on the Greek manuscript tradition known as the Textus Receptus. Its paragraph divisions are longer than the other translations. These longer units help the student to see the unified topics.
3. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is a modified word-for-word translation. It forms a mid point between the following two modern versions. Its paragraph divisions are quite helpful in identifying subjects.
4. The Today's English Version (TEV) is a dynamic equivalent translation published by the United Bible Society. It attempts to translate the Bible in such a way that a modern English reader or speaker can understand the meaning of the Greek text. Often, especially in the Gospels, it divides paragraphs by speaker rather than by subject, in the same way as the NIV. For the interpreter's purposes, this is not helpful. It is interesting to note that both the UBS4 and TEV are published by the same entity, yet their paragraphing differs.
5. The Jerusalem Bible (JB) is a dynamic equivalent translation based on a French Catholic translation. It is very helpful in comparing the paragraphing from a European perspective.
6. The printed text is the 1995 Updated New American Standard Bible (NASB), which is a word for word translation. The verse by verse comments follow this paragraphing.

### **Third Principle**

The third principle is to read the Bible in different translations in order to grasp the widest possible range of meaning (semantic field) that biblical words or phrases may have. Often a Greek phrase or word can be understood in several ways. These different translations bring out these options and help to identify and explain the Greek manuscript variations. These do not affect doctrine, but they do help us to try to get back to the original text penned by an inspired ancient writer.

This commentary offers a quick way for the student to check his interpretations. It is not meant to be definitive, but rather informative and thought-provoking. Often, other possible interpretations help us not be so parochial, dogmatic, and denominational. Interpreters need to have a larger range of interpretive options to recognize how ambiguous the ancient text can be. It is shocking how little agreement there is among Christians who claim the Bible as their source of truth.

These principles have helped me to overcome much of my historical conditioning by forcing me to struggle with the ancient text. My hope is that it will be a blessing to you as well.

Bob Utley  
June 27, 1996

# A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR VERIFIABLE TRUTH

What follows is a brief explanation of Dr. Bob Utley's hermeneutical philosophy and the procedures used in his commentaries.

Can we know truth? Where is it found? Can we logically verify it? Is there an ultimate authority? Are there absolutes which can guide our lives, our world? Is there meaning to life? Why are we here? Where are we going? These questions—questions that all rational people contemplate—have haunted the human intellect since the beginning of time (Eccl. 1:13-18; 3:9-11). I can remember my personal search for an integrating center for my life. I became a believer in Christ at a young age, based primarily on the witness of significant others in my family. As I grew to adulthood, questions about myself and my world also grew. Simple cultural and religious clichés did not bring meaning to the experiences I read about or encountered. It was a time of confusion, searching, longing, and often a feeling of hopelessness in the face of the insensitive, hard world in which I lived.

Many claimed to have answers to these ultimate questions, but after research and reflection I found that their answers were based upon (1) personal philosophies, (2) ancient myths, (3) personal experiences, or (4) psychological projections. I needed some degree of verification, some evidence, some rationality on which to base my worldview, my integrating center, my reason to live. I found these in my study of the Bible. I began to search for evidence of its trustworthiness, which I found in (1) the historical reliability of the Bible as confirmed by archaeology, (2) the accuracy of the prophecies of the Old Testament, (3) the unity of the Bible message over the sixteen hundred years of its production, and (4) the personal testimonies of people whose lives had been permanently changed by contact with the Bible. Christianity, as a unified system of faith and belief, has the ability to deal with complex questions of human life. Not only did this provide a rational framework, but the experiential aspect of biblical faith brought me emotional joy and stability.

I thought that I had found the integrating center for my life—Christ, as understood through the Scriptures. It was a heady experience, an emotional release. However, I can still remember the shock and pain when it began to dawn on me how many different interpretations of this book were advocated, sometimes even within the same churches and schools of thought. Affirming the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible was not the end, but only the beginning. How do I verify or reject the varied and conflicting interpretations of the many difficult passages in Scripture by those who were claiming its authority and trustworthiness? This task became my life's goal and pilgrimage of faith. I knew that my faith in Christ had brought me great peace and joy. My mind longed for some absolutes in the midst of the relativity of my culture and the dogmatism of conflicting religious systems and denominational arrogance. In my search for valid approaches to the interpretation of ancient literature, I was surprised to discover my own historical, cultural, denominational and experiential biases. I had often read the Bible simply to reinforce my own views. I used it as a source of dogma to attack others while reaffirming my own insecurities and inadequacies. How painful this realization was to me!

Although I can never be totally objective, I can become a better reader of the Bible. I can limit my biases by identifying them and acknowledging their presence. I am not yet free of them, but I have confronted my own weaknesses. The interpreter is often the worst enemy of good Bible reading! Let me list some of the presuppositions I bring to my study of the Bible so that you, the reader, may examine them along with me:

## I. Presuppositions

1. I believe the Bible is the sole inspired self-revelation of the one true God. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original divine author through a human writer in a specific historical setting.
2. I believe the Bible was written for the common person—for all people! God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible should not mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques.
3. I believe the Bible has a unified message and purpose. It does not contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.
4. I believe that every passage (excluding prophecies) has one and only one meaning based on the intent of the original, inspired author. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know the original author's intent, many indicators point in its direction:
  - a. the genre (literary type) chosen to express the message
  - b. the historical setting and/or specific occasion that elicited the writing
  - c. the literary context of the entire book as well as each literary unit
  - d. the textual design (outline) of the literary units as they relate to the whole message
  - e. the specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message
  - f. the words chosen to present the message

The study of each of these areas becomes the object of our study of a passage. Before I explain my methodology for good Bible reading, let me delineate some of the inappropriate methods being used today that have caused so much diversity of interpretation, and that consequently should be avoided:

## II. Inappropriate Methods

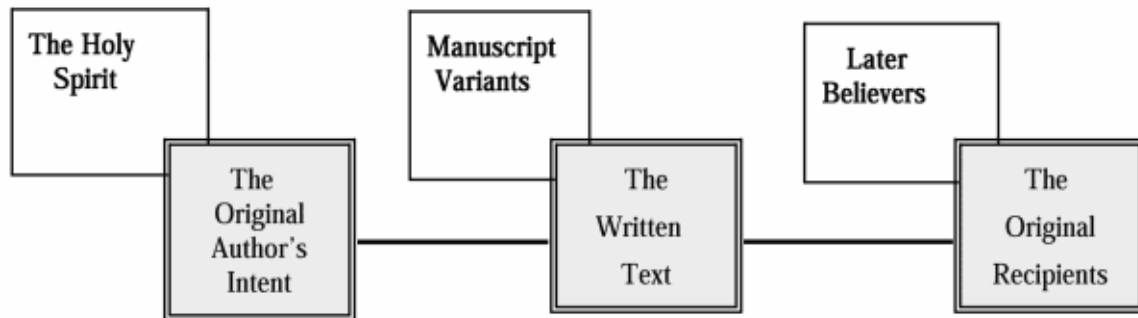
1. Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author's intent or the larger context. This is often called "proof-texting."
2. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
3. Ignoring the historical setting of the books and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
4. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author's intent.
5. Ignoring the original message by substituting one's own system of theology, pet doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author's purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker's authority. This is often referred to as "reader response" ("what-the-text-means-to-me" interpretation).

At least three related components may be found in all written human communication:



In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components. But to truly affirm

the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:



In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on the first two components: the original author and the text. I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and (2) "reader response" interpretation (what-it-means-to-me). Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications. But how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

### III. Possible Approaches to Good Bible Reading

At this point I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.

My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the text and the reader primary, not secondary. This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: "The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries." This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able to support our interpretations from the text itself. Five areas provide at least limited verification:

1. historical setting
2. literary context
3. grammatical structures (syntax)
4. contemporary word usage
5. relevant parallel passages
6. genre

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms. The four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

1. The first reading cycle
  - a. Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
    - (1) word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
    - (2) dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
    - (3) paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)

- b. Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.
  - c. Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
  - d. Identify the predominant literary genre
    - (1) Old Testament
      - a) Hebrew narrative
      - b) Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
      - c) Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
      - d) Law codes
    - (2) New Testament
      - a) Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
      - b) Parables (Gospels)
      - c) Letters/epistles
      - d) Apocalyptic literature
2. The second reading cycle
- a. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
  - b. Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
  - c. Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.
3. The third reading cycle
- a. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
  - b. List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
    - (1) the author
    - (2) the date
    - (3) the recipients
    - (4) the specific reason for writing
    - (5) aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
    - (6) references to historical people and events
  - c. Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
  - d. Check your historical setting by using study aids.
4. The fourth reading cycle
- a. Read the specific literary unit again in several translations
    - (1) word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
    - (2) dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
    - (3) paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
  - b. Look for literary or grammatical structures
    - (1) repeated phrases, Eph. 1:6,12,14
    - (2) repeated grammatical structures, Rom. 8:31
    - (3) contrasting concepts
  - c. List the following items
    - (1) significant terms
    - (2) unusual terms
    - (3) important grammatical structures
    - (4) particularly difficult words, clauses, and sentences
  - d. Look for relevant parallel passages
    - (1) look for the clearest teaching passage on your subject using a) "systematic theology" books b) reference Bibles c) concordances



- (2) look for a possible paradoxical pair within your subject. Many biblical truths are presented in dialectical pairs; many denominational conflicts come from proof-texting half of a biblical tension. All of the Bible is inspired, and we must seek out its complete message in order to provide a Scriptural balance to our interpretation.
- (3) look for parallels within the same book, same author or same genre; the Bible is its own best interpreter because it has one author, the Spirit.
- e. Use study aids to check your observations of historical setting and occasion
  - (1) study Bibles
  - (2) Bible encyclopedias, handbooks and dictionaries
  - (3) Bible introductions
  - (4) Bible commentaries (at this point in your study, allow the believing community, past and present, to aid and correct your personal study.)

#### **IV. Application of Bible Interpretation**

At this point we turn to application. You have taken the time to understand the text in its original setting; now you must apply it to your life, your culture. I define biblical authority as "understanding what the original biblical author was saying to his day and applying that truth to our day."

Application must follow interpretation of the original author's intent both in time and logic. We cannot apply a Bible passage to our own day until we know what it was saying to its day! A Bible passage should not mean what it never meant!

Your detailed outline, to paragraph level (reading cycle #3), will be your guide. Application should be made at paragraph level, not word level. Words have meaning only in context; clauses have meaning only in context; sentences have meaning only in context. The only inspired person involved in the interpretive process is the original author. We only follow his lead by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But illumination is not inspiration. To say "thus saith the Lord," we must abide by the original author's intent. Application must relate specifically to the general intent of the whole writing, the specific literary unit and paragraph level thought development.

Do not let the issues of our day interpret the Bible; let the Bible speak! This may require us to draw principles from the text. This is valid if the text supports a principle. Unfortunately, many times our principles are just that, "our" principles—not the text's principles.

In applying the Bible, it is important to remember that (except in prophecy) one and only one meaning is valid for a particular Bible text. That meaning is related to the intent of the original author as he addressed a crisis or need in his day. Many possible applications may be derived from this one meaning. The application will be based on the recipients' needs but must be related to the original author's meaning.

#### **V. The Spiritual Aspect of Interpretation**

So far I have discussed the logical process involved in interpretation and application. Now let me discuss briefly the spiritual aspect of interpretation. The following checklist has been helpful for me:

1. Pray for the Spirit's help (cf. I Cor. 1:26-2:16).
2. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing from known sin (cf. I John 1:9).
3. Pray for a greater desire to know God (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 42:1ff.; 119:1ff).
4. Apply any new insight immediately to your own life.
5. Remain humble and teachable.

It is so hard to keep the balance between the logical process and the spiritual leadership of the Holy Spirit. The following quotes have helped me balance the two:

1. from James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, pp. 17-18:  
 "The illumination comes to the minds of God's people—not just to the spiritual elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God's true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture."
  
2. on Kierkegaard, found in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75:  
 According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. "To read the Bible as God's word one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God's Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God."
  
3. H. H. Rowley in *The Relevance of the Bible*, p. 19:  
 "No merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study unto the richer inheritance of this greatest of all books."

## **VI. This Commentary's Method**

The Study Guide Commentary is designed to aid your interpretive procedures in the following ways:

1. A brief historical outline introduces each book. After you have done "reading cycle #3" check this information.
2. Contextual insights are found at the beginning of each chapter. This will help you see how the literary unit is structured.
3. At the beginning of each chapter or major literary unit the paragraph divisions and their descriptive captions are provided from several modern translations:
  - a. The United Bible Society Greek text, fourth edition revised (UBS4)
  - b. The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (NASB)
  - c. The New King James Version (NKJV)
  - d. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
  - e. Today's English Version (TEV)
  - f. The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

Paragraph divisions are not inspired. They must be ascertained from the context. By comparing several modern translations from differing translation theories and theological perspectives, we are able to analyze the supposed structure of the original author's thought. Each paragraph has one major truth. This has been called "the topic sentence" or "the central idea of the text." This unifying thought is the key to proper historical, grammatical interpretation. One should never interpret, preach or teach on less than a paragraph! Also remember that each paragraph is related to its surrounding paragraphs. This is why a paragraph level outline of the entire book is so important. We must be able to follow the logical flow of the subject being addressed by the original inspired author.

4. Bob's notes follow a verse-by-verse approach to interpretation. This forces us to follow the original author's thought. The notes provide information from several areas:
  - a. literary context
  - b. historical, cultural insights
  - c. grammatical information
  - d. word studies
  - e. relevant parallel passages
5. At certain points in the commentary, the printed text of the New American Standard Version (1995 update) will be supplemented by the translations of several other modern versions:
  - a. The New King James Version (NKJV), which follows the textual manuscripts of the "Textus Receptus."
  - b. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is a word-for-word revision from the National Council of Churches of the Revised Standard Version.
  - c. The Today's English Version (TEV), which is a dynamic equivalent translation from the American Bible Society.
  - d. The Jerusalem Bible (JB), which is an English translation based on a French Catholic dynamic equivalent translation.
6. For those who do not read Greek, comparing English translations can help in identifying problems in the text:
  - a. manuscript variations
  - b. alternate word meanings
  - c. grammatically difficult texts and structure
  - d. ambiguous texts Although the English translations cannot solve these problems, they do target them as places for deeper and more thorough study.
  - e. At the close of each chapter relevant discussion questions are provided which attempt to target the major interpretive issues of that chapter.

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS OF THE FUTURE VS. NEW TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS**

Through the years of my study of eschatology I have learned that most Christians do not have or want a developed, systematized, end-time chronology. There are some Christians who focus or major on this area of Christianity for theological, psychological, or denominational reasons. These Christians seem to become obsessed with how it will all end, and somehow miss the urgency of the gospel! Believers cannot affect God's eschatological (end-time) agenda, but they can participate in the gospel mandate (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Most believers affirm a Second Coming of Christ and an end-time culmination of the promises of God. The interpretive problems arising from how to understand this temporal culmination come from several biblical paradoxes.

1. the tension between Old Covenant prophetic models and New Covenant apostolic models
2. the tension between the Bible's monotheism (one God for all) and the election of Israel (a special people)
3. the tension between the conditional aspect of biblical covenants and promises ("if. . .then") and the unconditional faithfulness of God to fallen mankind's redemption
4. the tension between Near Eastern literary genres and modern western literary models
5. the tension between the Kingdom of God as present, yet future.
6. the tension between belief in the imminent return of Christ and the belief that some events must happen first.

Let us discuss these tensions one at a time.

### **FIRST TENSION** (OT racial, national, and geographical categories vs. all believers over all the world)

The OT prophets predict a restoration of a Jewish kingdom in Palestine centered in Jerusalem where all the nations of the earth gather to praise and serve a Davidic ruler, but Jesus nor the NT Apostles ever focus on this agenda. Is not the OT inspired (cf. Matt. 5:17-19)? Have the NT authors omitted crucial end-time events?

There are several sources of information about the end of the world.

1. OT prophets (Isaiah, Micah, Malachi)
2. OT apocalyptic writers (cf. Ezekiel 37-39; Daniel 7-12; Zechariah)
3. intertestamental, non-canonical Jewish apocalyptic writers (like I Enoch, which is alluded to in Jude)
4. Jesus Himself (cf. Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)
5. the writings of Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5; 1 Thessalonians 4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2)
6. the writings of John (1 John and Revelation)

Do these all clearly teach an end-time agenda (events, chronology, persons)? If not, why? Are they not all inspired (except the Jewish intertestamental writings)?

The Spirit revealed truths to the OT writers in terms and categories they could understand. However, through progressive revelation the Spirit has expanded these OT eschatological concepts to a universal scope ("the mystery of Christ," cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13). Here are some relevant examples:

1. The city of Jerusalem in the OT is used as a metaphor of the people of God (Zion), but is projected into the NT as a term expressing God's acceptance of all repentant, believing humans (the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22). The theological expansion of a literal, physical city into the new people of God (believing Jews and Gentiles) is foreshadowed in God's promise to redeem fallen mankind in Gen. 3:15, before there even were any Jews or a Jewish capital city. Even Abraham's call (cf. Gen. 12:1-3) involved the Gentiles (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5).
2. In the OT the enemies of God's people are the surrounding nations of the Ancient Near East, but in the NT they have been expanded to all unbelieving, anti-God, Satanically-inspired people. The battle has moved from a geographical, regional conflict to a worldwide, cosmic conflict (cf.

Colossians).

3. The promise of a land which is so integral in the OT (the Patriarchal promises of Genesis, cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:7,15; 17:8) has now become the whole earth. New Jerusalem comes down to a recreated earth, not the Near East only or exclusively (cf. Revelation 21-22).
4. Some other examples of OT prophetic concepts being expanded are
  - a. the seed of Abraham is now the spiritually circumcised (cf. Rom. 2:28-29)
  - b. the covenant people now include Gentiles (cf. Hos. 1:10; 2:23, quoted in Rom. 9:24-26; also Lev. 26:12; Exod. 29:45, quoted in 2 Cor. 6:16-18 and Exod. 19:5; Deut. 14:2, quoted in Titus 2:14)
  - c. the temple is now Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:61; 27:40; John 2:19-21) and through Him the local church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16) or the individual believer (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19)
  - d. even Israel and its characteristic descriptive OT phrases now refer to the whole people of God (i.e., "Israel," cf. Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16, i.e., "kingdom of priests," cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9-10; Rev. 1:6)

The prophetic model has been fulfilled, expanded, and is now more inclusive. Jesus and the Apostolic writers do not present the end-time in the same way as the OT prophets (cf. Martin Wyngaarden, *The Future of The Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment*). Modern interpreters who try to make the OT model literal or normative twist the Revelation into a very Jewish book and force meaning into atomized, ambiguous phrases of Jesus and Paul! The NT writers do not negate the OT prophets, but show their ultimate universal implication. There is no organized, logical system to Jesus' or Paul's eschatology. Their purpose is primarily redemptive or pastoral.

However, even within the NT there is tension. There is no clear systemization of eschatological events. In many ways the Revelation surprisingly uses OT allusions in describing the end instead of the teachings of Jesus (cf. Matthew 24; Mark 13)! It follows the literary genre initiated by Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, but developed during the intertestamental period (Jewish apocalyptic literature). This may have been John's way of linking the Old and New Covenants. It shows the age-old pattern of human rebellion and God's commitment to redemption! But it must be noted that although Revelation uses OT language, persons, and events, it reinterprets them in light of first century Rome (cf. Revelation 1:7).

## **SECOND TENSION** (monotheism vs. an elect people)

The biblical emphasis is on one personal, spiritual, creator-redeemer, God (cf. Exod. 8:10; Isa. 44:24; 45:5-7,14,18,21-22; 46:9; Jer. 10:6-7). The OT's uniqueness in its own day was its monotheism. All of the surrounding nations were polytheists. The oneness of God is the heart of OT revelation (cf. Deut. 6:4). Creation is a stage for the purpose of fellowship between God and mankind, made in His image and likeness (cf. Gen.1:26-27). However, mankind rebelled, sinning against God's love, leadership, and purpose (cf. Genesis 3). God's love and purpose was so strong and sure that He promised to redeem fallen humanity (cf. Gen. 3:15)!

The tension arises when God chooses to use one man, one family, one nation to reach the rest of mankind. God's election of Abraham and the Jews as a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod. 19:4-6) caused pride instead of service, exclusion instead of inclusion. God's call of Abraham involved the intentional blessing of all mankind (cf. Gen. 12:3). It must be remembered and emphasized that OT election was for service, not salvation. All Israel was never right with God, never eternally saved based solely on her birthright (cf. John 8:31-59; Matt. 3:9), but by personal faith and obedience (cf. Gen. 15:6, quoted in Romans 4). Israel lost her mission (the church is now a kingdom of priests, cf. Rev. 1:6; 2 Pet.2:5,9), turned mandate into privilege, service into a special standing! God chose one to choose all!

## **THIRD TENSION** (conditional covenants vs. unconditional covenants)

There is a theological tension or paradox between conditional and unconditional covenants. It is surely true that God's redemptive purpose/plan is unconditional (cf. Gen. 15:12-21). However, the mandated

human response is always conditional!

The "if. . .then" pattern appears in both OT and NT. God is faithful; mankind is unfaithful. This tension has caused much confusion. Interpreters have tended to focus on only one "horn of the dilemma," God's faithfulness or human effort, God's sovereignty or mankind's free will. Both are biblical and necessary.

This relates to eschatology, to God's OT promises to Israel. If God promises it, that settles it! God is bound to His promises; His reputation is involved (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38). The unconditional and conditional covenants meet in Christ (cf. Isaiah 53), not Israel! God's ultimate faithfulness lies in the redemption of all who will repent and believe, not in who was your father/mother! Christ, not Israel, is the key to all of God's covenants and promises. If there is a theological parenthesis in the Bible, it is not the Church, but Israel (cf. Acts 7 and Galatians 3).

The world mission of gospel proclamation has passed to the Church (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). It is still a conditional covenant! This is not to imply that God has totally rejected the Jews (cf. Romans 9-11). There may be a place and purpose for end-time, believing Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10).

#### **FOURTH TENSION** (Near Eastern literary models vs. western models).

Genre is a critical element in correctly interpreting the Bible. The Church developed in a western (Greek) cultural setting. Eastern literature is much more figurative, metaphorical, and symbolic than modern, western culture's literary models. It focuses on people, encounters, and events more than succinct propositional truths. Christians have been guilty of using their history and literary models to interpret biblical prophecy (both OT and NT). Each generation and geographical entity has used its culture, history, and literalness to interpret Revelation. Every one of them has been wrong! It is arrogant to think that modern western culture is the focus of biblical prophecy!

The genre in which the original, inspired author chooses to write is a literary contract with the reader. The book of Revelation is not historical narrative. It is a combination of letter (chapters 1-3), prophecy, and mostly apocalyptic literature. It is as wrong to make the Bible say more than was intended by the original author as it is to make it say less than what he intended! Interpreters' arrogance and dogmatism are even more inappropriate in a book like Revelation.

The Church has never agreed on a proper interpretation of Revelation. My concern is to hear and deal with the whole Bible, not some selected part(s). The Bible's eastern mindset presents truth in tension-filled pairs. Our western trend toward propositional truth is not invalid, but unbalanced! I think it is possible to remove at least some of the impasse in interpreting Revelation by noting its changing purpose to successive generations of believers. It is obvious to most interpreters that Revelation must be interpreted in light of its own day and its genre. An historical approach to Revelation must deal with what the first readers would have, and could have, understood. In many ways modern interpreters have lost the meaning of many of the symbols of the book. Revelation's initial main thrust was to encourage persecuted believers. It showed God's control of history (as did the OT prophets); it affirmed that history is moving toward an appointed terminus, judgment or blessing (as did the OT prophets). It affirmed in first century Jewish apocalyptic terms God's love, presence, power, and sovereignty!

It functions in these same theological ways to every generation of believers. It depicts the cosmic struggle of good and evil. The first century details may have been lost to us, but not the powerful, comforting truths. When modern, western interpreters try to force the details of Revelation into their contemporary history, the pattern of false interpretations continues!

It is quite possible that the details of the book may become strikingly literal again (as did the OT in relation to the birth, life, and death of Christ) for the last generation of believers as they face the onslaught of an anti-God leader (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2) and culture. No one can know these literal fulfillments of the Revelation until the words of Jesus (cf. Matthew 24; Mark 13; and Luke 21) and Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4-5; and 2 Thessalonians 2) also become historically evident. Guessing, speculation, and dogmatism are all inappropriate. Apocalyptic literature allows this flexibility. Thank God for images and

symbols that surpass historical narrative! God is in control; He reigns; He comes!

Most modern commentaries miss the point of the genre! Modern western interpreters often seek a clear, logical system of theology rather than being fair with an ambiguous, symbolic, dramatic genre of Jewish apocalyptic literature. This truth is expressed well by Ralph P. Martin in his article, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," in the book *New Testament Interpretation*, edited by I. Howard Marshall:

"Unless we recognize the dramatic quality of this writing and recall the way in which language is being used as a vehicle to express religious truth, we shall grievously err in our understanding of the Apocalypse, and mistakenly try to interpret its visions as though it were a book of literal prose and concerned to describe events of empirical and datable history. To attempt the latter course is to run into all manner of problems of interpretation. More seriously it leads to a distortion of the essential meaning of apocalyptic and so misses the great value of this part of the New Testament as a dramatic assertion in mythopoetic language of the sovereignty of God in Christ and the paradox of his rule which blends might and love (cf. Rev. 5:5,6; the Lion is the Lamb)" (p. 235).

W. Randolph Tate in his book *Biblical Interpretations* said:

"No other genre of the Bible has been so fervently read with such depressing results as apocalypse, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation. This genre had suffered from a disastrous history of misinterpretation due to a fundamental misunderstanding of its literary forms, structure, and purpose. Because of its very claim to reveal what is shortly to happen, apocalypse has been viewed as a road map into and a blueprint of the future. The tragic flaw in this view is the assumption that the books' frame of reference is the reader's contemporary age rather than the author's. This misguided approach to apocalypse (particularly Revelation) treats the work as if it were a cryptogram by which contemporary events can be used to interpret the symbol of the text. . First, the interpreter must recognize that apocalyptic communicates its messages through symbolism. To interpret a symbol literally when it is metaphoric is simply to misinterpret. The issue is not whether the events in apocalyptic are historical. The events may be historical; they may have really happened, or might happen, but the author presents events and communicates meaning through images and archetypes" (p. 137).

From *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, edited by Ryken, Wilhost and Longman III:

"Today's readers are often puzzled and frustrated by this genre. The unexpected imagery and out-of-this-world experiences seem bizarre and out of sync with most of Scripture. Taking this literature at face value leaves many readers scrambling to determine 'what will happen when,' thus missing the intent of the apocalyptic message" (p. 35)

## **FIFTH TENSION** (the Kingdom of God as present yet future)

The kingdom of God is present, yet future. This theological paradox becomes focused at the point of eschatology. If one expects a literal fulfillment of all OT prophecies to Israel then the Kingdom becomes mostly a restoration of Israel to a geographical locality and a theological pre-eminence! This would necessitate that the Church is secretly raptured out at chapter 5 and the remaining chapters relate to Israel (but note Rev. 22:16).

However, if the focus is on the kingdom being inaugurated by the promised OT Messiah, then it is present with Christ's first coming, and then the focus becomes the incarnation, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ. The theological emphasis is on a current salvation. The kingdom has come, the OT is fulfilled in Christ's offer of salvation to all, not His millennial reign over some!

It is surely true that the Bible speaks of both of Christ's comings, but where is the emphasis to be placed? It seems to me that most OT prophecies focus on the first coming, the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (cf. Daniel 2). In many ways this is analogous to the eternal reign of God (cf. Daniel 7). In the OT the focus is on the eternal reign of God, yet the mechanism for that reign's manifestation is the ministry of the Messiah (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26-27). It is not a question of which is true; both are true, but

where is the emphasis? It must be said that some interpreters become so focused on the millennial reign of the Messiah (cf. Revelation 20) that they have missed the biblical focus on the eternal reign of the Father. Christ's reign is a preliminary event. As the two comings of Christ were not obvious in the OT, neither is a temporal reign of the Messiah!

The key to Jesus' preaching and teaching is the kingdom of God. It is both present (in salvation and service), and future (in pervasiveness and power). Revelation, if it focuses on a Messianic millennial reign (cf. Revelation 20), is preliminary, not ultimate (cf. Revelation 21-22). It is not obvious from the OT that a temporal reign is necessary; as a matter of fact, the Messianic reign of Daniel 7 is eternal, not millennial.

## **SIXTH TENSION** (imminent return of Christ vs. the delayed *Parousia*)

Most believers have been taught that Jesus is coming soon, suddenly, and unexpectedly (cf. Matt. 10:23; 24:27,34,44; Mark 9:1; 13:30; Rev. 1:1,3; 2:16; 3:11; 22:7,10,12,20). But every expectant generation of believers so far has been wrong! The soonness (immediacy) of Jesus' return is a powerful promised hope of every generation, but a reality to only one (and that one a persecuted one). Believers must live as if He were coming tomorrow, but plan and implement the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:19-20) if He tarries.

Some passages in the Gospels and 1 and 2 Thessalonians are based on a delayed Second Coming (*Parousia*). There are some historical events that must happen first:

1. world-wide evangelization (cf. Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10)
2. the revelation of "the man of Sin" (cf. Matt. 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13)
3. the great persecution (cf. Matt. 24:21,24; Revelation 13)

There is a purposeful ambiguity (cf. Matt. 24:42-51; Mark 13:32-36)! Live every day as if it were your last but plan and train for future ministry!

## **CONSISTENCY AND BALANCE**

It must be said that the different schools of modern eschatological interpretation all contain half truths. They explain and interpret well some texts. The problem lies in consistency and balance. Often there is a set of presuppositions which use the biblical text to fill in the pre-set theological skeleton. The Bible does not reveal a logical, chronological, systematic eschatology. It is like a family album. The pictures are true, but not always in order, in context, in a logical sequence. Some of the pictures have fallen out of the album and later generations of family members do not know exactly how to put them back. The key to proper interpretation of Revelation is the intent of the original author as revealed in his choice of literary genre. Most interpreters try to carry their exegetical tools and procedures from other genres of the NT into their interpretations of Revelation. They focus on the OT instead of allowing the teachings of Jesus and Paul to set the theological structure and let Revelation act as illustrative.

I must admit that I approach this commentary on the Revelation with some fear and trepidation, not because of the curse of Rev. 22:18-19, but because of the level of controversy the interpretation of this book has caused and continues to cause among God's people. I love God's revelation. It is true when all men are liars (cf. Rom. 3:4)! Please use this commentary as an attempt to be thought provoking and not definitive, as a sign post and not a road map, as a "what if," not a "thus says the Lord." I have come face to face with my own inadequacies, biases, and theological agenda. I have also seen those of other interpreters. It almost seems that people find in Revelation what they expect to find. The genre lends itself to abuse! However, it is in the Bible for a purpose. Its placement as the concluding "word" is not by accident. It has a message from God to His children of each and every generation. God wants us to understand! Let us join hands, not form camps; let us affirm what is clear and central, not all that may be, might be, could be true. God help us all!



## SPECIAL TOPIC: OT PROPHECY

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Opening Statements

1. The believing community does not agree on how to interpret prophecy. Other truths have been established as to an orthodox position throughout the centuries, but not this one.
2. There are several well defined stages of OT prophecy
  - a. premonarchial
    - (1) individuals called prophets
      - (a) Abraham – Gen. 20:7
      - (b) Moses – Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 18:15; 34:10
      - (c) Aaron – Exod. 7:1 (spokesman for Moses)
      - (d) Miriam – Exod. 15:20
      - (e) Medad and Eldad – Num. 11:24-30
      - (f) Deborah – Jdgs. 4:4
      - (g) unnamed – Jdgs. 6:7-10
      - (h) Samuel – 1 Sam. 3:20
    - (2) references to prophets as a group – Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22
    - (3) prophetic group or guild – 1 Sam. 10:5-13; 19:20; 1 Kgs. 20:35,41; 22:6,10-13; 2 Kgs. 2:3,7; 4:1,38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.
    - (4) Messiah called prophet – Deut. 18:15-18
  - b. non-writing monarchial (they address the king):
    - (1) Gad – 1 Sam. 22:5; 2 Sam. 24:11; 1 Chr. 29:29
    - (2) Nathan – 2 Sam. 7:2; 12:25; 1 Kgs. 1:22
    - (3) Ahijah – 1 Kgs. 11:29
    - (4) Jehu – 1 Kgs. 16:1,7,12
    - (5) unnamed – 1 Kgs. 18:4,13; 20:13,22
    - (6) Elijah – 1 Kings 18 - 2 Kings 2
    - (7) Micaiah – 1 Kings 22
    - (8) Elisha – 2 Kgs. 2:9,12-13
  - c. classical writing prophets (they address the nation as well as the king): Isaiah – Malachi (except Daniel)

#### B. Biblical Terms

1. *Ro'eh* = "seer" (BDB 906), 1 Sam. 9:9. This reference itself shows the transition to the term *nabi*. *Ro'eh* is from the general term "to see." This person understood God's ways and plans and was consulted to ascertain God's will in a matter.
2. *Hozeh* = "seer" (BDB 302), 2 Sam. 24:11. It is basically a synonym of *Ro'eh*. It is from a rarer term "to see." The participial form is used most often to refer to prophets (i.e., "to behold").
3. *Nabi* = "prophet" (BDB 611), cognate of Akkadian verb *Nabu* = "to call" and Arabic *Naba'a* = "to announce." This is the most common term in the Old Testament to designate a prophet. It is used over 300 times. The exact etymology is uncertain but "to call" at present seems the best option. Possibly the best understanding comes from YHWH's description of Moses' relationship to Pharaoh through Aaron (cf. Exod. 4:10-16; 7:1; Deut. 5:5). A prophet is someone who speaks for God to His people (Amos 3:8; Jer. 1:7,17; Ezek. 3:4.)
4. All three terms are used of the prophet's office in 1 Chr. 29:29; Samuel – *Ro'eh*; Nathan – *Nabi* and Gad – *Hozeh*.
5. The phrase, *'ish ha – 'elohim*, "Man of God," is also a broader designation for a speaker for God. It is used some 76 times in the OT in the sense of "prophet."
6. The term "prophet" is Greek in origin. It comes from: (1) *pro* = "before" or "for" and (2) *phemi* = "to speak."

### II. DEFINITION OF PROPHECY

- A. The term "prophecy" had a wider semantic field in Hebrew than in English. The history books of Joshua through Kings (except Ruth) are labeled by the Jews as "the former prophets." Both Abraham (Gen. 20:7; Ps. 105:15) and Moses (Deut. 18:18) are designated as prophets (also Miriam, Exod. 15:20). Therefore, beware of an assumed English definition!
- B. "Propheticism may legitimately be defined as that understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 896.
- C. "The prophet is neither a philosopher nor a systematic theologian, but a covenant mediator who delivers the word of God to His people in order to shape their future by reforming their present," *Prophets and Prophecy, Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 13 p. 1152.

### III. PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

- A. Prophecy is a way for God to speak to His people, providing guidance in their current setting and hope in His control of their lives and world events. Their message was basically corporate. It is meant to rebuke, encourage, engender faith and repentance, and inform God's people about Himself and His plans. They hold God's people to fidelity to God's covenants. To this must be added that often it is used to clearly reveal God's choice of a spokesman (Deut. 13:1-3; 18:20-22). This, taken ultimately, would refer to the Messiah.
- B. Often, the prophet took a historical or theological crisis of his day and projected this into an eschatological setting. This end-time view of history is unique in Israel and its sense of divine election and covenant promises.
- C. The office of prophet seems to balance (Jer. 18:18) and usurp the office of High Priest as a way to know God's will. The Urim and Thummim transcend into a verbal message from God's spokesman. The office of prophet seems to also have passed away in Israel after Malachi. It does not reappear until 400 years later with John the Baptist. It is uncertain how the New Testament gift of "prophecy" relates to the Old Testament. New Testament prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; 1 Cor. 12:10,28-29; 14:29,32,37; Eph. 4:11) are not revealers of new revelation or Scripture, but forth-tellers and foretellers of God's will in covenant situations.
- D. Prophecy is not exclusively or primarily predictive in nature. Prediction is one way to confirm his office and his message, but it must be noted "less than 2% of OT prophecy is Messianic. Less than 5% specifically describes the New Covenant Age. Less than 1% concerns events yet to come." (Fee and Stuart, *Howto Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 166)
- E. Prophets represent God to the people, while Priests represent the people to God. This is a general statement. There are exceptions like Habakkuk, who addresses questions to God.
- F. One reason it is difficult to understand the prophets is because we do not know how their books were structured. They are not chronological. They seem to be thematic but not always the way one would expect. Often there is no obvious historical setting, time frame, or clear division between oracles. These books are difficult
  1. to read through in one sitting
  2. to outline by topic
  3. to ascertain the central truth or authorial intent in each oracle

### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHECY

- A. In the Old Testament there seems to be a development of the concept of "prophet" and "prophecy." In early Israel there developed a fellowship of prophets, led by a strong charismatic leader such as Elijah or Elisha. Sometimes the phrase, "the sons of the prophets," was used to designate this group (2 Kings 2). The prophets were characterized by forms of ecstasy (1 Sam. 10:10-13; 19:18-24).
- B. However, this period passed rapidly into individual prophets. There were those prophets (both true and false) who identified with the King, and lived at the palace (Gad, Nathan). Also, there were those who were independent, sometimes totally unconnected with the status quo of Israeli society (Amos). They are both male and female (2 Kgs. 22:14.)
- C. The prophet was often a revealer of the future, conditioned on man's immediate response. Often the prophet's task was an unfolding of God's universal plan for His creation which is not affected by

human response. This universal eschatological plan is unique among the prophets of the Ancient Near East. Prediction and Covenant fidelity are twin foci of the prophetic messages (cf. Fee and Stuart, p. 150). This implies that the prophets are primarily corporate in focus. They usually, but not exclusively, address the nation.

D. Most prophetic material was orally presented. It was later combined by means of theme, chronology, or other patterns of Near Eastern Literature which are lost to us. Because it was oral it is not as structured as written prose. This makes the books difficult to read straight through and difficult to understand without a specific historical setting.

E. The prophets use several patterns to convey their messages.

1. Court Scene – God takes His people to court, often it is a divorce case where YHWH rejects his wife (Israel) for her unfaithfulness (Hosea 4; Micah 6).
2. Funeral dirge – the special meter of this type of message and its characteristic "woe" sets it apart as a special form (Isaiah 5; Habakkuk 2).
3. Covenant Blessing Pronouncement – the conditional nature of the Covenant is emphasized and the consequences, both positively and negatively, are spelled out for the future (Deuteronomy 27-28).

#### V. HELPFUL GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PROPHECY

A. Find the intent of the original prophet (editor) by noting the historical setting and the literary context of each oracle. Usually it will involve Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant in some way.

B. Read and interpret the whole oracle, not just a part; outline it as to content. See how it relates to surrounding oracles. Try to outline the whole book.

C. Assume a literal interpretation of the passage until something in the text itself points you to figurative usage; then put the figurative language into prose.

D. Analyze symbolic action in light of historical setting and parallel passages. Be sure to remember this Ancient Near Eastern literature is not western or modern literature.

E. Treat prediction with care.

1. Are they exclusively for the author's day?
2. Were they subsequently fulfilled in Israel's history?
3. Are they yet future events?
4. Do they have a contemporary fulfillment and yet a future fulfillment?
5. Allow the authors of the Bible, not modern authors, to guide your answers.

F. Special concerns

1. Is the prediction qualified by conditional response?
2. Is it certain to whom the prophecy is addressed (and why)?
3. Is there a possibility, both biblically and/or historically, for multiple fulfillment?
4. The NT authors under inspiration were able to see the Messiah in many places in the OT that are not obvious to us. They seem to use typology or word play. Since we are not inspired we best leave this approach to them.

#### VI. HELPFUL BOOKS

A. *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* by Carl E. Amending and W. Ward Basque

B. *Howto Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

C. *My Servants the Prophets* by Edward J. Young

D. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy

E. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4, pp. 1067-1078

# INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

## OPENING STATEMENTS

A. Most of my adult academic/theological life I have had the presupposition that those who believe the Bible take it "literally" (and that is surely true for historical narrative). However, it has become more and more obvious to me that to take prophecy, poetry, parables, and apocalyptic literature literally is to miss the point of the inspired text. The author's intent, not literalness, is the key to a proper understanding of the Bible. To make the Bible say more (doctrinal specificity) is as dangerous and misleading as to interpret it in such a way as to make it say less than was intended by the original, inspired writer. The focus must be the larger context, the historical setting, and the intention the author expressed in the text itself and in his choice of genre. Genre is a literary contract between the author and the reader. To miss this clue is surely to lead to misinterpretation!

The book of Revelation is surely true, but not historical narrative, not meant to be taken literally. The genre itself is screaming this point to us if we will only hear it. This does not mean that it is not inspired, or not true; it is just figurative, cryptic, symbolic, metaphorical, and imaginative. The first century Jews and Christians were familiar with this type of literature, but we are not! The Christian symbolism in *The Lord of the Rings* or the *Chronicles of Narnia* might possibly be modern parallels.

- B. Revelation is a uniquely Jewish literary genre, apocalyptic. It was often used in tension-filled times (i.e., Israel dominated by Gentile powers) to express the conviction that God was in control of history and would bring deliverance to His people. This type of literature is characterized by
1. a strong sense of the universal sovereignty of God (monotheism and determinism)
  2. a struggle between good and evil, this evil age and the age of righteousness to come (dualism)
  3. use of secret code words (usually from the OT or intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature)
  4. use of colors, animals, sometimes animals/humans
  5. use of symbolic numbers (i.e. 4, 6, 7, 10, 12)
  6. use of angelic mediation by means of visions and dreams, but usually through angelic interpretation
  7. primarily focuses on the soon-coming, climatic events of the end-time (new age)
  8. use of a fixed set of symbols, not reality, to communicate the end-time message from God
  9. Some examples of this type of genre are:
    - a. Old Testament
      - (1) Isaiah 13-14; 24-27; 56-66
      - (2) Ezekiel 1; 26-28; 33-48
      - (3) Daniel 7-12
      - (4) Joel 2:28-3:21
      - (5) Zechariah 1-6, 12-14
    - b. New Testament
      - (1) Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and 1 Corinthians 15 (in some ways)
      - (2) 2 Thessalonians 2 (in most ways)
      - (3) Revelation (chapters 4-22)
    - c. Daniel 7-12 and Rev. 4-22 are the classic examples of this genre in the Bible
  10. non-canonical (taken from D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, pp. 37-38)
    - a. I Enoch, II Enoch (the Secrets of Enoch)
    - b. The Book of Jubilees
    - c. The Sibylline Oracles III, IV, V

- d. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs
- e. The Psalms of Solomon
- f. The Assumption of Moses
- g. The Martyrdom of Isaiah
- h. The Apocalypse of Moses (Life of Adam and Eve)
- i. The Apocalypse of Abraham
- j. The Testament of Abraham
- k. II Esdras (IV Esdras)
- l. I & II Baruch

11. There is a sense of duality in this genre. It sees reality as a series of dualisms, contrasts, or tensions (so common in John's writings) between:

- a. heaven - earth
- b. evil age (evil humans and evil angels) - new age of righteousness (godly humans and godly angels)
- c. current existence - future existence

All of these are moving toward a consummation brought about by God. This is not the world God intended it to be, but He is continuing to plan, work, and project His will for a restoration of the intimate fellowship begun in the Garden of Eden. The Christ event is the watershed of God's plan, but the two comings have brought about the current dualisms.

C. These apocalyptic works were never presented orally; they were always written. They are highly structured, literary works. The structure is crucial to a proper interpretation. A major part of the planned structure of the book of Revelation is seven literary units, which parallel each other to some extent (e.g., the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls). With each cycle the judgment increases: seals, 1/4 destruction; trumpets, 1/3 destruction; bowls, total destruction. Within each literary unit the Second Coming of Christ or some eschatological event occurs: (1) sixth seal, Rev. 6:12-17; (2) seventh trumpet, Rev. 11:15-18; an end-time angel judgment in Rev. 14:14-20; (3) seventh bowl, Rev. 16:17-21 and again in Rev. 19:11-21 and still again in Rev. 22:6-16 (also note the three-fold title for God in Rev. 1:4,8 and Christ in Rev. 1:17,18, "who is, who was, and who is to come," notice the future aspect is left out in Rev. 11:17 and Rev. 16:5 which means the future has come [i.e. second coming]). This shows that the book is not chronologically sequential, but a drama in several acts which foresees the same period of time in progressively violent OT judgment motifs (cf. James Blevins, *Revelation as Drama* and "The Genre of Revelation" in *Review and Expositor*, Sept. 1980, pp. 393-408).

There are seven literary sections plus a prologue and an epilogue

- 1. prologue, Rev. 1:1-8
- 2. Rev. 1:9-3 (Christ and the seven churches)
- 3. Rev. 4-8:1 (heaven and the seven seals [Rev. 2:1-17 interlude between 6th and 7th seals])
- 4. Rev. 8:2-11 (seven angels with trumpets [Rev. 10:1-11:13 interlude between 6th and 7th trumpets])
- 5. Rev. 12-14 (the two communities and their leaders)
- 6. Rev. 15-16 (seven angels with bowls)
- 7. Rev. 17-19 (Babylon and its judgment)
- 8. Rev. 20-22:5 (judgment and the new heaven and earth)
- 9. epilogue, Rev. 22:6-21

Another author who believed in the recapitulation theory is William Hendriksen. In his book, *More Than Conquerors*, he outlines the book this way:

- 1. Rev. 1-3 (Christ in the midst of the Seven Lampstands)
- 2. Rev. 4-7 (The Book with Seven Seals)
- 3. Rev. 8-11 (the Seven Trumpets of Judgment)
- 4. Rev. 12-14 (the woman and the man-child persecuted by the Dragon and His Helpers [the Beast and the Harlot])
- 5. Rev. 15-16 (the Seven Bowls of Wrath)

6. Rev. 17-19 (the fall of the Great Harlot and of the Beasts)
7. Rev. 20-22 (the judgment upon the Dragon (Satan) followed by the New Heaven and Earth, New Jerusalem), p. 28

In *More Than Conquerors*, William Hendriksen says that Revelation has seven sections: Rev. 1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-16; 20-22 and that each of these is parallel and covers the period between Christ's first coming and His second coming. Each ends with some aspect related to judgment and the Second Coming (pp. 22-31).

Although I surely agree in the dramatic parallelism of the seals, trumpets, and bowls and I also am very attracted to 17-19 being parallel to 20-22 (there is the second coming in Rev. 19:11-21 and another second coming in Rev. 22:6-16), I cannot see where each of his seven sections ends in the *Parousia*, especially chapters 1-3, unless there is an aspect of judgment seen as an eschatological event (cf. Rev. 2:5,7,11,16-17,25-26; 3:5,10,12,18-21). However, for me, this seven-fold recapitulation is becoming more and more a possibility for understanding the parallel structure of the whole book.

D. It is obvious that the number "seven" plays a large part in the structure of the book as can be seen from the seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Some other examples of "seven" are:

1. 7 blessings, Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14
2. 7 lampstands, Rev. 1:12
3. 7 spirits of God, Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6
4. 7 stars, Rev. 1:16,20; 2:1
5. 7 lamps of fire, Rev. 4:5
6. 7 seals on the scroll, Rev. 5:1
7. 7 horns, 7 eyes of the lamb, Rev. 5:6
8. 7 attributes of Jesus praised, Rev. 5:12
9. 7 signs in nature, Rev. 6:12-14
10. 7 types of men, Rev. 6:15
11. 7 attributes of God praised, Rev. 7:12
12. 7 angels before God, Rev. 8:2,6
13. 7 trumpets held by the seven angels, Rev. 8:6 (Rev. 15:1,6,7,8; 17:1; 21:9)
14. 7 signs, Rev. 12:1,3; 13:13,14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20
15. 7 heads, 7 diadems of the red dragon, Rev. 12:3
16. 7 heads of the sea beast, Rev. 13:1; 17:3,7
17. 7 angels, Rev. 14:6-20
18. 7 plagues, Rev. 15:1; 21:9
19. 7 hills, Rev. 17:9
20. 7 kings Rev. 17:10
21. 7 things that are no more in chapters 21-22 (Rev. 21:1,4[four times]; Rev. 21:25; 22:3)

E. The interpretation of this book is most susceptible to theological bias. One's presuppositions drive the interpretation of the ambiguous details. These theological presuppositions function on several levels

1. the origin of the symbols
  - a. Old Testament allusions
    - (1) the OT themes like creation, the fall, the flood, the exodus, restored Jerusalem
    - (2) hundreds of allusions (not direct quotes) from the OT prophets
  - b. intertestamental Jewish literature (I Enoch, II Baruch, Sibylline Oracles, II Esdras)
  - c. first century Greco-Roman world
  - d. ancient Near Eastern cosmological-creation accounts (especially Rev. 12)
2. the time frame of the book
  - a. first century

- b. every century
  - c. last generation
3. systematic theological grids (see definitions on p. 14, "Historical Theories of Interpretation," C; a good summary, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate)
    - a. preterist
    - b. historicist
    - c. futurist
    - d. idealist
  4. theological positions on chapter 20 (see chart on p. 193; good summaries: (1) *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse and *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock)
    - a. a millennial
    - b. post millennial
    - c. pre millennial
    - d. dispensational pre-millennial

In light of hermeneutical divergence (the different approaches to interpretation) and inappropriate dogmatism (the know-it-all attitude), how should an interpreter proceed?

1. let us admit that modern western Christians do not understand the genre and do not recognize the historical allusions that first century Christians would have immediately understood.
2. let us admit that every generation of Christians has forced the Revelation into its personal historical setting and all have been wrong so far.
3. Let us read the Bible before we read the theological systems. Look for the literary context of each vision/oracle and state the central truth in one declarative sentence. The central truth will be the same for every generation of believers while the specificity of the details may be relevant for only the first and/or last generation of believers. The details may be relevant, but history, not theology, will reveal their fulfillment.
4. Let us remember that this book is primarily a word of comfort and encouragement to faithfulness amidst the persecution of believers by unbelievers. This book is not meant to answer the curiosity of every generation of believers, nor outline a detailed plan of end-time events.
5. It is safe to affirm that fallen human society is on a collision course with the kingdom of God. It will appear at first that the world has won (like Calvary), but wait; God is sovereign, He is in control of history, of life and death. His people are victorious in Him!

F. Despite the difficulty and ambiguity of interpretation, this book has a message and is an inspired word from God to His people in every age. It is worth the extra effort necessary to study this unique book. Its strategic position in the NT canon speaks of its capstone message. Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, says

"Indeed, it may well be that, with the exception of the Gospels, the Apocalypse contains the most profound and moving teaching on Christian doctrine and discipleship found anywhere in Holy Scripture. Neither the fanaticism of some who have fixed their attention on prophecy rather than on Christ, nor the diversity of interpretive view-points should discourage us from pursuing Christian truth in this marvelous book" (p. 399).

Remember, these are truly the last words of Jesus to His church! The modern Church dares not ignore or minimize them! They are to prepare believers for persecution and conflict in light of God's sovereignty (monotheism), the reality of the evil one (limited dualism), the ongoing results of the fall (human rebellion), and God's promises to redeem mankind (unconditional covenant, cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; Exod. 19:5-6; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21).

**AUTHOR**

A. Internal evidence of John the Apostle's authorship

1. Author named himself four times as John (cf. Rev. 1:1,4,9; 22:8)
2. He also called himself
  - a. a bond servant (cf. Rev. 1:1; 22:6)
  - b. a brother and fellow-partaker in tribulation (cf. Rev. 1:9)
  - c. a prophet (cf. Rev. 22:9), and called his book a prophecy (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19)
3. He knows the OT (does not use LXX, but Targums) as well as the wilderness wandering period, the Tabernacle and contemporary Synagogue procedures.

B. External evidence of John the Apostle's authorship from early Christian authors

1. John the Apostle, son of Zebedee
  - a. Justin Martyr (Rome A.D. 110-165) in *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.4
  - b. Irenaeus (Lyons A.D. 120-202) in *Against Heresies* IV.14.2; 17.6; 21.3; V.16.1; 28.2; 30.3; 34.6; 35.2
  - c. Tertullian (North Africa A.D. 145-220) in *Against Praxeas* 27
  - d. Origen (Alexandria A.D. 181-252) in
    - (1) *On the Soul*, L:8:1
    - (2) *Against Marcion*, II:5
    - (3) *Against Heretics*, III:14, 25
    - (4) *Against Celsus*, VI:6, 32; VIII:17
  - e. The Muratorian Canon (Rome A.D. 180-200)
2. Other Candidates
  - a. John Mark – This was first mentioned by Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (a.d. 247-264), who denied the authorship of John the Apostle but still held the work as canonical. He based his rejection on vocabulary and style as well as the anonymous nature of John's other writings. He convinced Eusebius of Caesarea.
  - b. John the elder – This comes from a quote in Eusebius from Papias (*Eccl. His.* 3.39.1-7). However, Papias' quote probably used this title for John the Apostle rather than its asserting another author.
  - c. John the Baptist – (with later editorial additions) has been suggested by J. Massyngberde Ford in the Anchor Bible commentary, based primarily on John the Baptist's use of "lamb" for Jesus. The only other occurrence of this title is in Revelation.

C. Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria (A.D. 247-264) and student of Origen, was the first to express doubts (his book has been lost, but he is quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, who agreed with him) about John the Apostle's authorship, based on

1. John the Apostle does not refer to himself as John in the Gospel nor his letters, but Revelation is from "John"
2. the structure of Revelation is different from the Gospel and the letters
3. the vocabulary of Revelation is different from the Gospel and the letters
4. the grammatical style of Revelation is of inferior quality to the Gospel and the letters

D. Probably the most serious modern challenge to John the Apostle's authorship comes from R. H. Charles in *Saint John*, Vol. I p. xxxixff.

E. The majority of modern scholarship has rejected the traditional authorship of many of the NT books. A good example of this trend related to the authorship of Revelation might be Raymond E. Brown, a renowned Catholic Johannine scholar. The introductory volume of the Anchor Bible Commentary series says, "written by a Jewish Christian prophet named John who was neither John, son of Zebedee, nor the writer of the Johannine Gospel or of the Epistles" (p. 774).

F. In many ways authorship is uncertain. There are striking parallels with the Apostle John's other writings and also striking differences. The key to understanding this book is not in its human author,



but in its Divine author! The author believed himself to be an inspired prophet (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19).

## DATE

- A. This is certainly integrally linked to authorship and interpretive perspective (cf. Historical Theories C.)
- B. Some possible dates
  - 1. The traditional date is during Domitian's reign (A.D. 81-96) because it fits internal evidence of persecution
    - a. Irenaeus (quoted by Eusebius) in *Against Heresies*, 5.30.3. "It (this persecution) was seen not very long ago, almost in our generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian"
    - b. Clement of Alexandria
    - c. Origin of Alexandria
    - d. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, iii.23.1
    - e. Victorinus, *Apocalypse* x.11
    - f. Jerome
  - 2. Epiphanius, a third century writer, in *Haer*, 51.12, 32, says that John wrote it after his release from Patmos which was during Claudius' reign (A.D. 41-54).
  - 3. Others supposed it to be during Nero's reign (A.D. 54-68) because of:
    - a. the obvious background of Emperor cult persecution
    - b. *Caesar Nero*, written in Hebrew, equals the number of the beast, 666
    - c. If preterists are correct that John's Revelation refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, then for the book to be prophecy, it must have been written before a.d. 70

## RECIPIENTS

- A. From Rev. 1:4 it is obvious that the original recipients were seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia. These churches are addressed in such a way as to imply the travel route of the bearer of the letter.
- B. The message of Revelation uniquely relates to all churches and believers who are experiencing persecution from a fallen world system.
- C. As the canonical conclusion to the NT this book is a message of consummation to all believers of all ages.

## OCCASION

- A. The setting was persecution caused by the separation of the local churches from the legal protection Rome accorded to Judaism. This division occurred officially in the A.D. 70's when the rabbis from Jamnia instituted an oath formula which demanded the members of the local synagogues to curse Jesus of Nazareth.
- B. Roman documents indicate that Emperor worship became a major conflict with the church from the reigns of Nero (A.D. 54-68) to Domitian (a.d. 81-96). However, there is no documentation of an official empire-wide persecution. Apparently Revelation reflected the exuberance of local Emperor worship cults in the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire (cf. "Biblical Archaeology Review," May/June 1993 p. 29-37).

## THE SYNTAX

- A. There are many grammatical problems in the Greek text.
- B. Some possible reasons for these problems
  - 1. John's Aramaic thought patterns.
  - 2. He had no scribe on Patmos to write for him.
  - 3. The excitement of the visions was overwhelming.
  - 4. They are purposeful for the effect.
  - 5. The genre (apocalyptic) was highly figurative.
- C. Similar grammatical idiosyncrasies are found in other Jewish apocalyptic writings. Therefore, Revelation is not written in a poor grammatical style, but in a genre with grammatical distinctives.

## CANONICITY

- A. It was rejected early by the Eastern Church; the book does not appear in the Peshitta (fifth century Syriac version).
- B. In the early fourth century Eusebius, following Dionysius of Alexandria in the late third century, said Revelation was not written by the Apostle John. He listed it as one of the "disputed" books but included it in his canonical list (cf. *Ecclesiastical History*, III.24.18; III.25.4; and III.39.6).
- C. The Council of Laodicea (about A.D. 360) omitted it from the list of canonical books. Jerome rejected it as canonical, but the Council of Carthage (a.d. 397) included it. Revelation was admitted by means of a compromise between the eastern and western churches by which both Hebrews and Revelation were accepted into the NT canon.
- D. We should acknowledge that it is a faith presupposition of believers that the Holy Spirit guided the historical process of developing a Christian canon.
- E. The two major theologians of the Protestant Reformation rejected its place in Christian doctrine
  - 1. Martin Luther called it neither prophetic or apostolic, in essence rejecting its inspiration.
  - 2. John Calvin, who wrote a commentary on every book of the NT except Revelation, in essence is rejecting its relevance.

## HISTORICAL THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION

- A. It has been notoriously difficult to interpret; therefore, dogmatism is inappropriate!
- B. The symbols are drawn from
  - 1. Old Testament apocalyptic passages in
    - a. Daniel
    - b. Ezekiel
    - c. Zechariah
    - d. Isaiah
  - 2. intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature
  - 3. the first century Greco-Roman historical setting (especially Revelation 17)
  - 4. ancient Near Eastern mythological creation accounts (especially Revelation 12)
- C. In general there are four interpretive grids or presuppositions
  - 1. PRETERIST – this group sees the book as primarily or exclusively related to the first century churches in the Roman Province of Asia. All the details and prophecies were fulfilled in the first century (see John L Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*).
  - 2. HISTORICIST – this group sees the book as an overview of history, primarily of Western civilization and in some sense the Roman Catholic Church. Often the letters to the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 are used as a description of certain periods of time. Some see these as temporally synchronous and others as chronologically sequential.

3. FUTURIST – this group sees the book as referring to the events immediately preceding and following the *Parousia* (Second Coming of Christ) which will be literally and historically fulfilled (see *Progressive Dispensationalism*, by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L Bock).
4. IDEALIST – this group sees the book as totally symbolic of the struggle between good and evil which has no historical references (see Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb*; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*).

All of these have some validity, but they miss the intentional ambiguity of John's choice of genre and imagery. The problem is balance, not which one is correct.

## PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

A. The purpose of Revelation is to show God's sovereignty in history and the promise of the culmination of all things in Him. The faithful are to remain in faith and hope amidst the persecution and aggression of this fallen world system. The focus of the book is the persecution (Emperor worship in the eastern provinces) and faithfulness (false teachers and cultural compromise) of believers in the first century and in every century (cf. 2:10). Remember, prophets spoke of the future in an effort to reform the present. Revelation is not only about how it will end, but how it is going. In his article in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. I entitled, "The Eschatology of the Bible," Robert L. Sancy said,

"the biblical prophets were not concerned primarily with the time and chronological arrangement of future events. For them the spiritual state of their contemporaries was the point of importance and the great eschatological visitation of God for the judgment of unrighteousness and the blessing of the pious was interjected for its ethical impact in the present" (p. 104).

- B. The general purpose is summed up well in the brief introduction to the TEV and NJB translations
1. TEV, p. 1122, "The Revelation to John was written at a time when Christians were being persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The writer's main concern is to give his readers hope and encouragement, and to urge them to remain faithful during times of suffering and persecution."
  2. NJB, p. 1416, "The Bible is summed up in the message of hope and the rich symbolism of this book. It is a vision of rescue from the trials which beset God's people, and a promise of a glorious future. The message is expressed by means of imagery which draws on the whole of the Bible, so that every feature, animals, colors, numbers, is evocative and full of overtones to a reader familiar with the OT. In this way it is a secret and allusive revelation of what is to come, though the natural symbolism of the great acts of worship and the final vision of the messianic splendor of the new Holy City are clear enough. There was a tradition of such writing in Judaism from Daniel onwards, to strengthen God's people in persecution with assurance of eventual deliverance and triumph."

C. It is crucial that the interpreter give the redemptive theme priority.

1. God has brought individual, corporate, and cosmic salvation through Christ.
2. God's redemption is both spiritual and physical. The Church is saved, but not safe! One day She will be!
3. God still loves fallen, rebellious, self-centered humanity. The wrath of God in the seals and trumpets is for redemption (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11; 21:6b-7; 22:17).
4. God not only restores fallen mankind, but also fallen creation (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). Evil at every level will be purged!

The recurrent attempt by God to reach lost humanity with the gospel magnifies the gracious character of God. The bowl judgments are the result of recalcitrant evil, not an unloving God. God only judges and isolates evil when it refuses again and again to repent. In many ways the book justifies the judgment of God on fallen, irreconcilable humanity! The book ends in a gospel invitation (cf. Rev.

22:17).

D. This book must not be seen as a chronological chart of the events, times, and manner of the Second Coming. It has often been interpreted as the "secret" to western history (the seven churches seen as ages). Every generation has forced its histories into the apocalyptic symbols; every one has been wrong so far.

The details of these prophecies will be much more obvious to the last generation of believers suffering under the Anti-Christ. A literal interpretation has caused this book to be ignored by some (Calvin), depreciated by others (Luther, "neither apostolic nor prophetic"), and overemphasized by others (millennialists).

## **BOB'S KEYS TO INTERPRETATION**

A. We need to take into account the OT aspect

1. OT apocalyptic genre is a highly symbolic literary type.
2. Numerous allusions are drawn from the OT (some estimate that of 404 verses 275 include allusions to OT texts); the meaning of these symbols have been reinterpreted in light of the first-century Roman situation.
3. Prophetic foreshadowing takes current events to foreshadow eschatological events. Often these first-century historical fulfillments point to ultimate end-time historical fulfillments.

B. The overall structure of the book helps us to see the author's purpose

1. The seals, trumpets, and bowls cover basically the same period of time (chapters 6-16). Revelation is a drama in sequential acts.
2. It is possible that Rev. 17-19 are parallel to Rev. 20-22. Parts of chapter 19 (i.e., Rev. 19:11-21) are recapitulated in Rev. 20:7-10.
3. See the seven literary units at Opening Statements, C.

C. The historical context must be taken into account in any interpretation of the book

1. The presence of Emperor worship
2. Local persecution in the Eastern Provinces
3. The Bible cannot mean what it never meant. The interpretation of Revelation must be related to John's day first. It may have multiple fulfillments or applications, but they must be grounded in the first century.

D. The meaning of some of the cryptic terms has been lost to us due to our cultural, linguistic and existential setting. Possibly the end-time events themselves will shed light on the proper interpretation of these symbols. Be careful not to push all of the details of this apocalyptic drama. Modern interpreters must seek the major truth in each of these visions.

E. Let me summarize some of the key interpretive elements

1. The historical origins of the symbolism
  - a. OT themes, OT allusions
  - b. Ancient Near Eastern mythology
  - c. Intertestamental apocalyptic literature
  - d. Greco-Roman first century setting
2. The author's ways of defining his symbolism
  - a. Conversations with angelic guides
  - b. The hymn of heavenly choirs
  - c. Author himself states the meaning
3. The structure of the book (dramatic parallelism)

F. Further help

1. My two favorite commentators on Revelation are George Eldon Ladd and Alan F. Johnson. They do not agree. There is so much disagreement among godly, educated, sincere scholars that a word of caution is appropriate. Let me quote Alan Johnson in his *Commentary on Revelation* published by Zondervan:

"In view of the elaborate use of imagery and visions from Rev. 4:1 through the end of Revelation and the question how this material relates to chapters 1-3, it is not surprising that commentators differ widely in their treatment of these chapters. One problem is that of interpretation: *What* do the imagery and visions mean? Another problem involves chronology: *When* do these things take place? Furthermore, does John interpret his frequent Old Testament images in exact accordance with their Old Testament sources, or does he freely reinterpret these images? What is symbolic and what is literal? Answers to such questions will determine the interpreter's approach. Since few of these questions are capable of dogmatic answers, there is a need for tolerance of divergent approaches in the hope that the Spirit may use open-minded discussion to lead us further into the meaning of the Apocalypse" (p. 69).

2. For a general introduction to Revelation's relationship to the OT, I recommend John P. Milton's *Prophecy Interpreted* and John Bright's *The Authority of the Old Testament*. For a good discussion of Revelation's relationship to Paul, I recommend James S. Stewart's *A Man In Christ*.

### **READING CYCLE ONE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Therefore, read the entire biblical book at one sitting. State the central theme of the entire book in your own words.

1. Theme of entire book
2. Type of literature (genre)

### **READING CYCLE TWO (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Therefore, read the entire biblical book a second time at one sitting. Outline the main subjects and express the subject in a single sentence.

1. Subject of first literary unit
2. Subject of second literary unit
3. Subject of third literary unit
4. Subject of fourth literary unit
5. Etc.

# REVELATION 1:1-20

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS\*

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Introduction and Salutation	Introduction and Benediction	The Prologue	Introduction	Prologue
1:1-3	1:1-3	1:1-2 1:3	1:1-3	1:1-3
	Greeting the Seven Churches	Introductory Salutation	Greeting to the Seven Churches	Address and Greeting
1:4-5a	1:4-8	1:4-5a	1:4-5a	1:4-8
1:5b-7		1:5b-7	1:5b-6 5:7	
5:8		5:8	5:8	
A Vision of Christ	Vision of the Son of Man	Preparatory Vision	A Vision of Christ	Preliminary Vision
1:9-11	1:9-20	1:9-11	1:9-11	1:9-16
1:12-16		1:12-16	1:12-20	
1:17-20		1:17-20		1:17-20

\* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, ask yourself which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions.

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in the following documents: [Brief Definitions of Greek Grammatical Structure](#), [Textual Criticism](#), and [Glossary](#).

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

#### 1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 1:1-3:22

- A. Rev. 1:1-8 forms a prologue to the entire prophecy. The first three verses introduce the author, the time, the genre, and the blessing.
1. The author is John (a common Jewish name).
  2. The time is soon (Rev. 1:1b, 3c).
  3. The message is communication in visions and by angelic mediation and is called a prophecy (Rev. 1:3). The first three chapters are very similar to the normal style for letters of the first century.
  4. The blessing is for those who hear its reading and obey its exhortation to faithfulness amidst persecution.
- B. The next four verses (4-7) address the recipients in the form of the seven churches (Rev. 1:11) and their seven spirits (cf. Rev. 1:4,20; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). This section is marked by
1. YHWH being characterized (Rev. 1:4)
  2. Jesus being characterized (Rev. 1:5,6b,7)
  3. Believers being characterized (Rev. 1:6a)
  4. YHWH speaking (Rev. 1:8)
- C. Verses 1:9-3:22 are Jesus' last words to His Church(es). In Rev. 1:9-20 and at the beginning of the address to each of the seven Churches, Jesus is characterized by the OT titles used for YHWH.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:1-3

**<sup>1</sup>The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup>who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup>Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.**

**1:1 "The Revelation"** This Greek term *apocalypsis* is found only here in the book. It came from two Greek terms which meant "from a hiding place" or "to reveal or unveil something." It was used in several senses (BAGD p. 92).

1. the revelation of truth – Luke 2:32; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:6,26; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 1:17
2. a secret made known – Eph. 2:11-3:13
3. a revelation by vision/dream – 2 Cor. 12:1,7; Gal. 2:2
4. secrets related to the end-times – Luke 17:30; 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13; 5:1

In this book it means truth from God through Jesus Christ mediated by visions and angelic interpretation. It focuses on the evil present and the coming victory of righteousness through God's supernatural intervening. God will set things straight!

■ **"of Jesus Christ"** This is either an objective genitive relating the message about Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 1:12), or subjective genitive, relating the message given by Jesus Christ.

■ **"Jesus"** This Hebrew name meant "YHWH saves," "YHWH is salvation," "YHWH brings salvation." It is the same as the OT name "Joshua." "Jesus" is derived from the Hebrew word for salvation, "*hosea*,"

suffixed to the covenant name for God, "YHWH" (see Special Topic: Names for Deity at Col. 1:3). It was the name designated by God through an angel of the Lord (cf. Matt. 1:21).

▣ **"Christ"** This was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term "*messiah*," which meant "an anointed one." It implied "one called and equipped by God for a specific task." In the OT three groups of leaders: priests, kings, and prophets, were anointed. Jesus fulfilled all three of these anointed offices (cf. Heb. 1:2-3). See Special Topic: Messiah below.

### SPECIAL TOPIC: MESSIAH

▣ **"which God gave Him"** Jesus neither taught nor did anything without revelation or permission from the Father (cf. John 3:11-13, 31-36; 4:34; 5:19-23,30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:26,28-29,40; 12:49-50; 14:10,24; 15:15). Theologically this is characteristic of John's writings.

▣ **"to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place"** Notice how this opening paragraph is mirrored in Rev. 22:6-21. This was a literary technique of the first century.

**NASB, NKJV** "the things which must shortly take place"

**NRSV** "what must soon take place"

**TEV** "what must happen very soon"

**NJB** "what is now to take place very soon"

The time element is very important for interpretation of the whole book because it specifically states that John's message had a relevance for his day as well as the future. The term "must" (*dei*) meant "that which is binding, which is morally necessary, which is proper, or inevitable" (cf. Rev. 22:6). See Special Topic: Soon Return, below.

### SPECIAL TOPIC: SOON RETURN

▣ **"communicated it"** This is literally "signified" (*semainō*) (cf. NKJV). "Signs" are one of the literary structures that John uses to communicate his message in his Gospel (*semeion*, cf. Rev. 12:33; 18:32; 21:19). This may have an OT link to the OT prophets (cf. Isa. 7:11,14; 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7,22; 55:13; 66:19; Jer. 10:2; 32:20-21; 44:29 and Ezek. 4:3; 14:8; 20:12,20). The fact that this book is called "a revelation" through "signs" and "prophecy" gives us a clue to the literary genre of this book. The modern literary term "apocalyptic" used to describe a genre was unknown to John.

▣ **"to His bond-servant"** In this introductory verse, this phrase refers to the book's Apostolic author. Other places in the book the plural is used of God's prophets/messengers/preachers (cf. Rev. 10:7; 11:18; 22:6).

However, in other places in the book the title is used of all believers (cf. Rev. 7:3; 19:2,5; 22:3), which implies all believers should be witnesses (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; 1 Pet. 3:15). Jesus is the model to follow (cf. Rev. 1:5; 3:14; John 20:21)! Many will be killed, as Jesus was (cf. Rev. 6:9; 12:17; 17:6; 18:24; 20:4). Remember the theme of the book is be faithful unto death! I (Jesus) have overcome!

▣ **"John"** Unlike most apocalyptic authors, John identified himself and structured the opening of his prophetic witness in the form of seven letters (chapters 1-3). Some have denied John the Apostle's authorship of the book of the Revelation because he is anonymous in his other writings (he calls himself "the beloved disciple" in his Gospel and "elder" in 1 and 3 John), but names himself in Rev. 1:4, 9; 22:8.

**1:2 "the testimony of Jesus Christ"** Like Rev. 1:1, this can be either an objective, the testimony about Jesus, or subjective genitive, the testimony given by Jesus. Sometimes in John's writings there is purposeful ambiguity which combines both connotations.

**1:3 "Blessed"** This is the first of seven blessings in this book (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6;



22:7,14). The fact that those who read it were blessed shows not only its inspired nature but also its relevance to the people of that day and every day.

■ **"he who reads"** The NRSV adds "aloud," implying a public reading (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13). Congregational reading of the Scripture was done originally by specially trained members of the Church as in the synagogue (cantor). The Church adopted the worship forms of the early synagogue (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). We have a historical confirmation of the public reading of Scripture from Justin Martyr, a.d. 167, who mentioned that the Church read a portion from the Gospels and a portion from the Prophets.

■ **"who hear. . . and heed it"** This hearing and doing (both present active participles) are the essence of the Hebrew term "*Shema*" (cf. Deut. 5:1; 6:4-6; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9-10; Luke 11:28). Notice the conditional nature of the blessing. Those who hear must respond. This "if. . . then" covenantal pattern is both OT and NT. Blessing is connected not only to knowledge but also to lifestyle.

■ **"of this prophecy"** This term addresses both the divine content of this book and the literary genre. This book is a combination of a letter (chapters 1-3), an apocalyptic presentation (seals, trumpets, bowls), and a prophecy (cf. Rev. 22:7,10,18,19). It is important to remember that "prophecy" had two connotations: (1) to address the current hearers with God's message and (2) to show how current faith effected future events. It is both proclamation and prediction. See Introductory Article.

■ **"for the time is near"** This again shows the relevancy of the prophecy to its own day (cf. Rev. 22:10, another example is in Rom. 16:20). See Special Topic: Soon Return at Rev. 1:1

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:4-7**

**<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— <sup>6</sup>and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father— to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup>Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.**

**1:4 "to the seven churches"** Exactly why only seven churches were addressed is uncertain. There are several theories:

1. some have asserted that these were the churches that John had a special ministering relationship with
2. others have asserted that they form a postal route in the Roman Province of Asia
3. the number seven had great significance to the Jews, especially in inter-biblical apocalyptic literature

It was the number of perfection from its use of the days in Genesis 1. Therefore, it was probably used in both a literal sense—John did write to several churches which formed a Roman postal route in Asia Minor—and symbolically as a way of referring to all churches of all days. See Special Topics below.

#### **[SPECIAL TOPIC: SYMBOLIC NUMBERS IN SCRIPTURE](#)**

#### **[SPECIAL TOPIC: CHURCH \(EKKLESIA\)](#)**

■ **"in Asia"** This refers to the western end of the modern country of Turkey, which was, in large part, the old country of Phrygia, which became the Roman province of "Asia Minor."

■ **"Grace to you and peace"** This was a traditional form of greeting which is seen so often in Paul's writings. Many assert that the Christians changed the traditional Greek literary greeting from "*charein*" (cf. James 1:1) to the similar sounding Christian greeting of *charis*, which meant "grace." "Peace" may have referred to the Hebrew term "*shalom*," thereby combining the Greek and Hebrew greetings so as to relate to both groups in the churches. However, this is simply speculation.

■ **"from Him who is and who was and who is to come"** This is obviously a title for the unchanging Covenant God (cf. Ps. 102:7; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). Its grammatical form is awkward in Greek but may reflect an Aramaic background. The literal phrase is "from the One who is, from the One who was, and the One coming" (cf. Rev. 4:8). This phrase reflects the OT covenant title "I Am" (YHWH, cf. Exod. 3:14, see [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 1:8). This phrase is used for God the Father in Rev. 1:4 and 8, and of Jesus Christ in Rev. 1:17 and 18 (cf. Heb. 13:8). The purposeful transfer of titles from YHWH to Jesus was one way the NT authors asserted the Deity of Jesus.

This threefold phrase of God as past, present, and future is modified in Rev. 11:17 and 16:5, which is the Second Coming at the end of the trumpets, to just the present and past because the future (end-time) has dawned.

■ **"and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne"** See Special Topic below.

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: SEVEN SPIRITS](#)

**1:5 "and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness"** This is the first of three phrases which describe Jesus the Messiah. These opening verses are paralleled in Rev. 20:6-21. "Faithful" had an OT connotation of one who is loyal, true, and dependable (cf. Isa. 55:3-5). As God's written Word (the Bible) is trustworthy, so is His ultimate revelation, the Living Word, Jesus (cf. Rev. 3:14). The gospel is a message to be believed, a person to be received, and a life emulating that person to be lived.

The Greek phrase, "the faithful witness," can mean

1. "My witness, My faithful One" – as two phrases, see Rev. 2:13 (with the addition of the personal pronoun)
2. "the faithful and true Witness," see Rev. 3:14 (with the addition of "and true")

■ **"the firstborn of the dead"** See Special Topic below.

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRSTBORN](#)

■ **"and the ruler of the kings of the earth"** This phrase, like the previous one, is an allusion to Ps. 89:27 (cf. Ps. 72:11; Isa. 48:23), which speaks of Jesus as the promised Messiah. It also reflects John's reaction to

1. the emperor worship of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire
2. the use of the royal Mesopotamian phrase "King of kings" (cf. Rev. 11:15; 17:14; 19:16)

■ **"To Him who loves us"** This is a present active participle, meaning "Jesus continues to love us." This affirmation is very important in light of the weaknesses and failures of five of the seven churches (cf. chapters 2-3).

■ **"and released us from our sins"** This is an aorist active participle. The Vulgate and Coptic versions, as well as some minuscule Greek manuscripts, and the King James Version have the verb "washed" (*louō*) which was pronounced exactly like the word "released" (*luō*). The ancient scribes produced texts of the NT by one person reading the text aloud while others wrote it down.

The term "released" (with additions) appears in the ancient Greek manuscripts P<sup>18</sup>, κ<sup>\*</sup> (with preposition), κ<sup>2</sup>, A, and C while "washed" is found only in later uncial manuscripts, P (sixth century) and 046, as well as in several later minuscule (running Greek script) manuscripts. Hence, "released" or "freed"

is the preferred reading. The UBS<sup>4</sup> gives "released" a "certain" rating. See Special Topic: Textual Criticism.

■ **"by His blood"** This is an obvious allusion to the sacrificial (cf. Leviticus 1-7), vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21; Isa. 52:13-53:12). "By His blood" is a recurrent gospel truth (cf. Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19. Somehow in the mystery of God, His justice and mercy for all fallen humans met in the substitutionary death of Jesus (cf. Heb. 9:11-28). See Special Topic below.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE KERYGMA OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

**1:6 "He has made us"** This is an aorist active indicative. As Jesus has released us from our sins (Rev. 1:5), He has also made us a kingdom of priests to represent Him!

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"a kingdom, priests to His God"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"kings and priests to His God"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"a kingdom, priests serving His God"</b>
<b>TEV, NJB</b>	<b>"a kingdom of priests to serve His God"</b>

This is an allusion to the OT terms used of Israel in Exod. 19:6 and Isa. 61:6, where the nation was considered to be a kingdom of priests. God chose Abraham to choose Israel to choose a lost world (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3). Israel was meant to be a nation of witnesses (i.e., priests) but they failed in this assigned evangelistic task (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38). Therefore, God chose the Church to reach the world (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). The very same phrases which were used for Israel are now used for the Church (cf. Gal. 3:29; 6:16; Phil 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

It is important to notice the corporate, biblical emphasis of "the priesthood of believers." Western Christianity has over-emphasized the place and role of the individual and under-emphasized biblical corporality. The NT metaphor of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12) is a similar metaphor. The OT title was never meant as an excuse for believers to assert their individual freedoms. This emphasis developed from the historical struggle between Martin Luther and the Catholic Church of his day. The focus of this context is evangelism (cf. Rev. 1:7), involving every believer, attempting to reach every lost and needy human made in God's image for whom Christ died (cf. John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14). See Special Topic below.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRISTIANITY IS CORPORATE**

■ **"to His God and Father"** This phrase may seem to depreciate the full deity of the Son (see [SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TRINITY](#) at Rev. 22:17), but it is really a way of asserting Jesus' subordination while incarnated. The same phrase is used by Paul in Rom. 15:6. The sense of equality can be seen in Rev. 3:21; 14:1.

■ **"to Him be the glory and the dominion"** The term "glory" is an OT commercial term (using scales for purchases) that meant "to be heavy"; that which was heavy (e.g., gold) was valuable. The term came to be used of God's brightness, majesty, holiness, from the *Shekinah* Cloud of Glory in Exodus. Glory was often ascribed to God the Father in the NT (cf. Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; 2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 25; Rev. 1:6; 5:13; 7:12). See Special Topic: Glory at Rev. 15:8.

The term "dominion" addressed to God the Father, is similar theologically to the subordination of the Son (cf. John 17). Jesus is the Father's agent in all things, but the goal is the ultimate glorification of the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27-28).

■ **"forever and ever"** This is literally "into the ages of the ages." This double use of *aiōnos*, singular then plural, is common in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:18; 4:9,10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5). It is surprising that early Greek witnesses omitted the second one (MSS P<sup>18</sup>, A, P). UBS<sup>4</sup> cannot decide which reading is original. See Special Topics below.

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: FOREVER \(GREEK IDIOM\)](#)

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: FOREVER \('OLAM\)](#)

■ **"Amen"** This is a form of the OT Hebrew term for "faith" (cf. Hab. 2:4). Its original etymology was "to be firm or sure." However, the connotation changed to that which is to be affirmed (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). It was used metaphorically of someone who was faithful, loyal, steadfast, trustworthy (a title for Jesus in Rev. 3:14, cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). See Special Topic below.

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: AMEN](#)

**1:7 "Behold, He is coming with the clouds"** This verse may have been an exclamation by the angel of Rev. 1:1. It is an obvious reference to the Second Coming of Christ. See Special Topic below.

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: COMING ON THE CLOUDS](#)

■ **"and every eye will see Him"** This seems to imply the bodily, physical, visible, universal return of Christ, not a secret rapture of believers. In my opinion the Bible never teaches a secret rapture or coming. Those verses in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 24:37-44; Luke 17:22-37) that are often used to support a secret rapture, contextually relate to a comparison with the days of Noah. These texts denote the unexpected suddenness of His coming. In Noah's day the one taken was destroyed! Be careful of proof-texting small passages of Scripture out of the inspired original setting and using them to back up your presuppositional theological eschatological system!

■ **"even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him"** This is an allusion to Zech. 12:10,12 (cf. John 19:37). This is a good example of how John reworks OT texts to fit his Roman situation (a Jewish type of reinterpretation called *pesher*). The text of Zechariah is a spring-board to John's new application. In Zechariah the text refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem who grieve over "one pierced," but here John used it of the Romans and Jewish leaders who crucified Christ (cf. John 19:37). The pronoun "they" in the Masoretic Hebrew text is changed to "all the tribes of the earth" (cf. Matt. 24:30, this phrase is not from the Septuagint). Also, "mourn," in the context of the Zechariah passage is often interpreted as relating to Romans 11, where the Jews repent and trust Jesus as Messiah. However, in Rev. 1:7 the mourning is not for repentance, but because the judgment of God has fallen on unbelievers from all tribes (cf. Matt. 24:30). The Zechariah context alludes to the end-time judgment of the nations by mentioning "the plain of Megiddo," in Hebrew it is called Armageddon (cf. Zech. 12:11; 2 Chr. 35:22 and Psalm 2; Rev. 16:16), the site of an end-time battle between God and His people and Satan and his people, the unbelieving nations. See Special Topic below.

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: GRIEVING RITES](#)

■ **"So it is to be. Amen."** This is the Greek word for affirmation (*nai*) and the Hebrew word for affirmation (*amen*) placed side by side for emphasis (cf. Rev. 22:20).

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:8**

**<sup>8</sup>"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."**

**1:8** YHWH Himself speaks this verse, affirming the truth of the previous statements about Jesus. It combines four titles for Him with an allusion to a fifth and possibly a sixth. Apparently, Rev. 1:8 was God adding His personal affirmation to the above statement by the use of these magnificent names.

1. "I Am," which is an allusion to the Covenant name YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:14), a form of the verb "to be."

- Jesus used this of Himself (cf. John 8:56-59). The title "Lord" (*kurios*) in the NT reflects this OT title.
2. "Alpha and Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet which assume that God is the beginning and the ending, the controller of history (cf. Isa. 44:6; Rev. 21:6); this title is also used of Jesus in Rev. 1:17 and 22:13.
  3. "The Lord" is the modern way of translating YHWH (see Special Topic following).
  4. "God" in Gen. 2:4, YHWH, and *Elohim* are combined (the LORD God) as a name for deity. *El* is the general name for god in the Near East, from the root "to be strong."
  5. "The One who is the One who was, the One coming" is the phrase used earlier in Rev. 1:4, which speaks of the unchanging, ever-living God (cf. Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). This phrase is used of God the Father, YHWH, in Rev. 1:4 and 8 and of Jesus, God the Son, in Rev. 1:17, 18 and 22:13 (cf. Heb. 13:8).
  6. "The Almighty" which was the OT term, (1) "*El-Shaddai*," the patriarchal name for God (cf. Exod. 6:3) or (2) "YHWH *Sabaoth*," from the LXX's "The Lord God Almighty. It is found often in this book (i.e., *pantokratōr*, cf. Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 11; 21:22), but only once in the other NT books (i.e., 2 Cor. 6:18).

One early Greek manuscript, aleph (α\*), and several later manuscripts add the phrase "the beginning and the end" after "the Alpha and the Omega." Scribes inserted it from Rev. 21:6, but it is probably not an original part of the inspired original Greek text. The UBS<sup>4</sup> rates its exclusion as "certain." See Special Topic below.

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#)

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:9-11**

**<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."**

**1:9-20** This is John's vision of the resurrected, ascended, exalted Christ. These same descriptions are used to address the seven churches (chapters 2-3). John shows His identification with the readers by (1) using the term "your brother" and (2) mentioning his own experiences of suffering, the kingdom, and endurance. These key terms — tribulation, the kingdom, and perseverance — are also examples of Jesus' life which the readers, like John, are to emulate (cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17).

One reason modern western interpreters do not understand the Revelation is because we have never experienced the persecution and trials of the first century Roman world. Revelation is a word to hurting, dying, frightened believers.

**1:9 "fellow partaker in the tribulation"** See note at Rev. 7:14.

▣ **"kingdom"** See Special Topic below.

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: THE KINGDOM OF GOD](#)

▣ **"perseverance"** This word is used in Rev. 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSEVERANCE](#).

▣ **"on the island called Patmos"** The Romans used these small islands off the coast of Asia Minor to exile political prisoners (cf. Tacitus' *Annals*, 3.68; 4.30; 15.71). Apparently John was exiled to this small island, 37 miles from Miletus. The island was crescent shaped, facing east, ten miles long and six miles



wide.

■ **"because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"** There are two possible interpretations of this phrase. It can refer (1) to John's preaching the gospel or (2) to John's receiving the revelation. We have several historical references to John's political banishment.

1. Tertullian, *On the Prescription of Heretics*, 36
2. Origen, *Homilies on Matthew*
3. Clement of Alexandria, *The Rich Man's Salvation*, 47
4. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.20.8-9; and (4) Jerome, *Concerning Illustrious Men*, 9.

**1:10 "I was in the Spirit"** This is a special phrase that marks off the different visions that John received (cf. Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). It seems to refer to a trance-like state in which a revelation was given (cf. Acts 10:10; 22:17; 2 Cor. 12:1ff). This is characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

■ **"on the Lord's day"** This is the only reference in the Bible, referring to Sunday, which uses this phrase. Sunday was referred to as "the first day of the week" in John 20:19; Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:2.

■ **"like the sound of a trumpet"** This phrase was used in the context of God giving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:16). However, because of Rev. 1:12a and 4:1, it may refer to the voice of an angel. Angelic mediation is characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic literature. Revelation speaks more about angels than any other NT book.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: HORNS USED BY ISRAEL**

**1:11 "in a book"** This is the Greek term *biblion*. It was used in the sense of a booklet or scroll. It later became a technical term for a codex or book. John was commanded to write down his visions. They are the self disclosures of Deity. They are not for John's personal benefit, but for the Church. One characteristic of apocalyptic literature is that it was a highly structured written genre, not given orally, like OT prophecies. A book or scroll occurs repeatedly in Jewish apocalyptic literature as a way to pass on the message for future readers.

■ **"send it to the seven churches"** The order of these churches followed a Roman postal route which began and ended in Ephesus. Paul's circular book known as "Ephesians" may have traveled this same route. God's revelation is never for an individual only, but for the people of God, the body of Christ!

■ The King James translation adds the phrase "I am the Alpha and the Omega" again, but there is no ancient Greek manuscript support for this phrase in this verse.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:12-16**

**<sup>12</sup>Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; <sup>13</sup>and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. <sup>14</sup>His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup>His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup>In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.**

**1:12 "I saw seven golden lampstands"** This does not refer to the Menorah (seven-stemmed candelabrum) which was in the Tabernacle (cf. Exod. 25:31-40) nor to the lampstand of Zech. 4:2. These separate, single lampstands were a symbolic way of referring to the seven churches (cf. Rev. 1:20; 2:1).

**1:13-18** In this description of Jesus much of the imagery has two possible OT backgrounds: (1) YHWH, but also (2) the angel of Daniel 10.

<b>1:13</b>	
<b>NASB</b>	"one like a son of man"
<b>NKJV</b>	"One like the Son of Man"
<b>NRSV</b>	"one like the Son of Man"
<b>TEV</b>	"looked like a human being"
<b>NJB</b>	"one like a Son of Man"

Notice the variety in capitalization. The reason is the ambiguity of the term. In the OT it was a descriptive phrase for a human being (cf. Ps. 8:4; Ezek. 2:1 and many more). However, it also was used in Dan. 7:13 and possibly Ezek. 1:26 to refer to a human Messiah, whose deity (cf. Rev. 2:18, where this same personage is called "Son of God") is assumed because

1. he appears before God
2. he rides on the clouds of heaven
3. he is given the eternal kingdom.

Jesus used this term to refer to Himself because it had no rabbinical usages, no nationalistic or militaristic connotations. It combined the human and divine aspects of Jesus' person (cf. 1 John 4:1-3; John 1:1-2,14).

Notice that the NKJV and NRSV have "the" while NASB, TEV, and JB have "a." There is no definite article in the Greek text (cf. Dan. 7:13; Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28). However, the fact that it is a title makes it definite. The ambiguity may be purposeful (an aspect of John's writings). Jesus is a real human being and also the Divine Messiah.

▣ **"clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash"** This phrase has been understood in several ways.

1. as a reference to the High Priest (cf. Exod. 28:4; 29:5; Lev. 16:4 and Zech. 3:4)
2. as a reference to a royal, wealthy person (cf. 1 Sam. 18:24; 24:12 and Ezek. 26:16)
3. as a vision of the glorious interpreting angel of Dan. 10:5-21, which might signify Jesus as bringing God's message.

Josephus, in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews* III.7.2,4, said that the High Priest wore a girdle interwoven with gold. Therefore, Jesus is the High Priest (cf. Ps. 110:4-7; Zechariah 3) of the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 8:1-13; Psalm 110).

**1:14 "His head and His hair were white like white wool"** This is an allusion to the Ancient of Days in Dan. 7:9. This is an example of NT authors attributing titles and descriptions of YHWH to Jesus, emphasizing Jesus' deity.

▣ **"His eyes were like a flame of fire"** This symbolized His penetrating knowledge (cf. Dan. 10:6; Rev. 2:18; 19:12).

<b>1:15</b>	
<b>NASB</b>	"like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace"
<b>NKJV</b>	"like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace"
<b>NRSV</b>	"like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace"
<b>TEV</b>	"like brass that has been refined and polished"
<b>NJB</b>	"like burnished bronze when it has been refined in a furnace"

This word for bronze (*chalkolibanon*) is uncertain. Brass is the related term, *chalkos* (cf. Matt. 10:9; 1 Cor. 13:1; Rev. 18:22). It was used in Ezek. 1:7 for the cherubim's feet and in Dan. 10:6 for the angelic messenger. Jesus' feet are described in these same terms (cf. Rev. 1:15; 2:18) to show His heavenly origin or majestic character.

**"NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV "voice was like the sound of many waters"  
TEV "voice sounded like a roaring waterfall"  
NJB "voice like the sound of the ocean"**

This was used of

1. YHWH in Ezek. 1:24; 43:2
2. the wings of the cherubim of Ezek. 1:24
3. of the angelic messenger (possibly) in Dan. 10:6

Apparently it was a symbol of a heavenly person's authoritative voice (cf. Rev. 14:2; 19:6).

**1:16 "In His right hand He held seven stars"** This phrase is repeated in Rev. 1:16,20; 2:1; 3:1. This shows Jesus' personal care of His local churches.

▣ **"and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword"** *Hromphaia* refers to the large Thracian, broadsword which the Roman soldiers carried. This metaphor appears in the OT in Isa. 11:4; 49:2. It symbolizes both (1) war (cf. Rev. 2:16; 6:8) and (2) the power of the word of God, especially judgment (cf. Rev. 2:12; 19:15,21; 2 Thess. 2:8). Hebrews 4:12 uses another type of sword (*machaira*), but the same idea — the power of the word of God.

▣ **"His face was like the sun shining in its strength"** A similar phrase is used to describe the angelic messenger of Dan. 10:6 and Rev. 10:1. In Dan. 12:3 (cf. Matt. 13:43) it was a symbol of the resurrected righteous ones. Jesus is described in similar terms at His transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:2).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 1:17-20**

**<sup>17</sup>When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup>and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. <sup>19</sup>Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. <sup>20</sup>As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."**

**1:17 "I fell at His feet as a dead man"** This type of revelation has always caused consternation to humans receiving it (cf. Dan. 8:17; 10:9; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; II Baruch 21:26; IV Ezra 5:14). It is an awesome thing for the supernatural spiritual realm to unveil itself to a human being.

▣ **"He placed His right hand on me"** This gesture shows Jesus' care and attention to His people (cf. Dan. 8:18; 10:10, 18).

▣ **"Do not be afraid"** This is a present imperative with the negative particle, usually meaning to stop an act that is already in process. Humans are afraid of the supernatural realm (cf. Jesus' words in Matt. 14:27; 17:7; 28:10; Mark 6:50; Luke 5:10; 12:32; John 6:20 and the angel's words in Matt. 28:5; Luke 1:13,30; 2:10).

▣ **"for I am the first and the last"** This was usually a reference to YHWH (cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), but here it is used of the exalted Christ (cf. Rev. 1:8; 2:8; 22:13). This is an equivalent to the phrase "Alpha and Omega." See notes at Rev. 1:4 and 8.

**1:18**

**NASB, NRSV "the living One"**



<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"I am He who lives"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"I am the living one!"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"I am the Living One"</b>

This is an allusion to the covenant name for God, YHWH, which comes from the Hebrew verb "to be" (cf. Exod. 3:14). See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Rev. 1:8. He is the ever-living, only-living One (cf. Dan. 12:7; John 5:26). Again, this is the NT author's use of an OT title for God to describe Jesus. This is very similar to Jesus using YHWH's name for Himself in John 8:58.

■ **"I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,"** The resurrection was:

1. the Father's stamp of approval (cf. Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,33,34,37; 17:31; Rom. 4:24; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:21)
2. a demonstration of the Spirit's power (cf. Rom. 8:11)
3. a demonstration of Jesus' personal power (cf. John 10:11,15,17,18)

This reference to Jesus' death may also have been a way to thwart the Gnostic false teachers who denied His humanity.

■ **"I have the keys of death and of Hades"** The Jews saw death as a prison with gates (cf. Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18; Isa. 38:10; Matt. 16:19). Keys are a metaphor for authority. This is symbolic of Jesus' authority over death for Himself and His followers (cf. Rev. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 15).

<b>NASB, NKJV,</b>	
<b>NRSV, NJB</b>	<b>"Hades"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"the world of the dead"</b>

The King James Version translates this as "hell," but this is an English translation confusion of the Greek words, *Hades* and *Gehenna*. *Hades* corresponds to the OT word *Sheol* (cf. Rev. 6:8; 20:13-14). In the OT humans were pictured as descending into the earth where they were gathered into families. It was a conscious but joyless existence. Slowly God began to reveal more and more (progressive revelation) about the afterlife. The rabbis asserted that there was a righteous (Paradise) and wicked (Tartarus) division in *Sheol* (cf. Luke 23:43). The Bible is sketchy on the details about the afterlife. It speaks in metaphors of heaven (i.e., streets of gold, city 1500 miles cubed, no closed gates, etc.) and hell (fire, darkness, worms, etc.)

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: Where Are the Dead?](#)

**1:19** This phrase has been used as the pattern for interpreting the book of the Revelation. It is seen as either a twofold or a threefold vision. The Greek phrase is a twofold description of what is current and what will occur. John was speaking to his day as well as to the future. This book combines both aspects in the traditional prophetic sense of current events foreshadowing eschatological events. This book addressed the persecution of John's day and the persecution in every age but also ultimately persecution of the end-time anti-Christ (cf. Dan. 9:24-27; 2 Thessalonians 2).

**1:20 "mystery of the stars"** This term (*mustērion*) is used in several senses by Paul, but all relate to the eternal, but hidden plan of God for humans' salvation, which is believing Jews and Gentiles being united into one new body in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13). Here, however, it seems to be used in connection with the seven churches Jesus is addressing in chapters 2 and 3. From verse 20 it is obvious that the seven spirits, seven stars, seven golden lampstands, and seven angels are all symbolic in some way of the seven churches. This term is used in a similar way of a hidden meaning to a symbol in Rev. 17:7. See notes and Special Topic at Rev. 10:7.

■ **"the angels"** The Greek (*aggelos*) and Hebrew (*malak*) terms can be translated "messengers" or "angels." There have been several theories as to their identity.

1. Some say they were the seven spirits which are mentioned in verse 4.

2. Others say they were the pastors of these churches (cf. Mal. 2:7).

3. others say it refers to the guardian angel of these churches (cf. Dan. 10:13,20,21).

It seems best that they refer to a personification of the churches as a whole, whether symbolized in a pastor or an angel.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Does chapter 1 give any clues on how to interpret the book of the Revelation? If so, what are they?
2. Is the book of the Revelation primarily for its day or the last days? Why?
3. Why did John make so many allusions to the Old Testament but never directly quote from it?
4. Why are there so many different titles used for God in this chapter?
5. Why are the descriptions of Rev. 1:12-20 used to introduce each of the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3?
6. Why is the glorified Jesus described so similarly to the angel of Dan. 10?

# REVELATION 2 - 3

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

<b>UBS<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>NKJV</b>	<b>NRSV</b>	<b>TEV</b>	<b>NJB</b>
The Message to Ephesus	The Loveless Church	The First Letter	The Message to Ephesus	Ephesus
2:1a	2:1-7	2:1	2:1a	2:1-7
2:1b-7		2:2-7	2:1b-7a 2:7b	
The Message to Smyrna	The Persecuted Church	The Second Letter	The Message to Smyrna	Smyrna
2:8a	2:8-11	2:8	2:8a	2:8-11
2:8b-11		2:9-11	2:8b-10 2:11a 2:11b	
The Message to Pergamum	The Compromising Church	The Third Letter	The Message to Pergamum	Pergamum
2:12a	2:12-17	2:12	2:12a	2:12-13
2:12b-17		2:13-17	2:12b-16 2:17a 2:17b	2:14-17
The Message to Thyatira	The Corrupt Church	The Fourth Letter	The Message to Thyatira	Thyatira
2:18a	2:18-29	2:18	2:18a	2:18-29
2:18b-29		2:19-29	2:18b-23 2:24-28 2:29	
The Message to Sardis	The Dead Church	The Fifth Letter	The Message to Sardis	Sardis
3:1a	3:1-6	3:1a	3:1a	3:1-6
3:1b-6		3:1b-6	3:1b-5 3:6	
The Message to Philadelphia	The Faithful Church	The Sixth Letter	The Message to Philadelphia	Philadelphia
3:7a	3:7-13	3:7	3:7a	3:7-13
3:7b-13		3:8-13	3:7b-12 3:13	

The Message to Laodicea	The Lukewarm Church	The Seventh Letter	The Message to Laodicea	Laodicea
3:14	3:14-22	3:14	3:14a	3:14-22
3:14b-22		3:15-22	3:14b-21	
			3:22	

## READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## GENERAL BACKGROUND

- A. This literary unit (chapters 2-3) is connected to the OT titles for YHWH used of the Messiah (cf. Rev. 1:12-20). This is one way the NT author affirmed Jesus' Deity. John's revelation transfers Old Testament titles and actions of YHWH to Jesus, the ascended, glorified Messiah.
- B. Its purpose is to show the spiritual needs of these first century churches, and by analogy, all churches (i.e., the number seven). John's ministry in his old age was in Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus. John is obviously well acquainted with these churches and cities. These letters show the ethical aspect of Christianity. They are a call to faithfulness and godliness. The church will also be judged (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).
- C. There were many churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor in John's day. Why did the author only write to seven of them?
  1. It is the biblical number to denote perfection (cf. Genesis 1). There are numerous literary structures of sevens in John's prophecy.
  2. These churches formed a travel route, starting at Ephesus and ending at Laodicea. It was possibly the Imperial postage route.
  3. They are to some extent representative of the types of churches found in every age and culture.
- D. What is the significance of this literary unit to us today?
  1. Some interpret these churches as prophetic descriptions of Western history from Pentecost to the Second Coming
    - a. Ephesus = the Apostolic Period, a.d. 33-100 (Pentecost to John)
    - b. Smyrna = the Period of Persecution, a.d. 100-313 (John to Constantine)
    - c. Pergamum = the Period of Constantine, a.d. 313-590 (Constantine to Gregory)
    - d. Thyatira = Papal Rome, A.D. 590-1517 (Gregory to Luther)
    - e. Sardis = Reformation, A.D. 1517-1792 (Luther - Carey)
    - f. Philadelphia = Modern Missionary Movement, a.d. 1792-1914 (Carey to rapture)

g. Laodicea = Period of Apostasy, A.D. 1914 - Parousia (WWI - Parousia)

This is a relatively recent interpretative grid which has come to characterize "Dispensational Premillennialism" (which usually sees Matthew 13 as a parallel to the 7 churches). However, there is nothing in the text itself to commend this view. Although some aspects of western history fit this scheme, others do not. It is arrogant to assert that the Bible was written exclusively to address only western culture. Such a scheme would have been meaningless to a first century audience.

2. Some interpret these churches as a representative sample of the types of churches which are found in all ages and cultures.

E. One of the books that has helped me interpret prophecy/apocalyptic is D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*. He makes an interesting theological point about all the promises made to faithful believers in chapters 2-3 (pp. 28-32). He lists the promises as

1. the tree of life
2. the crown of life
3. the white stone
4. authority over the nations
5. the Morning Star
6. dressed in white
7. a pillar in God's temple
8. the name of God
9. the name of Jerusalem
10. sit on God's throne

He says these are not meant to be interpreted literally or individually, but as a corporate fulfillment, as is seen in Rev. 21:3. I think this is a proper hermeneutical approach to this genre.

## **STRUCTURAL UNITY OF THE SEVEN LETTERS**

A. Many commentators see a seven element structure present in most letters, although not all seven are present in every church.

1. Jesus' common address "to the angel of the church of write . . ." (cf. Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14).
2. Description of Jesus taken from Rev. 1:12-20, which are Old Testament titles and actions of YHWH, introduce each message.
3. Jesus' knowledge of the churches, both positive and negative, "I know . . ." (cf. Rev. 2:2, 9,13,19; 3:1,8,15).
4. Jesus addresses the individual churches and their cultural, geographical and spiritual opportunities.
5. Jesus speaks of His sudden, soon coming, either in temporal judgment or the Second Coming, (cf. Rev. 1:1,3; 2:5,16,25; 3:3,11).
6. Jesus admonishes spiritual hearing and understanding, (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Jesus used "He who has an ear, let him hear" in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 11:15, 13:9, 43; Mark 4:24.)
7. Jesus promises a reward for faithful followers, (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,25-26; 3:4-5,11-12,21).

These seven steps are not consistent in each letter. The order changes and some elements are left out in certain churches, but overall this structure shows one of several of John's seven-fold literary structures.

## **THE CITIES TO WHICH THE LETTERS WERE DIRECTED**

A. Ephesus

1. It was the largest city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was not the capital, though the

- Roman governor lived there. It was a commercial center because of its excellent natural harbor.
2. It was a free city, which allowed it to have local government and much freedom, including no garrison of Roman soldiers.
  3. It was the only city which was allowed to hold the biannual Asian games.
  4. It was the site of the Temple to Artemis (Diana in Latin), which was one of the seven wonders of the world of its day. It was 425' x 220' with 127 columns which were 60' tall; 86 of them were overlaid with gold (see Pliny's *Hist. Nat.* 36:95 ff). The image of Artemis was thought to have been a meteor which resembled a many breasted female figure. This meant that there were many cultic prostitutes present in the city (cf. Acts 19). It was a very immoral, multicultural city.
  5. Paul stayed in this city more than three years (cf. Acts 18:18 ff; 20:13).
  6. Tradition asserts that it became John's home after Mary's death in Palestine.

#### B. Smyrna

1. It was supposedly founded by an Amazon (strong woman leader) named Smyrna. In John's day it was a city of about 200,000.
2. It was located on the Aegean Sea. It had an ideal natural harbor and was, therefore, a commercial center surpassed only by Ephesus in Asia Minor. It was a very wealthy city.
3. It was destroyed by the Lydians about 600 b.c., but was rebuilt by Lysimachus following Alexander the Great's plans whereby the sea breeze blew down every street.
4. It was also a free city because it had helped the retreating Roman soldiers after their defeat by Mithradates.
5. It was a center of worship of the goddess Roma (195 b.c.) and Emperor worship. It had the first temple to Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 26).
6. It was a religious center with the worship of Cybele and the pantheon of Homer. There was even a tradition that Homer was born here. Its many temples were located on the Acropolis called Pagos with a golden road between the Temple of Zeus and Cybele.
7. It had a large active anti-Christian Jewish population.
8. It was the city in which Polycarp (John the Apostle's disciple) was martyred in a.d. 155.

#### C. Pergamum

1. It was a large wealthy city and the capital of Asia Minor (since 282 b.c.), although not located on a major trade road.
2. It boasted of the largest library in the Roman world outside of Alexandria, Egypt. It had over 200,000 parchment scrolls!
3. Vellum was invented here. It was processed animal skins which were used for writing. This writing medium was developed because Alexandria, Egypt, refused to sell them papyrus reeds. This was because their king, Eumenes II (197-159 b.c.) tried to hire Alexandria's librarian, Aristophanes. When the Ptolemaic king, Epiphanes (205-182 b.c.) of Alexandria found out, he arrested the librarian and embargoed papyrus from Pergamum. There was a real rivalry between these two learning centers. Anthony later sent Pergamum's library to Alexandria as a present to Cleopatra.
4. It was the home of Galen the physician and the center of the healing arts of Asclepius. It is even said that Asclepius was "a Pergamum god." The symbol for this god was the snake.
5. It also had a temple to Roma and the Emperor Augustus (A.D. 29) and was the administrative center (*neokopros*) of the Emperor's cult. Its loyalty to Rome was well known.
6. It was known for its worship and defense of the Greek pantheon. There was a huge Temple to Zeus on the acropolis that overlooked the whole city. It was shaped like a throne (i.e., Satan's throne).

#### D. Thyatira

1. It was a smaller trade-oriented city. There are many records of its numerous and flourishing trade guilds, each with its own patron deity. It was located on a major road between Pergamum

and Sardis which continued on to Philadelphia and Laodicea. It was famous for its woolen products. Lydia (cf. Acts 16:14), a seller of purple cloth, was from this city.

2. It was enlarged by Seleucus Nicateo, who settled his Macedonian soldiers here.
3. It had several temples to local deities
  - a. Tyrimnos (Apollo) – the sun god
  - b. Artemis (Diana) – the love goddess
  - c. Sibyl Sambathe – a local female fortune teller

#### E. Sardis

1. It was a large, wealthy ancient city. For years it was the opulent capital of the Lydian Empire because of its superb military position, 1500' up on a mountain spur. It is mentioned in Persian records because Cyrus the Great captured the city. It is also mentioned in Obad. 1:20. It had greatly declined by John's day.
2. It was noted for its dyed wool products. The process was invented there, so they claimed.
3. It was the center of the worship of Cybele, the mother goddess. The ruins of the temple are still visible on the acropolis. The excesses of this worship were known and deplored throughout the Roman Empire.

#### F. Philadelphia

1. It was located on a plateau and was protected by water. This made it a highly desirable military position. It was the newest of the seven cities. It was founded by Attalus II (159 - 138 b.c.).
2. It was located on a major trade route to Sardis and it had flourished.
3. It was located in a fine agriculture area, especially for grapes. The god Bacchus, or Dionysus, was one of its chief deities. It was also an active earthquake area and was destroyed in the huge quake of a.d. 17, which also destroyed ten other major cities of the area. However, the after-shocks continued in this area and the population moved to the surrounding countryside.
4. It was also a center for the Emperor's cult (as were Smyrna and Pergamum) which was possibly the source of much of the Churches' persecution in the provinces.
5. It was a major center of Hellenistic culture and aggressively exported its influence. It seems to have been founded for this very purpose on the border of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia.

#### G. Laodicea on the Lychus River

1. It was one of three cities in the Lychus River valley (the other cities were Colossae and Hierapolis). Churches were founded in each of these three cities, probably by Paul's convert, Epaphras (cf. Col. 1:17; 4:12-13).
2. It was founded by the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus II, who named it after his wife, Laodice, in 250 b.c. It was located on a militarily defensible site like Philadelphia.
3. It was located on a major east/west trade route. It was noted as a banking center.
4. It was located in a fertile agricultural and pastoral region, especially suited for raising a special black sheep for which it became famous worldwide. It mass-produced a black outer garment called a "*trimeta*."
5. It had a very large Jewish population.
6. It, like Pergamum, was a center for the worship of the healing god Asclepius. The city was the site of a medical school which was noted for its ear and eye salve.

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 2:1**

**1" To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:**

**2:1 "the angel"** The Hebrew and Greek term for angel can mean messenger. It could refer to

1. the pastor (cf. Mal. 2:7)
2. the angel of the church (cf. Daniel 10)
3. the unique spirit or character of the individual congregations

This same phrase introduces every letter (cf. Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 14).

▣ **"church"** This Greek compound term *ekklesia* is a combination of two Greek terms, "out of" and "to call." It was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew term, *qahal*, or "assembly of Israel." The early Christians used it to designate themselves because

1. they saw themselves as the people of God, like Israel
2. they saw themselves as divinely called by God both for salvation and ministry

See Special Topic at Rev. 1:4.

▣ **"The One who holds the seven stars"** This is a description of Jesus taken from Rev. 1:16. These seven stars referred to the churches (cf. 1:20). The term "holds" (present active participle) speaks of a firm, sure grasp (cf. John 10:28). Nothing and no one could separate these churches from Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:31-39) except their own refusal to repent and follow Him! Only unbelief can separate.

▣ **"in His right hand"** This is an anthropomorphic (speaking of God in physical terms) metaphor for power and authority (cf. Rev. 1:16,17,20; 2:1; 5:1,7).

▣ **"walking among"** This anthropomorphic metaphor is used in Gen. 3:8 as a symbol of God's presence with mankind (cf. Lev. 26:12).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: GOD DESCRIBED AS A HUMAN (anthropomorphic language)**

▣ **"the golden lampstands"** This does not refer to the Menorah of the Tabernacle, but is another symbol for the seven churches (cf. Rev. 1:12-13).

▣ **"says"** Jesus' last words to His church are not Matt. 28:18-20 or Acts 1:7-11, but Revelation 2-3.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 2:2-7**

**<sup>2</sup>I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup>and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. <sup>6</sup>Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.**

**2:2 "I know"** The form is a perfect active indicative of *oida*, but translated as a present. Jesus sees, understands, and cares for His churches. His concern involves both affirmation and discipline (which is a form of parental love). This same phrase is repeated in all seven letters (cf. Rev. 2:2,4,13,19; 3:1,8,15).

The Old Testament background of this term implies intimate, personal relationship (cf. Gen 4:1; Jer. 1:5).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW (USING MOSTLY DEUTERONOMY AS A PARADIGM)**

▣ **"your deeds and your toil"** This was an active church, but they had forgotten the priority of fellowship with Christ (cf. Rev. 2:4). Too many good things had robbed them of the best (cf. Gal. 3:1).



■ **"perseverance"** This term implies a voluntary, active, steadfast endurance. This is a major theme of the book (cf. Rev. 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).

Perseverance must be balanced with security (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,11-12,21). Most biblical truths are presented in dialectical, seemingly paradoxical, pairs. Both are equally true, but neither is true alone. Salvation is an initial repentance and faith followed by lifestyle repentance, faith, obedience, service, and steadfastness! See Special Topic below.

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSEVERANCE](#)

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"evil men"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"those who are evil"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"evildoers"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"evil people"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"wicked people"</b>

This is literally *kakous* (*kakos*), which is often used of "evil people." The synonym *ponēros* can be used of evil (neuter) or evil people and ultimately of the evil one (masculine, cf. Matt. 5:37; 13:38; John 17:15). Context and usage confirm that this text must refer to "bad people" (cf. Rom. 2:9; 13:4) in the church (false teachers) or possibly in the community.

*Kakos* is used only twice in Revelation, here and Rev. 16:2, where it is used to describe the results of the "bowls of the wrath of God" (i.e., sores).

■ **"you put to the test"** This Greek term (*peirazō*) meant to test with either good or bad (majority) intentions (cf. Rev. 2:2,10; 3:10). The related term (*peirasmos*) had the connotation of testing with the view toward destruction. The balance is found in 1 John 4:1 where believers are to test (*dokimazō*) with a view toward approval those who claim to speak for God. The call for believers to examine those who claim to speak for God is found in both Testaments (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:22; Matt. 7:15-23; 1 John 4:1-6).

There is tension in the NT related to believers critically judging each other (cf. Matt. 7:1-5). However, Christians are called to evaluate each other for leadership roles (cf. Matt. 7:5,6,15; 1 Cor. 5:1-12; 1 Timothy 3; 1 John 4:1-6). Attitude and motive are the keys to proper evaluation (cf. Gal. 6:1; Rom. 2:1-11; 14:1-23; James 4:11-12).

### [SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK TERMS FOR "TESTING" AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS](#)

■ **"those who call themselves apostles"** This use of the term "apostles" does not refer to The Twelve, but to the wider use of the term (cf. Acts 14:14; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; Eph. 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:6). The NT often addresses the subject of false apostles or teachers (cf. Matt. 7:15-16; 24:24; Acts 20:29; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 John 4:1 and throughout the Pastoral Epistles). This church had correctly identified these false apostles and rejected them.

**2:3** This church was faithful amidst difficult circumstances, even persecutions. They had not denied Christ or grown weary in well-doing (cf. Gal. 6:9; Heb. 12:3; James 5:7-8). See note at Rev. 2:7.

**2:4**

<b>NASB, NKJV</b>	<b>"you have left your first love"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"you have abandoned the love you had at first"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"you do not love me now as you did at first"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"you have less love now than formerly"</b>

There have been several theories as to what this meant.

1. TEV and Charles Williams translations assume it means love for Christ.
2. James Moffatt assumed it means love for one another.
3. Hershell Hobbs in his commentary assumed it means love for the lost.
4. J. B. Phillips in his translation combined all of the above.

5. Some think it is related to the problem of second generation believers (cf. Jdgs. 2: 7-10).
6. Some see it as a loveless church of cold orthodoxy (cf. 1 Corinthians 13).

**2:5 "remember"** This is a present active imperative meaning "always keep in mind." Believers are often admonished to remember their previous condition in sin and their new position in the grace and mercies of God through Christ.

■ **"from which you have fallen"** This is a perfect active indicative. Leaving their "first love" had become a settled condition of neglect!

■ **"repent and do the deeds you did at first"** These are two aorist active imperatives. Notice the church as a whole is called on to make a decisive repentance (cf. 2 Chr. 7:14) and to become active in its love for Christ, for each other, and for the lost.

Repentance is crucial for a faith relationship with God (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21). The Hebrew term meant a change of actions, while in Greek it meant a change of mind. Repentance is a willingness to change from one's self-centered existence to a life informed and directed by God. It calls for a turning from the priority and bondage of the self. Basically it is a new attitude, a new worldview, a new master. Repentance is God's will for every fallen child of Adam, made in His image (cf. Ezek. 18:21,23,32 and 2 Pet. 3:9).

The NT passage which best reflects the different Greek terms for repentance is 2 Cor. 7:8-12.

1. *lupē*, "grief" or "sorrowing" Rev. 2:8 (twice), Rev. 2:9 (thrice), Rev. 2:10 (twice), Rev. 2:11
2. *metamelomai*, "after care," Rev. 2:8 (twice), Rev. 2:9
3. *metanoēō*, "repent," "after mind," Rev. 2:9, 10

The contrast is between a false repentance (*metamelomai*, cf. Judas, Matt. 27:3 and Esau, Heb. 12:16-17) and a true repentance (*metanoēō*, cf. Peter, John 21:15-23; Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62).

True repentance is theologically linked to

1. Jesus' preaching on the conditions of the New Covenant (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3,5)
2. the Apostolic sermons in Acts (*kerygma*, cf. Acts 3:16,19; 20:21)
3. God's sovereign gift (cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18 and 2 Tim. 2:25)
4. perishing (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9)

Repentance is not optional!

■ **"or else I am coming to you"** This is a common theme in this book; Christ is coming soon (cf. Rev. 1:2,3; 2: 5,16; 25; 3:3,11). In the OT the coming of God could bring blessing or judgment. In this context Christ was coming to discipline His church (cf. 1 Pet. 4:17)! Therefore, it has a temporal, as well as eschatological, orientation.

■ **"and will remove your lampstand out of its place"** The lampstand symbolizes the entire church. This may have involved the removal of Christ's presence and blessing. The entire congregation was not facing apostasy, but the loss of their effective ministry. This also applies to the churches of Pergamum (cf. Rev. 2:16); Thyatira (cf. Rev. 2:22-23); Sardis (cf. Rev. 3:3); and Laodicea (cf. Rev. 3:19). It is possible that each of these churches were affected by a Nicolaitan type of false teaching which promoted compromise with pagan culture.

**2:6 "that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans"** There has been much speculation about who these Nicolaitans were and what they believed. The only biblical source we have is Rev. 2:6, 14-15. Speculation began early in the Church around a.d. 180 when Irenaeus and Hippolytus supposed that these were the followers of one of "the seven" chosen in Acts 6:5 named Nicolas. This is totally unsubstantiated. Irenaeus, in his book, *Contra-heresies*, 3:11:7, assumed that they were followers of Cyrenian Gnosticism of the second century. Eusebius, in his book, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:29:1, said that this particular sect did not last long.

In Rev. 2:14-15, the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans are similar. There is a

possible etymological connection between their names in Greek; it means "conqueror" and "people" (very similar to the meaning of the name Nicodemus). What is obvious is that both were encouraging believers to participate in pagan worship practices which involved ritual sexual activity. In this sense the Nicolaitans and Balaamites (cf. Num. 25:1-9; 31:16-18) are very similar to the teachings of Jezebel (cf. 2:20).

**2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"** This admonition is repeated throughout the letters to the seven churches (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). It was a phrase that came from the words of Jesus (cf. Matt. 11:15; 13:9,43). Spiritual truth must be responded to by mind and hand. This is similar to the Hebrew term *shema*, "hear so as to do" (cf. Deut. 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9-10).

▣ **"churches"** See Special Topic at Rev. 1:4.

▣ **"To him who overcomes"** There is a continuing theological emphasis on the perseverance of believers (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,25-26; 3:4-5,11-12,21). It is the experiential evidence of a true conversion (cf. Matt. 24:13; Gal. 6:9)! Jonathan Edwards said, "Sure proof of election is that one holds out to the end." W. T. Conner said, "The salvation of a man elected to salvation is from all eternity certain in the mind and purpose of God, yet it is conditioned upon faith, and a faith that perseveres and conquers." See Special Topic at Rev. 2:2.

▣ **"I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God"** This is an allusion to a tree in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 2:9). As humans began in fellowship with God and with the animals in a garden, so the Bible ends in the same manner (cf. Isa. 11:6-9; Rev. 22:2,14,19).

The term "paradise" was a Persian word for a nobleman's walled garden, which was used in the Septuagint to translate the Garden of Eden (cf. Ezek. 28:13; 31:8). It is one of the many references to the Messianic age that is found throughout the letters to the seven churches.

The term "paradise" is used in two senses: (1) in Luke 23:4 it may refer to the righteous part of *Sheol/Hades* (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:8). Jesus tells the repentant thief that he would be with Him there that day (Jesus did not return to heaven for 40 days, cf. John 20:17) and (2) in 2 Cor. 12:3 it refers to God's presence, God's heavenly throne room ("the third heaven").

God's purpose for mankind, made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), has always been eternal life. The fall of Genesis 3 and the rest of the Bible document God's commitment to mankind's redemption and eternal fellowship with Him. This fallen world, this gap in full fellowship, was not God's desire, but mankind's shame. God will restore creation for His purposes.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 2:8-11**

**<sup>8</sup>And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: <sup>9</sup>I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup>Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."**

**2:8 "The first and the last"** This is one of the recurrent titles for Jesus found in Rev. 1:17 and 22:13. Initially it referred to YHWH (cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). It is synonymous with the phrase "I am the Alpha and Omega" (cf. Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 27:13) and "the beginning and the end" (cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:13). See fuller note at Rev. 1:8.

▣ **"who was dead, and has come to life"** This may have been a slap at the nature cult of Cybele, the mother goddess. Many of the ancient fertility religions based their worldview on personified cycles of nature, winter death, and spring rebirth. In context this relates theologically to 1:18; 5:6, where Jesus is the

lamb that was slain but is now alive. It emphasizes Jesus' once-for-all (not repeated) substitutionary death and resurrection (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:12,28; 10:10).

**2:9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty"** These are two very strong Greek words. They are significant because the city of Smyrna was very prosperous. The fact that the church was poor seems to imply economic persecution. It is theologically significant that in the book of the Revelation believers suffer "tribulations" from unbelievers and the evil one, but unbelievers suffer "the wrath of God." See full note at Rev. 7:14. Believers are always protected (sealed, see Special Topic at Rev. 7:2) from divine judgment.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: TRIBULATION**

■ **"(but you are rich)"** Believers cannot judge their standing in Christ by worldly standards (cf. Matt. 6:33).

**NASB, NKJV "blasphemy"**

**NRSV, NJB "slander"**

**TEV "evil things said against you"**

This is literally the term "blasphemy," which had an OT connotation of "to revile" and was usually used in connection with verbal attacks on YHWH (cf. Lev. 24:13-23). Twice in the OT the term "blessed" (*barak*) is used in the sense of blasphemy (cf. 1 Kgs. 21:10,13). In context these Jewish religionists claim to know God ("bless God"), but they do not (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).

■ **"who say they are Jews and are not"** A very similar phrase is used in Rev. 3:9; there it is obvious that they are racial Jews who claim to be God's people but really are not (cf. John 8:44; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:29; 6:16). From Acts and Galatians we know that the Jews caused great opposition to the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5).

Revelation 2:13 suggests that this refers to local cults of emperor worship called the *Concilia* which demanded that Christians call Caesar "Lord" and burn incense to him once a year.

■ **"a synagogue of Satan"** John saw the world in sharp contrast, God versus Satan. Satan (see [SPECIAL TOPIC: SATAN](#) at Rev. 12:3) is mentioned often in the book (cf. 2:9,13; 3:9; 12:9,10; 20:2,7). He slanders the believers and energizes their persecutors. This conflict or dualism in the spiritual realm characterizes apocalyptic literature. There is a battle for control of the hearts and minds of the children of Adam.

**2:10 "Do not fear"** This is a present middle or passive (deponent) imperative with the negative particle which usually meant to stop an act already in process. These churches were afraid. Persecutions were a sign of their salvation and God's blessings (cf. Matt. 5:10-12).

■ **"the devil is about to cast some of you into prison"** Behind evil human leaders lurks a supernatural personal force of evil (cf. Eph. 6:10-19).

The term Satan is an OT title and description. His God-given task was to provide a rebellious, self-centered alternative to mankind and thereby accuse them when they yielded to temptation (cf. Genesis 3; Job 1-2; Zechiah 3). There is a development of evil in the OT. Satan was created as a servant and progressed into an enemy (cf. *An Old Testament Theology* by A. B. Davidson p. 300-306).

It is surely an assumption that the highly figurative language of Isaiah 14, which directly refers to the arrogant King of Babylon, and Ezekiel 28, which directly refers to the prideful King of Tyre, ultimately identifies the spiritual pride and fall of Satan. The language of Ezekiel 28 is taken from a description of the Garden of Eden. It is difficult to accept a description of a human, historical, pagan king in angelic terms taken from Eden (cf. Genesis 3). However, Ezekiel does the very same thing with the King of Egypt in chapter 31. He is described as a huge tree in the garden of Eden.

All believers long for more information, especially about the origins of God, angels, evil, etc. We must be cautious of turning metaphorical, prophetic description into dogmatic theology. Much modern theology comes from isolated, figurative texts mixed with modern concepts, both theological and literary (Dante and

Milton).

In the NT he is called the devil (cf. Rev. 12:9,12; 20:2,10), which is a composite Greek term meaning "to throw across," "to slander," or "bring accusations against." This again reflects his task of accusing and tempting. These terms are synonymous in the Revelation (cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:2). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSONAL EVIL](#) at Rev. 12:9.

■ **"that you may be tested"** This term is used in two senses: (1) believers are tested so as to show their true faith and grow stronger (cf. Rev. 2:10; Acts 14:27; Rom. 5:3-4; 8:17-19; Heb. 5:8; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-19) and (2) unbelievers are tested to show their unbelief and deserved judgment (cf. Rev. 3:10). In Revelation the Christian's trials are called "tribulations" (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:9), while the unbelievers are subjected to "the wrath of God."

There were two Greek terms translated "test," "try," or "tempt." One had the connotation of "to test with a view toward destruction" (*peirasmos, peirasmo*). The other terms (*dokimos, dokimazo*) were used with the connotation of "to test with a view toward approval." Satan tempts to destroy; God tests to strengthen (cf. 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:7; Gen. 22:1; Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16; 13:3; Jdgs. 2:22; 2 Chr. 32:31). See Special Topic at Rev. 2:2.

■ **"ten days"** There has been much speculation about the phrase "ten days":

1. some say that it referred to a literal ten day period of persecution in the city of Smyrna in John's day
2. others say that because ten is the number of completion, it simply meant a complete number of days of persecution
3. some say that it referred to an unspecified period of persecution

The good news is that it has a limit. The persecution will end!

However, in an apocalyptic book one is never sure if the numbers are used figuratively or literally. If the number was often used in the OT and interbiblical apocalyptic literature with a symbolic meaning then probably it is figurative. The most often used symbolic numbers are 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12 and their multiples (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:4).

■ **"be faithful unto death"** This is a present middle or passive (deponent) imperative which emphasizes the believer's need to continue in faith even if it means physical death (cf. Matt. 2:13; 12:11; 10:22; 24:13; Luke 12:4; Gal. 6:9). Some believers were and are killed. This is the paradox of the sovereignty of God and our experience in a fallen world.

■ **"and I will give you the crown of life"** This was the victor's crown called the "*stephanos*" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25). It was the reward of Christian martyrs. We learn from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, 4:15, that there were many martyrs, including Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. There are also other crowns (rewards) mentioned in the New Testament (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 3:11).

John uses the term for life, *zoē*, to refer to eternal life, resurrection life (cf. John 1:4; 3:15,36; 4:14,36; 5:24,26,29,39,40; 6:27,33,35,40,47,48,51,53,54,63,68; 8:12; 10:10,28; 11:25; 12:25,50; 14:6; 17:2,3; 20:31; Rev. 2:7,10; 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:6,27; 22:1,2,14,17,19). True life is far more than physical existence!

## [SPECIAL TOPIC: DEGREES OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENT](#)

**2:11 "He who overcomes"** This is also a recurrent admonition to faithfulness (cf. Rev. 2:7,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). It is certainly an emphasis on perseverance (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:2).

■ **"will not be hurt by the second death"** This is a double negative construction with aorist passive subjunctive which shows God's ultimate care for those who are martyred (cf. Rev. 12:11). The "second death" referred to hell (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:18) or eternal separation from fellowship with God (cf. Rev. 20:6,14; 21:8).

■ **"He who has an ear, let him hear"** This is a recurrent admonition for spiritual attention and discernment (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

## NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 2:12-17

**12**"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: **13**"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. **14**But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. **15**So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **16**Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. **17**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."

**2:12 "The One who has the sharp, two-edged sword"** This is the same reference to the glorified Jesus found in Rev. 1:16. It was an OT metaphor for YHWH (cf. Isa. 11:4; 49:2). It is used in the NT for the penetrating power of the word of God (cf. Rev. 2:16; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 4:12).

**2:13 "I know where you dwell"** "Dwell" in the OT implied "to live permanently with." These believers faced strong local governmental and demonic pressure. Jesus knew them and their perilous situation. He was there with them.

- **"where Satan's throne is"** There have been several possible interpretations of this phrase:
  1. It could refer to the large throne of Zeus which was located in Pergamum.
  2. It could refer to the god of healing, Asclepius, whose symbol was a serpent.
  3. It seems that the whole city looked like a giant throne because of the Acropolis which stood hundreds of feet above the city itself.
  4. It could be a reference to the Concilia, the local organization to promote emperor worship, which was very powerful in Pergamum.

Because of the historical context, either #1 or #4 seems best.

- **"you hold fast My name"** This is a present active indicative. It shows the significance of the name as representing the character of a person. Believers trust by calling on His name (cf. John 1:12; 3:18; Rom. 10:9-13) and worship by calling on His name (cf. Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 26:25) and persevere by calling on His name (cf. John 17:11-12).

### SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NAME OF THE LORD

- **"and did not deny My faith"** This is an aorist middle (deponent) indicative. During these early centuries of Christianity, and even today in certain societies, there was a real temptation to save one's prosperity or life by denying faith in Christ during physical or judicial trials. The church has always struggled with how to handle these apostates.

### SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH (*PISTIS* [noun], *PISTEUŌ*, [verb], *PISTOS* [adjective])

- **"Antipas, My witness"** We know nothing about this man. The title given him is the same that was used for Christ in Rev. 5:1. The term "witness" can mean "martyr" (cf. 11:3; 17:6). Tertullian said that Antipas was roasted in a brazen bull, but this is simply later tradition.

**2:14 "yet I hold it somewhat against you"** Jesus had a negative statement for six of the seven churches. Righteous living in some areas does not excuse sin in others!



■ **"because you have there some who hold to the teaching of Balaam"** Balaam was a prophet of God (cf. Num. 24:2) who was lured into helping to compromise the people of Israel (cf. Num. 22-25 and 31:16). He is condemned in both the OT and the NT (cf. Num. 31:16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11).

It is possible that the name Balaam in Hebrew meant "conqueror of the people" and the name Nicolaitans may have meant the same thing in Greek (Nicodemus of John 3 also has a similar meaning). This would identify these two groups as to their immoral practices (cf. Jezebel, 2:20).

■ **"who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel"** Balaam's suggestion to Balak, King of Moab, was to involve the children of Israel in the fertility worship of Ba'al (cf. Num. 25:1-3). There was a continuing cultural temptation to the sexual worship practices of first century pagans.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: ISRAEL (THE NAME)**

■ **"to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality"** These two sins involved pagan worship practices (cf. Num. 25:1-3 and 31:16). Not only were there pagan meals where the food was sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1-13), but often sexual immorality was the normal and expected worship practice at these pagan assemblies. Human sexual activity was a supposed means of assuring the health and fertility of herds, crops, and society.

**2:15 "you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans"** Because of the similarity of the teachings of Balaam, the Nicolaitans (cf. 2:6), and Jezebel (cf. 2:20), all three of these refer to pagan, idolatrous worship practices. Believers must not revert to, or compromise with, the pagan cultures.

**2:16 "Therefore repent" See note at Rev. 2:5.**

■ **"or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth"** This is an aorist active imperative. There is an ongoing emphasis concerning repentance (cf. Rev. 2:5,16,22; 3:3,19). The coming could refer to temporal judgment against the church or to the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world. It is significant that the church as a whole was called on to repent (cf. Rev. 3:20; 2 Chr. 7:14) because of the sins of some; if they did not, the consequences were corporate discipline! See Special Topic: Soon Return at Rev. 1:2.

**2:17 "to him I will give some of the hidden manna"** Manna was God's supernatural provision for the children of Israel during the Wilderness Wandering Period (cf. Exod. 16:14-15,31; Ps. 78:17-33, especially Rev. 2:24). There have been several theories proposed to interpret this cryptic phrase:

1. It could refer to the Ark of the Covenant being brought out of hiding by Jeremiah from Mt. Nebo (cf. II Maccabees 2:4-8) because it contained a jar of manna (cf. Exod. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4).
2. It could refer to the food of the new age of righteousness (cf. II Baruch 29:8).

The exact reference is uncertain but it was obviously an allusion to the new age of the Spirit inaugurated by Christ. Some have even asserted that because of John 6:31-35, the hidden manna referred to Christ Himself. This is a good example of the difficulty in interpreting the specific details of this book which the contemporary hearer understood, but the exact reference has since been lost.

■ **"and I will give him a white stone"** This stone, also called *Tessera*, had many usages in the Ancient Near East.

1. it could be used for a ticket to special banquets
2. it could be used to vote for acquittal by a jury
3. it could be used as a symbol of victory for an athlete
4. it could be used to show the freedom of a slave.

In this context, #1 seems to be the best, referring to the Messianic Banquet (a common theme in Jewish apocalyptic literature).

■ **"and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it"** This new name seems to be a symbol of the New Age or a title for the Messiah (cf. Isa. 56:5; 62:2; 65:15; see [SPECIAL TOPIC: MESSIAH](#) at Rev. 1:1). This new name is mentioned often in the book of the Revelation (cf. Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 19:12,13,16; 22:4).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 2:18-29**

**18**"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: **19**"I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. **20**"But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. **21**"I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. **22**"Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. **23**"And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. **24**"But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. **25**"Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. **26**"He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; **27**and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; **28**and I will give him the morning star. **29**"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

**2:18 "The Son of God"** It was very common to refer to Jesus as "Son." The most common title using this metaphor was "Son of man," which was Jesus' self-chosen title. The other term was "Son of God" which was a common designation for Jesus in John's writings (cf. John 1:34,49; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4,27; 19:7; 20:31; 1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5,10,12,13,20). A third use of "son" is found in the book of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28) where Jesus is contrasted with a servant (i.e., Moses, the prophets). He is a full family member with the Father.

This is not one of the descriptive phrases from chapter 1. This term, like "virgin-born," was used sparingly by NT authors probably because of the possible misunderstanding of pagan hearers, who would immediately relate these terms to their usages in the pagan pantheons. The Homeric gods and goddesses often were sexually active with humans, producing special offspring.

#### **[SPECIAL TOPIC: THE SON OF GOD](#)**

■ **"who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze"** This was another title for Jesus taken from Rev. 1:14,15. It is an allusion to Dan. 10:6 showing Jesus' heavenly origin. It is possible that it was used in connection with Thyatira because this city was famous for its bronzeware.

**2:19** This verse is Jesus' acknowledgment of the ministry of the believers at Thyatira. They were active in kingdom work and getting even more active. This affirmation, however, did not excuse the heresy of Rev. 2:20.

**2:20 "But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess"** This is an allusion to the Jezebel of 1 Kgs. 16:31-33; 2 Kgs. 9:21-22. Alexandrinus (MSS A) adds "Thy" before Jezebel, which implied that she may have been the wife of the pastor of this church or an active church leader. But this is speculation. Her teachings (cf. Rev. 2:20c) were similar to the Balaamites



in Rev. 2:14b and the Nicolaitans in Rev. 2:15.

Jezebel was not rejected because she was a woman prophetess. There are many biblical examples of godly women leaders.

1. Miriam, Exod. 15:20
2. Deborah, Judges 4:4
3. Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14
4. Anna, Luke 2:36
5. Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9
6. Phoebe, Romana 16:1

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: WOMEN IN THE BIBLE**

**2:21** God's mercy and patience as well as His justice are evident in Rev. 2:21-23 (cf. Rom. 2:5).

**2:22 "I will throw her on a bed of sickness"** This is sarcasm related to her bed of adultery (teachings about immorality).

▣ **"great tribulation"** See [SPECIAL TOPIC: TRIBULATION](#) at Rev. 2:9 and the big end-time one at Rev. 7:14.

▣ **"unless they repent of her deeds"** This is a third class conditional, which referred to potential future action but with an element of contingency.

**2:23 "and I will kill her children"** This does not refer to literal children, but to her followers (cf. Rev. 2:22; 2 John 1:1).

▣ **"and all the churches will know"** This shows that the seven letters were to be read and the truth applied by all the churches, then and now. For "church" see Special Topic at Rev. 1:4.

▣ **"I am He who searches the minds and hearts"** The Bible asserts that God knows the motives and thoughts of all humans (cf. Ps. 7:9; 26:2; 39:1; Pro. 24:12; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; Heb. 4:12-13; 8:27).

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEART**

▣ **"and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds"** This spiritual truth is presented so clearly in Gal. 6:7. We reap what we sow. This principle does not imply a salvation by human effort (cf. Eph. 2:8-9), but that those who have met God in Christ will live godly, loving, serving lives (cf. 3:12; Matt. 25:1-46; Eph. 2:10).

This is a spiritual principle. God is ethical-moral and so is His creation. Humans break themselves on God's standards. We reap what we sow. This is true for believers (but does not effect salvation) and unbelievers (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 1 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

**2:24 "the deep things of Satan"** There are several theories relating to this phrase. It could refer

1. to a catch-phrase of Jezebel and her followers
2. to the Gnostic false teachers' emphasis on knowledge
3. to the initiation rites of the mystery religions of the Roman Empire
4. in an antithetical way, to "the deep things of God" (cf. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)

▣ **"I place no other burden on you"** This is an affirmation of the true believers in the city of Thyatira. They had an active, aggressive faith (cf. Rev. 2:19).

**2:25 "hold fast until I come"** Christ's followers must persevere (cf. Rev. 2:20) amidst persecution, heresy and apathy. This is a command (aorist active imperative). Jesus is on His way; He is coming soon (cf. Rev. 2:16; 22:7,20). This is the hope and encouragement of every generation of Christians.

**2:26-27** This is an allusion to Psalm 2:8-9, possibly with Isa. 30:14 and Jer. 19:11 added in. Jesus is the Messianic king. His kingdom is coming in worldwide power and consummation. It will be worth it all when His followers see Him!

**2:26 "nations"** The use of this term from the OT implies that it refers to those outside the covenant of YHWH (the exception is 7:9). It becomes a way of referring to godless, wicked peoples (cf. Rev. 2:26; 5:9; 10:11; 11:2,9,18; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6,8; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3,23; 19:15; 20:8).

**2:27 "I also have received authority from my Father"** Jesus has already been given all authority (cf. Psalm 2; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2: 9-11). Jesus' kingdom was present, but not consummated.

The OT quote in verse 27 is from Ps. 2:8 which initially referred to the Messiah (cf. Rev. 12:5; 19:15), but here it is used for believers who put their trust in Jesus Christ. They reign with Him. See Special Topic at Rev. 5:10.

**2:28 "and I will give him the morning star"** There have been several possible interpretations of this phrase:

1. it referred to a metaphor for Christ (cf. Rev. 22:16)
2. it referred to intimate knowledge and fellowship with Christ (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19)
3. it referred to resurrection (cf. Dan. 12:3)
4. it referred to the military Messiah mentioned in Num. 24:17
5. it referred to the joy of God's people (cf. Job 38:7)
6. it referred to a phrase used of Satan in Isa. 14:12, but now for Christ

**2:29** See note at Rev. 2:7.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 3:1-6**

**<sup>1</sup>To the angel of the church in Sardis write: "He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. <sup>3</sup>So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. <sup>4</sup>But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."**

**3:1 "church"** See Special Topic at Rev. 1:4.

■ **"He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars"** This phrase is another allusion to the glorified Christ (cf. Rev. 1:4,16,20). The seven stars refer to the churches and her leaders in Rev. 1:20; the seven spirits may be a related metaphor because in Rev. 4:5 they are related to the seven lampstands, which are also mentioned in Rev. 1:20 as referring to the churches. These seven spirits of God are also mentioned in Rev. 5:6 as part of the description of the lamb. See Special Topic: The Seven Spirits at Rev. 1:4.

■ **"I know your deeds"** Jesus was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of His churches (cf. Rev.

2:2,19; 3:1,8,15).

**NASB, NKJV** "that you have a name that you are alive"  
**NRSV** "that you have a name of being alive"  
**TEV** "that you have a reputation of being alive"  
**NJB** "how you are reputed to be alive"

This was a devastating revelation. They thought they were right with God, spiritually pleasing to Him (cf. Isa. 29:13; Rom. 2:19-20; Col. 2:16-23; 2 Tim. 3:5), but they were not!

**3:2**

**NASB, NRSV,**  
**TEV, NJB** "Wake up"  
**NKJV** "Be watchful"

This is a present middle (deponent) imperative (with a present active participle), literally "be thou continually watching." It is the first of five present imperatives found in verses 2 and 3. Jesus commands His church to keep watching!

**NASB, NKJV** "strengthen the things that remain"  
**NRSV** "strengthen what remains"  
**TEV** "strengthen what you still have"  
**NJB** "put some resolve into what little vigor you have left"

This is an aorist active imperative. They were to act now and continue to act to preserve what remained of their dying faith.

▣ **"for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God"** The first verb is a perfect active indicative. They may have looked spiritual (cf. Isa. 29:13), but they were much like the religious people mentioned in Matt. 7:21-23 and Col. 2:16-23.

The term "completed" is a perfect passive participle meaning "mature, perfect, equipped for the assigned task." They had not allowed God to complete what faith had started (cf. Phil. 1:6).

**3:3 "remember what you have received and heard"** This is a present active imperative followed by a perfect active indicative and an aorist active indicative. This relates to the gospel which they heard and continued to receive. Christianity is not a decision only, but a lifestyle relationship. It involves believing a message and receiving a person. It results in a changed and changing life of repentance (aorist active imperative, Rev. 3:3b) and obedience (present active imperative, Rev. 3:3b).

▣ **"keep it"** This is a present active imperative which is an ongoing command.

▣ **"repent"** This is an aorist active imperative which implies a complete repentance. See note at Rev. 2:5.

▣ **"Therefore if you do not wake up"** This is a third class conditional sentence like 2:22. The action is potential, contingent on their response to Jesus' commands, but not assured.

▣ **"I will come like a thief"** This is often used of the Second Coming (cf. Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thess. 5:2,4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). However, in this context it seems to refer to a temporal judgment of this church.

**3:4 "a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments"** The putting on and taking off of clothing was used as a metaphor of the Christian life (cf. Eph. 4:22,24,25,31; Col. 3:8,10,12,14; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1). Some believers had not compromised with pagan culture.

▣ **"they will walk with Me in white"** White clothing is used as a symbol of purity or victory in Rev.

3:4,5,18; 6:11; 7:9,13-14; 19:14. The term "walk" is often used as a metaphor of the Christian life (cf. Rev. 3:5; 21:24; 1 John 1:6,7; 2:6,11; 3 John 3-4).

**3:5 "He who overcomes"** Four things will be given to the one who overcomes.

1. they will walk with the Messiah, Rev. 3:4
2. they will be clothed in white
3. their names will never be blotted out of the book of life
4. the Messiah will acknowledge them as His own in the presence of the Father and His angels

See Special Topic on Perseverance at Rev. 2:2.

■ **"I will not erase his name from the book of life"** This is a strong Double negative. When citizens died, their names would be erased from the rolls of their city but God will never erase believers from His rolls.

This metaphorical phrase "the book of life" is also found in Rev. 20:12-15, where two books are mentioned:

1. the book of life which is made up of the names of God's people (cf. Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27)
2. the book of deeds or remembrances which records the deeds of both the wicked and righteous (cf. Ps. 56:8, 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16)

For "book" see notes at Rev. 5:1.

■ **"I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels"** As believers confess Christ ("call on His name," cf. Rom. 10:9-13), He also confesses them before the Father (cf. Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8).

"Confess" is the Greek term *exomologeō*. It was used in three senses:

1. to publically confess sins to God and others present (cf. Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5; Acts 19:18; James 5:16)
2. to publically confess faith in Christ (cf. Phil. 2:1; and possibly Rom. 14:11)
3. to publically praise God (cf. Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; Rom. 14:11 {Isa. 45:23}; 15:9 [Ps. 18:49])

The related Greek word *homologeō* was used in similar ways:

1. to acknowledge sin (cf. 1 John 1:9)
2. to acknowledge faith in Christ (cf. Matt. 10:32; Luke 10:32; John 9:22 [negatively, John 1:20; 12:42])
3. to affirm a belief in something (cf. Acts 23:8; 24:14; Heb. 11:13)

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: CONFESSION**

**3:6** See note at Rev. 2:7.

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 3:7-13**

**<sup>7</sup>"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:**

**<sup>8</sup>I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.**

**<sup>9</sup>Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the *hour* of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup>I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup>He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new**

**name. <sup>13</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

**3:7 "He who is holy, who is true"** Verse 7 is a series of four descriptive clauses describing Jesus with titles for YHWH. "Holy" was used 30 times in Isaiah to describe YHWH. John usually substituted the term "righteous" (cf. Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). "True" was often used of YHWH (cf. Isa. 65:16; Jer. 10:10; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). The first two, "holy" and "true," are used again of God in Rev. 6:10. The term "true" in Greek meant "true as over against false," but in Hebrew it meant "faithful or trustworthy." Jesus is surely both (cf. Rev. 3:14; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6).

■ **"who has the key of David"** This is an allusion to the royal Davidic Messiah of 2 Samuel 7, but particularly of Isa. 22:22, from where this exact imagery is drawn.

■ **"Who shuts and no one opens"** This refers to the preaching of the gospel (see note at Rev. 3:8).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: USE OF "DOOR" IN THE NT**

**3:8 "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut"** This is a perfect active indicative and a Perfect passive participle. This refers to either

1. preaching opportunities (keys, cf. Matt. 16:19)
2. entrance into the Messianic banquet (clothed in white, cf. Rev. 3:4)
3. a divine opportunity for service (cf. Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3)

■ **"because you have a little power"** This is the first of three reasons why Jesus opened such a wonderful door of opportunity. This is the only one of the seven churches to which Jesus had nothing negative to say.

■ **"and have kept My word"** The verb tense (aorist active indicative) implies a particular time of persecution or a decisive act of obedience. They had "little faith," but they used it well!

■ **"and have not denied My name"** This may be a reference to the persecution caused by the demands of the Concilia, local supporters of the Emperor worship (cf. Rev. 2:13).

**3:9 "I will cause *those of the synagogue of Satan,*"** This may refer to Jewish opposition to the gospel. The Church, not unbelieving Jews, is the true people of God.

■ **"I will make them come and bow down at your feet"** This is an allusion to Isa. 45:14; 49:23; 60:14, which initially spoke of the Gentiles coming into the Jewish nation, but because these so-called Jews rejected the Messiah they would come to bow to these Gentile believers to show God's love to them (cf. Isa. 43:4,9). This is a good example of how the NT in general, and John in particular, has modified the OT prophecies concerning Israel. John uses a text that originally saw the Gentiles coming to a restored Jerusalem to worship YHWH, but in the new age of righteousness this geo-political image is expanded to include a believing world (Jew and Gentile) having unbelieving Jews come and bow down! This universalization of Israel and Jerusalem shows that Revelation, far from substantiating a literal fulfillment of OT prophecies to a Jewish nation, has transformed them (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13). This is the "mystery of the gospel hidden from the ages"!

### **3:10**

**NASB "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance"**

**NKJV, NJB "Because you have kept My command to persevere"**

**NRSV "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance"**

**TEV "Because you have kept my command to endure"**

This may be a reference to John 8:51 or 17:6. Jesus is not promising to keep His church from persecution because in the letters to the seven churches persecution, even death, was occurring.

Verse 10 refers to a world-wide judgment of God on unbelievers. It is crucial to distinguish between the "tribulations" believers endure in faith and "the wrath of God" that falls on an unbelieving world.

Interpreters differ over how the church will be spared amidst this eschatological judgment:

1. some see the church as going through it protected by God (cf. John 17:15)
2. others see this as pointing toward a secret rapture of believers before this period

I prefer #1. God's people were not spared persecution and death during the first few centuries in a Greco-Roman culture or the continuing persecution and death as the gospel spread, nor will they be spared the end-time birth pains of the New Age. Persecution has always purged and strengthened the church!

The literary unit of chapters 2-3, in which the Church experiences persecution, is followed by the literary unit of heaven, in which the martyred Church prays for revenge. This "wrath of God" is given in stages of severity (seals-1/4, trumpets-1/3, bowls—total destruction), each stage given for the purpose of calling the lost to salvation. God's ultimate wrath, the second death, the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20), is no longer for redemption, but is totally punitive.

The persecuted church becomes the victorious church and the persecuting unbelievers experience persecution! God is in control! See Special Topic: Perseverance at Rev. 2:2.

■ **"to test those who dwell on the earth"** This phrase is used repeatedly throughout to refer to a settled state of rebellion by unbelievers (cf. Rev. 6:10; 18:13; 1:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:8). God wants them to repent and believe (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but they will not, even amidst the expanding judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. See Special Topic: Greek Terms for Testing at Rev. 2:2.

**3:11 "I am coming quickly"** This is a continuing emphasis upon the immediacy of the Lord's coming (cf. Rev. 1:1, 3; 2:16; 22:7,12,20). The early church expected the immediate return of the Lord. This is the hope of every generation of Christians. See Special Topic: Soon Return at Rev. 1:3.

■ **"hold fast what you have"** This is a present active imperative, meaning "continue to hold fast" as the aorist active imperative of Rev. 2:25 focused on a decisive act of holding fast (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:2). As believers hold on to God, He will hold on to them (cf. Gal. 6:9). This is the covenant relationship of God's sovereignty and mankind's mandated response!

Salvation is an initial decision of repentance and faith (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21) followed by lifestyle repentance and faith, obedience, service, and perseverance. All of these items are necessary for mature Christianity.

■ **"crown"** This is another reference to the *stephanos* crown mentioned in Rev. 2:10. It was a reward for faithfulness.

**3:12 "He who overcomes"** See note at 2.2.

■ **"I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God"** Philadelphia was in an earthquake area; the metaphor of a pillar conveyed the concept of stability. Prominent citizens' names were inscribed on the pillars of the temples in Philadelphia. The term "temple" here is a term (*naos*) from the verb "to dwell" and was used of the place where deity's very presence dwelt. The overcoming believers will never have to leave God's presence (cf. Ps. 23:6; 27:4-6).

This may be a metaphor because apparently there will be no temple in the new age (cf. 21:22).

■ **"I will write on him the name of My God"** Notice the five-fold repetitions of "My" in Rev. 3:12. This is a wonderful acknowledgment of intimacy with God. The name symbolized ownership (cf. 7:3; 14:1; 22:4).

■ **"the new Jerusalem. . .new name"** Revelation picks up on the prophecies of Isaiah.

1. new things, Isa. 42:9; 43:19; 48:6 (Rev. 21:5)
2. new song, Isa. 42:10 (Rev. 5:9; 14:3)
3. new name, Isa. 62:2; 65:15 (Rev. 2:17)

4. new heaven and new earth, Isa. 65:17; 66:22 (Rev. 3:12; 21:1).

The new heavenly city, Jerusalem, is also prophesied in Isaiah 40:2,9; 41:27; 44:20,28; 52:1,2,9; 62:1,6,7; 65:18,19; 66:10,13,20 (Rev. 21:2,10). It is the metaphor for the presence of God among His people. The OT prophecies have been universalized. New Jerusalem is not a city in Palestine, but the promise of a new age of righteousness.

**3:13** See note at Rev. 2:6.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 3:14-22**

**14**"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: **15**I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. **16**So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. **17**Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, **18**I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. **19**Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. **20**Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. **21**He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. **22**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

**3:14 "The Amen"** This is an allusion to a title of YHWH, "the God of the Amen," in Isa. 65:16. The term "Amen" is a form of the OT word for "believe" or "faith" (cf. Gen. 15:16; Hab. 2:4). It usually emphasized faithfulness or trustworthiness (cf. 1:6; 2 Cor. 1:20). See Special Topic at Rev. 1:6.

■ **"the faithful and true Witness"** This may be another phrase from chapter 1 (cf. Rev. 1:5). In the Septuagint both of these adjectives are used to refer to YHWH. It is possible that *emeth*, which is the Hebrew word for "faith," "believe" or "trust," was translated as *pistos* (faithful) and *alētheia* (truth). These two Greek terms are used often in Revelation for Jesus (cf. Rev. 3:14; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6).

**NASB, NKJV "the Beginning of the creation of God"**

**NRSV "the origin of God's creation"**

**TEV "the origin of all that God has created"**

**NJB "the Principle of God's creation"**

This is an allusion to both Gen. 1:1 and John 1:1. The terms "beginning" (Hebrew, *bereshith*) and "origin" (Greek, *archē*) have two connotations: (1) start or (2) origin, source.

This phrase was used in the Arian/Athanasius (Trinitarian) controversy of the fourth century and is an allusion to Pro. 8:22-31. Wisdom was YHWH's first creation and through wisdom all else was created. This was probably the origin of John's use of "*logos*" in his Gospel (cf. John 1:1). This is one of the strongest passages on the pre-existence of Christ (cf. John 1:1; 8:57-58; 2 Cor. 8:4; Phil. 2:6-7; Col. 1:17), and also of Christ being the Father's agent in creation (cf. John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:16; Col. 1:15,18; Heb. 1:2).

**SPECIAL TOPIC: ARCHĒ**

**3:15 "you are neither cold nor hot"** This may be an allusion to the lukewarm water that the people of this city had to drink because of the local hot springs. A similar charge is made against the church of Sardis (cf. 3:1).



**3:16 "I will spit you out of My mouth"** The warnings of Rev. 2:5; 3:3,16,17 are shocking when it is realized that they are addressed to the visible churches of the first century. This is not the loss of salvation, but the loss of effective ministry (cf. Rev. 3:19; Heb. 12:5-13).

**3:17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'"** Verses 17 and 18 are a historical allusion to Laodicea as a center of banking, a center for dyed wool, and a center for eye salve. The tragedy of their prosperity was that they thought they had so much when they had so little (cf. 3:1).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: WEALTH**

**3:18 "buy from Me"** This may be an allusion to Isa. 55:1-3, where God's offer of salvation was free, but described as a cost.

▣ **"white garments"** See note at Rev. 3:4.

▣ **"that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed"** In the OT nakedness was a sign of defeat, judgment, and poverty.

**3:19 "I reprove"** This Greek term *elegchō* is used in the sense of "to expose and thereby to heal or correct" (cf. John 3:20; Eph. 5:11-14).

▣ **"and discipline"** Being disciplined by God is a sign that we are members of His family (cf. Job 5:17; Pro. 3:12; Ps. 94:12; Heb. 12:6).

▣ **"be zealous"** This is a Present active imperative. It is from the same word root as "hot" or "boiling" (*zestos*) used in Rev. 3:15-16. Knowing and serving God must be a flaming passion and lifestyle.

▣ **"and repent"** This is an aorist active imperative. There is a recurring insistence throughout these seven letters that Christians, not just unbelievers, must repent and return to Christ for maturity, stability, and joy (cf. Rev. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). Repentance is a lifestyle, not only an initial action!

**3:20 "I stand at the door and knock"** This is a Perfect active indicative, "I stand and continue to stand at the door" followed by a present active indicative "and continue to knock." Although this church received no word of praise, it did receive a warm invitation. This is not the invitation to become a Christian, but rather an invitation for the church members to return to vital fellowship with Christ. This verse is often used out of context to refer to evangelism.

The metaphor of "a door" was used in the Gospels (cf. Mark 13:28-29; Luke 12:36) as a way of referring to the nearness of Christ's coming. See Special Topic: Door at Rev. 3:7.

▣ **"if anyone hears My voice and opens the door"** This is a Third class conditional sentence implying potential but not certain action. In many parts of the world knocking is accompanied by a verbal greeting. Notice the volitional element; the person/church must respond and open the door. This is the covenantal aspect of all of God's relationships with humans. He takes the initiative, He sets the agenda, but humans must respond. Also, notice that the response is not just initial but continual. Salvation is not a product, but a lifestyle relationship. It has its ups and downs, but the existential fellowship is sure!

▣ **"I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me"** This is an allusion to the peace offering (cf. Leviticus 3, and 7), a time of fellowship where God symbolically ate with the offerer. Others see this as a reference to the eschatological Messianic banquet.

The term used here for a meal is the one used for the meal at the end of the day, which was the major time of family fellowship and companionship. In the East eating has always been a sign of covenant, friendship, and fellowship.



**3:21 "I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne,"** This is a powerful image of intimate fellowship and inclusion. There are many allusions in the NT to believers' reigning with Christ (cf. Rev. 2:26, 27; Luke 22:30; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2 ff; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev. 20:4). Revelation 22:5 implies Christians' eternal reign with Christ. See Special Topic on Reigning in the Kingdom of God at Rev. 5:10.

■ **"as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"** It is wonderful to know that Jesus has already overcome the world (cf. John 16:33; Eph. 1:21-22) and that He is already seated at the Father's right hand (cf. Eph. 1:20; 1 John 2:1 and Rev. 22:1) and that He wants us to join Him in His victory!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does John's prophecy of the end-times begin with a letter to seven (and only seven) churches in Asia Minor?
2. Why does each letter begin with a description of Christ from chapter 1?
3. How do these letters relate to the Church today?
4. How do you interpret these strong warnings addressed to these churches?
5. How does the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" relate to the warnings and call to perseverance in these letters?
6. Why is 3:20 not a salvation promise?
7. How is the next literary unit related to the letters to the seven churches? Will God spare the end-time believers from persecution, but not the believers of the first century?

# REVELATION 4 AND 5

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Heavenly Worship	The Throne Room of Heaven	Visions of the Glory of God and of the Lamb	Worship in Heaven	God Entrusts the Future of the World to the Lamb
4:1-6a	4:1-11	4:1-6a	4:1-6a	4:1-11
4:6b-11		4:6b-11	4:6b-8 4:9-11	
The Scroll and the Lamb	The Lamb Takes the Scroll		The Scroll and the Lamb	
5:1-14	5:1-7	5:1-5	5:1-5	5:1-5
	Worthy is the Lamb	5:6-10	5:6-10	5:6-10
	5:8-14			
		5:11-14	5:11-14	5:11-14

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. These two chapters form a literary unit; chapter 4 shows God as Creator (the connotation of *Elohim*, God as creator, provider, and sustainer of all life, cf. Psalm 104) and chapter 5 shows God's Lamb (Jesus) as Redeemer (the connotation of YHWH, God as Savior, Redeemer, and covenant-making God, cf. Psalm 103). The larger literary context continues through the opening of the seven seals. However, the seals themselves begin in chapter 6 and continue through 8:1.
- B. Chapter 4 forms a central theme (the secure glory and rule of YHWH) of the book of the Revelation. This heavenly throne scene is similar to the heavenly tabernacle of Hebrews 8 and 9. This motif (God's heavenly glory) forms the central goal of early Jewish mysticism.

C. The book of the Revelation is not primarily the how and when of the Second Coming; it is primarily the sovereignty of God in human history. These two chapters are essential in understanding the remainder of the book and its purpose!

D. It is obvious from these two chapters that John was using apocalyptic language to describe spiritual truth. John used imagery from OT apocalyptic passages, particularly Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10; also 2:9,10; Daniel 4; 7:13-14 and also innumerable references to Jewish intertestamental apocalyptic writings, such as I Enoch. If this is true then it is extremely inappropriate to force Revelation into a literal, totally historical interpretive grid, especially when we force the events of our day, our culture, our geographical setting into the details of an ancient apocalyptic book. This is not to imply in any sense that Revelation is not true. It was not meant to be interpreted like historical narrative; a better hermeneutical model may be the parables of Jesus (see Fee and Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 256)!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup>After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." <sup>2</sup>Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. <sup>3</sup>And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. <sup>4</sup>Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones / saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup>Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; <sup>6</sup>and before the throne *there was, something like* a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. <sup>7</sup>The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup>And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." <sup>9</sup>And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

4:1

NASB, NKJV "after these things I looked"

NRSV "after this I looked"

TEV "at this point I had another vision and saw"

NJB "then, in my vision, I saw"

This grammatical formula, with a slight variation, is also found in Rev. 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1 and possibly Rev. 19:1. These is a series of visions. Most OT prophetic visions were covenantally conditioned, emphasizing the "if. . .then" of God's covenant with Israel. Israel's current faith determined her future fate. This is also true

of John's visions in the Revelation.

1. Jesus' words to the seven churches are conditional. Their response to His warning determined their future.
2. The judgments of the seals and trumpets are also conditional. God wants unbelievers to repent and turn to Him.

As in the OT, God's universal redemptive plan (cf. Gen. 3:15; 15:12-2; 17:1-8, also note Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; 13:29) is unconditional based on His promises but also conditional (cf. Gen. 12:1; Revelation 2-3) on human covenantal response. This universal redemptive plan is revealed in the heavenly scenes of chapters 4 and 5.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN**

■ **"a door *standing open in heaven*"** This is a perfect passive participle, meaning that the door was opened by deity (passive voice) and remained open (perfect tense). This is another way of expressing God's revelation of Himself to mankind. It is very similar to Rev. 19:11; Ezek. 1:1; Matt. 3:16; John 1:51 and Acts 7:55-56. See Special Topic at Rev. 3:7.

The word "heaven" is used more than 50 times in John's writings and always in the singular except for one time in Rev. 12:12. The exact meaning of this change, from the singular to the plural, is theologically uncertain. The rabbis discussed whether there were three or seven heavens (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). John focuses on one heaven, wherein God dwells; He chooses to let us see into His realm. Though there is chaos on earth, there will be none in heaven.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEAVENS AND THE THIRD HEAVEN**

■ **"and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound of a trumpet*"** A voice like a trumpet was mentioned in Rev. 1:10 (see note). At first this implies Jesus speaking, but because chapters 4 & 5 are a literary unit and Jesus is not introduced until 5:5,9-10,12,13, this probably refers to a revealing angel (very characteristic of apocalyptic literature). An angel's voice and a trumpet blast are related in Paul's description of the Second Coming (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16).

■ **"come up here"** Dispensationalists have assumed that this is the secret rapture of the Church because of their presuppositional understanding of the book of the Revelation (all OT prophecies must be literally fulfilled; the church and Israel are totally separate; the church will be secretly raptured to heaven so that OT prophecies can be fulfilled to an earthly Israel). Often this interpretation is supported by an argument from silence, since the word "church" does not appear in Revelation after chapter 3 (except in Rev. 22:10). However, there is nothing in the text to imply that anyone but John was called up to heaven.

Because of the "lightning" and "thunder" of Rev. 4:5, this may be an allusion to Moses being called up (cf. Exod. 19:20,24) on Mt. Sinai to receive God's revelation (cf. Exodus 19-20, esp. 19:16,19).

Also notice the mention of God's voice like a loud trumpet in Exod. 19:19 (see Special Topic: Horns Used in Israel at Rev. 1:10).

■ **"what must take place after these things"** This phrase may be an allusion to Dan. 2:29,45. If so, it refers to historical events in a series, not future events. Revelation is not things in the first century and things in a far distant future century, but events that:

1. recur in every age (cf. Matt. 24:4-14)
2. reflect the whole period between Christ's first coming and His second coming (the seven literary units of the book)

This phrase is similar to 1:1. God's word and will must (*dei*) come to pass. Here the time element (i.e., shortly) is left out, but the certainty remains. God will accomplish His redemptive plan!

**4:2 "Immediately I was in the Spirit"** John is described as being in the Spirit in Rev. 1:10; 17:3 and 21:10. This may be similar to what happened to Ezekiel in Ezek. 8:1-4; 11:1, to Jesus in Matt. 4:8; to Philip in Acts 8:39-40, and to Paul in 2 Cor. 12:1-2. Whether this is a spiritual trance or a physical transportation is uncertain.

■ **"a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne"** The term "throne" (*thronos*) is used over 47 times in this book. God's reign is the central motif of this heavenly vision (chapters 4 & 5). The throne is a symbolic, apocalyptic way of showing that YHWH is in control of all history. God is a spiritual, eternal, personal spirit; He does not sit on a throne (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:1)!

One purpose of the genres of prophecy and apocalyptic is God's knowledge and control of future events. All history is known and purposeful (*telos*, cf. Matt. 24:14; 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The throne is described as "was standing." This imperfect tense can have two meanings: (1) it has always stood or (2) it was just set up. This may be an allusion to Dan. 7:9, "thrones were set up."

**4:3 "He who was sitting was like"** John is not going to describe the appearance of God because in Jewish thought, this was extremely inappropriate (cf. Exod. 33:17-23; Isa. 6:5). But he will describe the glory of God in the colors of three precious gems. Gems are also used in Ezek. 28:13 to describe heavenly (Garden of God) imagery.

**NASB, NKJV,**  
**NRSV, TEV** "jasper"  
**NJB** "diamond"

The exact color and name of gems is very uncertain in ancient literature. The names of gems and colors were changed from country to country and period to period. The jasper was the first stone found in the breastplate of the High Priest which is mentioned in Exod. 28:17-21. This stone seems to be a clear stone. It will be connected with the "sea of glass" (cf. Rev. 4:6; 15:2; 21:11,18,21). It may refer to our diamond.

**NASB, NKJV** "sardius"  
**NRSV, TEV** "carnelian"  
**NJB** "ruby"

The sardius was a blood red stone. It was the last stone on the breastplate of the High Priest. This may be an allusion to God as being the First and the Last with the emphasis on the Messianic tribe of Judah (the emerald rainbow). These two stones are listed in ancient writings as a summary of all jewels.

■ **"and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance"** The emerald is the stone for Judah on the breastplate of the High Priest. The emphasis of the rainbow has been greatly conjectured but there are two main theories.

1. Some see it as an allusion to Gen. 9:16, where the rainbow is a symbol of God's covenant protection and a sign that the storm is over; in the midst of judgment there was promise and mercy.
2. Others relate it to Ezek. 1:28, a symbol of the glory of YHWH.

Whether the rainbow is a sign of judgment or of covenant is uncertain, but it obviously was an unusual rainbow because it was green in color and not simply a refraction of normal light.

**4:4 "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones"** The reason for twenty-four thrones has been disputed.

1. some see it as connected with the orders of the Aaronic priesthood set up by David in 1 Chr. 24:7-19
2. others see it as an allusion to the heavenly council which is mentioned in 1 Kgs. 22:19; Isa. 24:23; Dan. 7:9-10,26
3. still others see it as a combination of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, which symbolizes the complete people of God (cf. Rev. 21:12,14)

It is surprising that this number does not occur in Jewish intertestamental apocalyptic literature.

■ **"twenty-four elders sitting"** There has also been much debate about the identity of these elders. There are two major theories

1. They represent believers:

- a. pictured as being clothed in white (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4)
  - b. angels are never said to wear crowns and sit on thrones (cf. Rev. 4:4,10)
  - c. they are in lists which specifically include angels (cf. Rev. 5:11)
  - d. Rev. 5:9-10 in the Vulgate, Peshitta, and later the Textus Receptus includes the elders in the songs of redemption
2. They represent angels:
- a. angels do wear white garments (cf. Matt. 28:3; John 20:12; Mark 16:5; Acts 1:10; Rev. 15:6 and Dan. 10:5,6)
  - b. these elders are always identified with the living creatures as in Rev. 5:11,14, which seem to list three different orders of angels
  - c. one of the elders acts as a revealing angel (cf. Rev. 5:5)
  - d. in Isa. 24:23 the angels of God's heavenly council are called "elders"
  - e. the textual evidence of Rev. 5:10 implies that the elder does not include himself in the song of redeemed humanity

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: ELDER**

▣ **"golden crowns"** Nowhere in Scripture are angels said to wear crowns (even the powerful angel in Daniel 10). The demonic hordes from the abyss are described as wearing something similar to golden crowns in Rev. 9:7.

**4:5 "from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder"** This is similar to Exod. 19:16-19, which describes physical phenomena that surround the presence of God on Mt. Sinai. These phrases indicate God's presence (cf. Rev. 11:19) or His judgments (cf. Rev. 8:5; 16:18).

▣ **"seven lamps of fire"** These appear to be seven separate lamps (torches), not one bowl with seven wicks (cf. Exod. 25:37; Zech. 4:2). They function in a way similar to all the other "sevens," referring to the very presence of God.

▣ **"which are the seven spirits of God"** This same phrase is used in Rev. 1:4; 3:1 and 5:6. It is often interpreted as a reference to the Holy Spirit based on 1:4, but none of the other references confirm that interpretation. This phrase seems to be equated with the churches (seven stars, Rev. 3:1; seven lamps, Rev. 4:5) or with the omnipotence and omniscience of the Lamb (Rev. 5:6). See Special Topic: The Seven Spirits at Rev. 1:4.

**4:6 "a sea of glass like crystal"** There have been numerous theories about this phrase:

- 1. it refers to the laver in the Temple (cf. 1 Kgs. 7:23; 2 Chr. 4:2-6)
- 2. it is related to the concept of the crystal sea found in Exod. 24:9-10
- 3. it is part of the portable throne chariot of God in Ezek. 1:22,26; 10:1
- 4. it is a symbol of separation from the holiness of God (cf. Rev. 15:2).

This sea is removed in Rev. 21:1, showing the curse (cf. Genesis 3) of mankind's sin and separation has been removed. See note at Rev. 21:1.

▣ **"four living creatures"** These living creatures are described in Rev. 4:6-8. They are a combination of the *cherubim* of Ezek. 1:5-10 and 10:1-17 and the *seraphim* of Isa. 6:2,3. The numbers of wings and faces vary, but it is a composite picture of these human/animal/angels which surround the throne of God (cf. Rev. 4:6,8,9; 5:6,8,11,14; 6:1,3,5,7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: CHERUBIM**

▣ **"full of eyes in front and behind"** This may refer to the eyes of each of the four faces or it may be a biblical metaphor of God's omniscience (cf. Rev. 4:8; Ezek. 1:18; 10:12).

**4:7 "lion. . .calf. . .man. . .eagle"** This is an obvious allusion to Ezek. 1:6,10. In rabbinic literature these are listed as the strongest of the different orders of God's creation. Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) used these four different faces to describe the four Gospel writers (church tradition finally settled on John, eagle; Luke, human; Mark, ox; Matthew, lion) but this is too speculative and allegorical. These composite creatures are symbolic, not literal. Knowing the OT emphasis on maintaining God's orders of creation, a composite human and animal creature would be Levitically unclean. This is not historical narrative of actual things and events, but a highly symbolic genre seeking to describe ultimate, spiritual truths; in this case God as the ever living One (v. 8,9), the Holy One (v. 8), and the creator of all things (v. 11).

**4:8 "holy, holy, holy"** These living creatures are repeating the song of the *seraphim* in Isa. 6:2,3. This is the first of many hymns that are found in the book of the Revelation (cf. 4:8,11; 5:9-10,12,13; 7:12; 11:17-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 18:2-8; 19:1-3, 6-7). Often the hymns are a means of interpreting the visions. Another symbol, like the sea of glass, it functions as a Hebrew superlative of the ultimate holiness of God.

■ **"the Lord God, the Almighty"** These were three of the OT titles for God (cf. Rev. 1:8):

1. Lord = YHWH (cf. Exod.3:14; Psalm 103)

2. God = *Elohim* (cf. Psalm 104)

3. the Almighty = *El Shaddai*, the patriarchal name for God (cf. Exod. 6:3)

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 1:8.

■ **"who was and who is and who is to come"** This phrase is a recurrent title (cf. Rev. 1:4; 4:8; see full note at Rev. 1:4). This is a play on God's covenant name, YHWH, which comes from the verb "to be." This same theme is repeated in Rev. 4:9 and 10 in the phrase "to Him who lives forever and ever" (cf. Rev. 10:6; 15:7).

**4:9-11** This is one sentence in Greek, which shows that ultimate worship is due Him who sits on the throne and lives forever (cf. Psalm 47; Dan. 4:34; 12:7). This may be an allusion to the angelic attendants called the heavenly council (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19; Job 1:6; Dan. 7:10) or the Jewish "angels of presence" (i.e., Tobit 12:15).

**4:9 "the living creatures"** These angelic beings are mentioned often in the book (cf. Rev. 5:6,8,14; 6:1; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4).

**4:10 "will cast their crowns before the throne"** This is a symbol of their acknowledgment that God deserves all the praise and honor! Whatever was the reason for their having crowns, they recognized that the power was from God!

**4:11 "You created all things"** The elders and living creatures praise God as the Creator, Sustainer and Provider of all things. This is the theological emphasis of the name *Elohim* (cf. Genesis 1; Job 38-41; Psalm 104). This chapter uses the theological meaning of the two most used names for God to describe His actions. The progressive revelation of the NT makes it clear that Jesus was the Father's agent of creation (cf. John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16 and Heb. 1:2).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 5:1-5**

**<sup>1</sup>I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" <sup>3</sup>And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. <sup>4</sup>Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; <sup>5</sup>and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."**

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**5:1 "and I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne"** A better translation of this phrase would be "on the right hand of Him" (Peshitta translated into English by Lamsa and the Amplified Bible). It is not the idea of God holding tightly to the book, but God holding it out for someone to take and open.

The phrase "the right hand of Him" is a biblical anthropomorphism to describe God's power and authority (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:1). God does not have a physical body; He is a spiritual being (cf. John 4:24), uncreated and eternal.

■ **"book"** The Greek term is "*biblion*" which later was used to refer to a codex (book). Most commentators agree that books did not appear until the second century, so what we have here is a papyrus or parchment scroll (NKJV, NRSV, TEV and NJB). There are several theories as to the meaning of this book.

1. the book of woes found in Ezek. 2:8-10; and Rev. 10:8-11
2. the book which the people are unwilling to read because God has spiritually blinded them (cf. Isa. 29:11; Rom. 11:8-10,25)
3. the events of the end-time (cf. Dan. 8:26)
4. a Roman last will or testament, which was traditionally sealed with seven seals
5. the book of life (cf. Dan. 7:10; 12:1), which is mentioned so often in the book of the Revelation (cf. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12,15)
6. the Old Testament (cf. Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15)
7. the heavenly tablets of I Enoch 81:1,2.

In my opinion aspects of #1, #2, or #3 seem to be best; the scroll is a book of the destiny of mankind and God's culmination of history.

■ **"written inside and on the back"** This was very unusual in the ancient world because of the difficulty of writing on the back side of papyrus, although it is mentioned in Ezek. 2:8-10 and Zechariah 5:3. It symbolizes God's complete and full control over history and human destiny.

Both of the participles (written and sealed) that describe this scroll are perfect passives. The first is a special grammatical form used to describe Scripture as being inspired (i.e., John 6:45; 8:17; 10:34, etc). The second is a way of expressing that the scroll was protected, preserved, and reserved by God.

■ **"sealed up with seven seals"** The seven seals have two possible origins.

1. Seven was the number of perfection from Genesis 1, therefore, it was perfectly sealed.
2. Roman wills were sealed with seven seals.

The seals were small blobs of wax containing the imprint of the owner, placed where the book or scroll would be opened (see Special Topic at Rev. 7:2). In Rev. 6:1-8:1 the breaking of these seals brings woes upon the earth, but the content of the scroll is not revealed in this literary unit. As a matter of fact, in the structure of the book, the seventh seal starts the seven trumpets which is the seventh seal.

**5:2 "I saw a strong angel"** Some see a connection etymologically to the name Gabriel, which means "God's strong man." Another strong angel is mentioned in Rev. 10:1 and 18:21. Angelic mediation is common in Jewish intertestamental apocalyptic literature.

■ **"proclaiming with a loud voice"** He was addressing all creation.

■ **"Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"** The term "worthy" is a commercial term relating to the use of a pair of scales. It came to mean "that which corresponds to." Something is put on one side of the scales and what is put on the other is equal. It could be used in a negative or positive sense. Here, it is the inestimable value of the sinless Savior. Only Jesus was equal to the task of redemption. Only Jesus was equal to the task of consummation. Only Jesus is worthy (cf. Rev. 5:7, 9-10,12).

**5:3 "And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it"** This shows the total inability of angels or humans to bring about the will of God! Rebellion has



affected them all! Creation cannot help itself! No one is worthy!

**5:4 "I began to weep greatly"** This is an imperfect tense verb, which denotes the beginning of an action or repeated action in past time. This meant "loud wailing," so characteristic of the Ancient Near East.

**5:5 "one of the elders said to me"** Here we find one of the elders acting in the role of an angelic interpreter, as in the book of Daniel. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: ELDER](#) at Rev. 4:4.

- **"Stop weeping"** This is a present imperative with the negative particle which usually meant to stop an act which is already in process.
- **"the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah"** This is an allusion to Gen. 49:9-10 (cf. II Esdras 12:31,32). The Messiah is the conquering Lion (king) from the tribe of Judah.
- **"the Root of David"** This is an allusion to 2 Samuel 7 and particularly Isa. 11:1-10. This same idea of a royal Davidic Messiah can be found in Jer. 23:5; 33:5 and Rev. 22:16.
- **"has overcome"** This is an aorist active indicative, which implies it was an accomplished fact (i.e., Calvary and the empty tomb). Notice that the Lion is not going to conquer by His power, but by His sacrifice (cf. Rev. 5:6).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 5:6-10**

**<sup>6</sup>And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup>And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup>When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. <sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."**

**5:6 "a Lamb standing"** This concept of a sacrificial Lamb (i.e., baby lamb, *amion*) depicts the vicarious atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Lamb is mentioned throughout the book of the Revelation (cf. Rev. 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1,4(twice),10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:9,14,22,23,27; 22:1,3). The sacrificial metaphor is from

1. the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12)
2. one of the lambs that was sacrificed daily in the morning and evening (the continual, cf. Exod. 29:38-46; Num. 28:3,6,10,23,31; 29:11,16,19,22,25,28,31,34,38)
3. the slain lamb of Isa. 53:7 or John 1:7,29

This metaphor is used of Jesus in two distinct senses: (a) as an innocent sacrificial victim and (b) as the overcoming victor (also found in Jewish apocalyptic literature, cf. I Enoch 90:9; Testament of Joseph 19:8-9). In the NT only John the Baptist in John 1:29,36 and John in Revelation 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1, refer to Jesus as "Lamb" (Paul asserts this, but without the term in 1 Cor. 5:7).

- **"as if slain"** He was dead but now alive. The Messiah's resurrection is parodied by the sea beast (cf. Rev. 13:3).
- **"having seven horns and seven eyes"** The first term refers to power or omnipotence (cf. Exod. 27:2; 29:12; Deut. 33:17; 2 Chr. 18:10; Ps. 112:9; 132:17; Jer. 48:25; Ezek. 29:21; Zech. 1:18-21). The second term refers to God's omniscience (cf. Rev. 4:6,8; Ezek. 1:18; 10:12; Zech. 3:9 and 4:10). This symbolism is

similar to Dan. 7:13-14.

■ **"which are the seven Spirits of God"** See Special Topic at Rev. 1:4 and note at Rev. 4:5.

**5:8 "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb"** This shows the worship of the Lamb as well as the worship of God (cf. Rev. 5:13), which is a central theme in Revelation.

■ **"and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints"** Angels were the regular bearers of prayers to God in inter-biblical Jewish literature (cf. Tobit 12:15; III Baruch 11). The idea of incense representing prayers is used several times in Scripture (cf. Rev. 8:3-4; Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10).

■ **"saints"** Although the word "church" does not appear after chapter 3, the concept of "saints" does continue throughout the book and must refer to the people of God. The concept of believers as "saints" is common in Revelation (cf. Rev. 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:8 and 20:9).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: SAINTS**

**5:9-10** There is a significant Greek manuscript variant related to the pronoun "us." The NKJV has the pronoun "us" in Rev. 5:9, "have redeemed us to God," and in Rev. 5:10, "and have made us kings and priests to our God." Most modern translations (NASB, NRSV, TEV, NJB) omit "us" in both verses. If "us" is present in both verses then Jesus' sacrificial death includes the twenty-four elders who seem to be angelic creatures. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus' death related to angelic redemption. Also, the presence of "them" (*autous*) in Rev. 5:10 grammatically excludes the possibility of "us" being original. The United Bible Society's fourth edition rates the two plural pronoun's omission as "certain."

**5:9 "And they sang a new song"** In the OT there are many allusions to the new song (cf. Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1 and Isa. 42:10). At every major event in the OT, the people of God were encouraged to sing a new song praising God's activity. This is the ultimate song about God's revealing Himself in the Messiah and the Messiah's work of redemption on behalf of all believers (cf. Rev. 5:9,12,13; 14:3).

The emphasis on "new" things is characteristic of the new age in Isaiah 42-66.

1. "new things," Isa. 42:9
2. "new song," Isa. 42:10
3. "do something new," Isa. 43:19
4. "new things," Isa. 48:6
5. "new name," Isa. 62:6
6. "new heavens and new earth," Isa. 65:17; 66:22.

In Revelation there are also many "new things."

1. "new Jerusalem," Rev. 3:12; 21:2
2. "new name," Rev. 2:17; 3:12
3. "new song," Rev. 5:9,10,12,13; 14:3
4. "new heaven and new earth," Rev. 21:1

■ **"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals"** This new song (Rev. 5:9-10) is a fivefold description of the worthiness of the Lamb.

1. substitutionary death (cf. Rev. 5:6,9,12; 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
2. redemptive price paid (cf. Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4; Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:23; 1 Tim. 2:6)
3. purchased men from every nation (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 14:6)
4. made the believers a kingdom of priests (cf. Rev. 1:6; 5:10)
5. they will reign with Him (cf. Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:4)

■ **"from every tribe and tongue and people and nation"** This is a recurrent metaphor of universality (cf. Rev. 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). It may be an allusion to Dan. 3:4,7.

▣ **"and purchases for God with Your blood"** This is surely a reference to the vicarious atonement of the Lamb of God. This concept of Jesus as the sacrifice for sin is central in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:5; 5:9,12; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4; 15:3; 19:7; 21:9,23; 22:3) and also in all the NT (cf. Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24-25; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:28; and 1 Pet. 1:18-10).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM**

**5:10 "have made them to be a kingdom and priests"** This is an allusion to Exod. 19:6 and Isa. 61:6. This terminology is now used for the Church, the new Great Commission people of God (cf. Rev. 1:6; 20:6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9). See note at Rev. 1:6.

▣ **"they will reign upon the earth"** Some translators see this in a future sense and some see it as a present reality. There is a Greek manuscript variant between the future tense in MSS  $\kappa$ , P and the present tense in MS A (Alexandrinus). If it is in a present sense it is similar to Rom. 5:17 and Eph. 2:6. If future it possibly deals with the reigning of the people of God with Christ (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 5:10). Even this future reign is seen in two ways.

1. in Rev. 20:4, 6 it seems to refer to a millennial reign
2. in Rev. 22:5 it seems to refer to an eternal reign (cf. Ps. 145:13; Isa. 9:7; Dan. 2:44; 7:14,18,27)
3. possibly the millennium is a symbol of eternity

The UBS<sup>4</sup> gives the future tense an "A" rating (certain).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: REIGNING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 5:11-14**

**<sup>11</sup>Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." <sup>13</sup>And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." <sup>14</sup>And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.**

**5:11 "many angels"** This verse lists three groups of angels: (1) many angels (thousands of thousands); (2) living creatures (four); or (3) elders (twenty-four).

▣ **"the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands"** This seems to be an allusion to the heavenly court of Dan. 7:10 (see note at Rev. 5:1).

**5:12 "the Lamb that was slain to receive power"** This is the affirmation of the Son from the angelic beings. "Was slain" is a perfect passive participle (cf. Rev. 5:6; 13:8), which implies "slain in the past" with the marks and effect of the slaying remaining. When we see Jesus He will still have the marks of the crucifixion. They have become His badge of honor! The concept of the cross is implicit and central in Revelation. See note at Rev. 5:9.

In this verse seven attributes are given unto the Lamb by the angelic orders:

1. power
2. riches
3. wisdom

4. might
5. honor
6. glory
7. blessing

These attributes may come from 1 Chr. 29:10-12, which may also be the OT source for the liturgic conclusion to the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:13 in the Greek manuscript tradition.

The NASB Study Bible (p. 1855) adds the note that the attributes of God begin with three in Rev. 4:11, then four in Rev. 5:13, and finally seven in Rev. 5:12 and 7:12. Remember apocalyptic literature is a highly structured genre which uses symbolic number often.

**5:13** All conscious human creation (the largest human choir possible), humans (both alive and dead) in Rev. 5:13 bless the Father and the Son with a fourfold blessing (cf. Rev. 5:14; Ps. 103:19-20; Phil. 2:8-11) and the angelic orders (the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders) surrounding the throne affirm the blessing (cf. Rev. 5:14).

**5:14 "Amen"** This is an affirmation from the four throne angels (the four living creatures). See Special Topic at Rev. 1:6.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. How do chapters 4 and 5 fit into the overall purpose of the book?
2. What is the literary genre of chapters 4 and 5?
3. From what sources does John pull his imagery?
4. Who are the elders?
5. Are the creatures described in Rev. 4:7-10 cherubim or seraphim?
6. List the OT titles of the Messiah which are found in chapter 5.
7. List the fivefold description of the Messiah's worthiness found in Rev. 5:9 and 10.

# REVELATION 6:1-7:17

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Seals	First Seal: the Conqueror	The Opening of the First Six Seals	The Seals	The Lamb Breaks the Seven Seals
6:1-2	6:1-2	6:1-2	6:1-2	6:1-2
	Second Seal: Conflict on Earth			
6:3-4	6:3-4	6:3-4	6:3-4	6:3-4
	Third Seal: Scarcity on Earth			
6:5-6	6:5-6	6:5-6	6:5-6	6:5-6
	Fourth Seal: Widespread Death on Earth			
6:7-8	6:7-8	6:7-8	6:7-8	6:7-8
	Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs			
6:9-11	6:9-11	6:9-11	6:9-11	6:9-11
	Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances			
6:12-17	6:12-17	6:12-17	6:12-17	6:12-17
The 144,000 of Israel Sealed	The Sealed of Israel	An Interlude	The 144,000 People of Israel	God's Servants will be Preserved
7:1-8	7:1-8	7:1-8	7:1-8	7:1-8
The Multitude from Every Nation	A Multitude from the Great Tribulation		The Enormous Crowd	The Rewarding of the Saints
7:9-12	7:9-17	7:9-12	7:9-12	7:9-12
7:13-17		7:13-17	7:13	7:13-17
			7:14a	
			7:14b-17	

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This section relates contextually to chapters 4 and 5. Chapters 4 and 5 describe events in heaven, while Rev. 6:1-8:1 describes the unfolding judgments of God on the earth. As a matter of fact, Rev. 4:1-16:21 forms one literary unit.
- B. The identity of the first rider (cf. Rev. 6:2) is difficult, but assuming it is a symbol of evil, the four riders are symbolic of the persecutions believers face in a fallen, hostile world (cf. Matt. 24:6-7). The term "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) is used consistently and solely of the persecution of Christians by unbelievers.  
The sixth seal beginning in Rev. 6:12 describes God's wrath on unbelievers. Believers are exempt from the wrath (*orgē*, cf. Rev. 6:16) of God, but they do face the persecution and rage of the unbelieving world.
- C. There are three major interpretive problems in this section.
1. how do the seals, trumpets, and bowls relate to each other in history
  2. who are the 144,000 of Rev. 7:4 and how do they relate to the second group mentioned in Rev. 7:9
  3. to which period of tribulation and which type of tribulation does the group in Rev. 7:14 refer

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." <sup>2</sup>I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

**6:1 "when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals"** This verse shows the connection between chapters 5 and 6. These seals are broken before the book is read, so many interpreters have assumed that they are representative of problems that occur in every age (cf. Matt. 24:6-12). However, because of the growing intensity of the judgments, some see these as immediately preparatory to the end of the age. Here is the interpretive tension between the kingdom as present and future. There is a fluidity in the NT between the "already" and the "not yet." The book of the Revelation itself illustrates this tension. It was written for the persecuted believers of the first century (and every century) and yet prophetically addresses the last generation of believers. Tribulations are common in every age!

The seventh seal is the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls. As has been noted, each is more intense than the previous one. The first two are redemptive in purpose. They basically demonstrate that God's judgment is just because unbelievers will not repent, so the last cycle (i.e., bowls) have no opportunity for repentance, only judgment! But it seems to me that the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet describe the end of the age. Therefore, these are synchronous in nature and not chronologically sequential.

The one Second Coming is discussed three times, at the end of the seals (cf. Rev. 6:12-17) and

trumpets (cf. Rev. 11:15-18), and not just at the end of the bowls in Rev. 16:17-21 and again in Rev. 19:11-21. This is the structural pattern of the book. It is an apocalyptic drama in several acts! See Introduction to Revelation, C.

■ **"one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder"** The four living creatures, like the elders, are levels of angelic creation. This voice, like thunder, is also mentioned in Rev. 14:2 and 19:6.

■ **"Come"** This term means either "come" or "go forth." The text of the ancient Greek uncial manuscript Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) adds "and see" (cf. KJV, NKJV, which would refer to John), but Alexandrinus (A) has only "come" (which would refer to the four horses). UBS4 gives this shorter form a "B" rating (almost certain). In context this command (present imperative) does not refer to John or the church, but to the four horsemen (cf. Rev. 6:3,5,7).

**6:2 "I looked, and behold, a white horse"** This context is an allusion to Zech. 1:8 (the four horses) and Zech. 6:1-8 (the four chariots). There has been much discussion about the identity of this horseman. The interpretations range all the way from Jesus (Irenaeus) to the anti-Christ. With that kind of confusion, dogmatism is inappropriate. Some believe that it refers to Christ because of a similar description found in Rev. 19:11-21, but the only similarity seems to be the color of the horse. Others see this as a reference to the spreading of the gospel. This is because they see these chapters as paralleling the Olivet discourse of Matt. 24; Mark 13, and Luke 21. Therefore, this is assumed to be a reference to Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10.

It has even been proposed, based on Ezekiel 39, that this refers to Gog leading his troops against God's people. This would symbolize the end-time anti-Christ (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2). It seems highly unusual that an angel could command Jesus to come. Although Jesus wears a crown in chapters 6 and 19, the Greek words to describe these crowns are different. There, Jesus is called "faithful and true," but not here. The conquest of the rider is not described at all. The rider is described as having a bow in chapter 6, but in chapter 19, Christ has a double edged sword in His mouth, therefore, the similarity is far overshadowed by the differences. This may be just one of the plagues of the OT. These plagues, which are an allusion to Leviticus 26 and Ezek. 14:21, are spelled out in Rev. 6:8. White was not only a color symbol for righteousness, but also a Roman symbol of military victory. Roman generals who had been victorious in battle rode in a chariot through the streets of Rome pulled by four white horses.

■ **"and he who sat on it had a bow"** The bow was the weapon of choice of the feared mounted archers of the Parthian Hordes (who rode on white horses). The bow is often used in the OT to describe YHWH as Warrior (cf. Ps. 45:4-5; Isa. 41:2; 49:2-3; Hab. 3:9; Zech. 9:13 and possibly Gen. 9:13). There are also examples of YHWH judging other nations in the metaphor of His breaking their bow (cf Ps. 46:9; Jer. 51:56 and Hosea 1:5).

■ **"a crown was given to him"** This is a "*stephanos*" crown, meaning a victor's crown, while the one mentioned in Rev. 19:11 of Christ is a "*diadema*," a royal crown.

■ **"he went out conquering and to conquer"** The symbols in Rev. 6:1 are of war and conquest. Because the first and second horsemen are described with similar purposes, some see this first one as a war of conquest and the second as a civil war. This is speculation, but the two horses are somehow parallel.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:3-4**

**<sup>3</sup>When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." <sup>4</sup>And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.**

**6:4 "another, a red horse"** This is an allusion to some kind of military slaughter.



■ **"a great sword was given to him"** This was the small Roman sword called "*machaira*." It was worn on the belt of Roman soldiers and was used for capital punishment of Roman citizens (cf. Rom. 13:4). The phrase "men would slay one another" is interesting because in the OT this is one of the means YHWH used to defeat His people's enemies (cf. Jdgs. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:20; 2 Chr. 20:22).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:5-6**

**<sup>5</sup>When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup>And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."**

**6:5 "I looked, and behold, a black horse"** This is a symbol of famine (cf. Matt. 24:7) which follows war.

**6:6 "A quart of wheat for a denarius"** A denarius was a day's wage for a soldier or a laborer (cf. Matt. 20:2). We learn from Herodotus that this would purchase the normal amount of food required for one man for one day. This shows the severity of the famine: that a man could work all day and have only enough food for himself.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: COINS IN USE IN PALESTINE IN JESUS' DAY**

■ **"three quarts of barley for a denarius"** Barley was the staple diet of the poor. This Greek word "quarts" is "*choinix*" and equaled about 1.92 pints.

■ **"and do not damage the oil and the wine"** It is amazing how many interpretations there are of this detail. Many try to go back to the Temple scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls to find some allusion to Jewish sacrifice. Oil and wine were staples of the diet of Mediterranean people. The fact that these were not hurt shows a limited famine. This limitation can also be seen in Rev. 6:8. God limits His judgment so that unbelievers will have time to repent (cf. Rev. 16:9). It is also possible that both of these were used for medical purposes.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:7-8**

**<sup>7</sup>When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." <sup>8</sup>I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.**

**6:8**

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"an ashen horse"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"a pale horse"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"pale green horse"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"a pale-colored horse"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"deathly horse"</b>

The term "pale" referred to a yellowish green or off-white color. In English we get the word "chlorine" from this Greek word. It was possibly the color of a dead body. Because of the list of the means of death in Rev. 6:8, this may refer to those killed or eaten by wild animals, which was one of the OT curses (cf. Lev. 26:22; Jer. 15:3; Ezek. 5:17; 14:21).

■ **"he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following"** This is an OT allusion to Pro. 5:5 or Hosea 13:14. It is a personification of the terms for the termination of physical life. These two terms are used three times together in the Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:18; 20:13-14).



The term "*Hades*" is synonymous to the OT term "*Sheol*," which meant "the holding place of the dead." See [SPECIAL TOPIC: Where Are the Dead?](#) at Rev. 1:18.

▣ **"Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth"** Notice the pronoun "them" refers to all four horses and their riders. There is an intensification of the judgment in the trumpets (i.e., one third, cf. Rev. 8:7,8,10,12); there is complete destruction in the bowls (cf. Rev. 16:1-21). These fractions are a literary device to show that God's judgments had a redemptive purpose (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:7; 16:9,11), but fallen, rebellious, hardened mankind would not respond (although a few may have, cf. Rev. 11:13).

▣ **"to kill with"** These four horsemen represent the OT covenant judgments (cf. Lev. 26:21-26; Jer. 15:2-3; 24:10; 27:8; 29:17-18; 32:24,36; 34:17; Ezek. 5:12,17; 14:21; Amos 4:6-10). The term for "sword" is different from Rev. 6:4. This refers to the large battle sword, *hromphaia*. All four of the OT judgments of war, famine, plague, and wild animals are listed in Lev. 26:21-26 and Ezek. 14:21. These covenant judgments are clearly discussed in Deuteronomy 27-29. Remember, originally their purpose was to cause Israel to repent and turn back to YHWH. They function in that same redemptive sense here (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 11:13; 14:7; 16:9,11).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:9-11**

**<sup>9</sup>When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; <sup>10</sup>and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup>And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.***

**6:9 "I saw underneath the altar"** There has been much discussion as to which altar this refers. The term "altar" is used quite often in Revelation (cf. Rev. 8:3,5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7). Some believe that this refers to the sacrificial altar mentioned in Lev. 4:7 and by Paul in Phil. 2:17, while others believe that it is the altar of incense in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle (cf. Rev. 8:3-5) or temple of Rev. 11:1. It is probably the altar of sacrifice because

1. the rabbis saw this as a place of great honor
2. it is referring to death (i.e., blood) of the martyrs

One might ask, "Why do martyrs assemble under the altar?" Remember that in the OT "blood" was the symbol of life (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11,14). In the sacrificial system of Israel the blood was not placed on the horns of the sacrificial altar, but poured out at the base (i.e., Exod. 29:12; Lev. 4:7,18,25; 8:15; 9:9). Therefore, the life (i.e., souls) of the slain martyrs was at the base of the altar.

▣ **"the souls of those who had been slain"** These souls are the disembodied (between death and resurrection) martyred believers (cf. Rev. 13:15; 18:24; 20:4). This is surprising because it is more a Greek thought than a Hebrew concept. All Christians are called to be martyrs if the situation demands (cf. Rev. 2:10,13; Matt. 10:38-39; 16:24).

There seems to be no connection between those killed by the four horsemen of Rev. 6:1-8 and these martyrs!

**NASB** "because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained"

**NKJV** "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held"

**NRSV** "for the word of God and for the testimony they had given"

**TEV** "because they had proclaimed God's word and had been faithful in their witnessing"

**NJB** "on account of the Word of God, for witnessing to it"

This phrase is a recurrent theme in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:9; 12:11,17; 19:10; 20:4). It is very similar in meaning to the phrase "to him who overcomes" (cf. Rev. 2:6,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). These were killed because they were active Christians.

**6:10 "How long. . . will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood"** Many commentators view this as being sub-Christian. This is probably because these commentators have never been in severe persecution from unbelievers themselves. These people are not asking for vengeance, but for justice! This may be an allusion to Deut. 32:43 (cf. Rev. 19:2). This request follows Paul's admonition in Rom. 12:19.

▣ **"O Lord"** This term "Lord" (*despotēs*) describes total authority. We get the English term "despot" from this Greek word. It is used of YHWH in Luke 2:29 and Acts 4:24 and of Jesus in 2 Pet. 2:1 and Jude 1:4.

▣ **"those who dwell on the earth"** This is a very common phrase in Revelation; it always refers to unbelievers (cf. Rev. 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,12,14; 17:2,8).

**6:11 "there was given to each of them a white robe"** This is a metaphor for "rest," "blessedness," or "victory." For some the theological problem involved here is how a disembodied soul could wear a piece of clothing. Be careful of hyper literalism, especially when interpreting an apocalyptic drama! The fact that commentators even discuss this shows how much they misunderstand the genre of the book! Do not push the details in Revelation!

▣ **"until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also"** One of the major truths of this book is that God is in control of all things (cf. Rev. 6:8), even the death of Christian martyrs! All of history is in His hand. God is not surprised by any events, actions, or outcomes. Yet there is still pain, suffering and unfairness in this fallen world. For a good discussion of the problem of evil see John W. Wenham's *The Goodness of God*.

This concept of a completed number of martyrs (cf. I Enoch 47:4) is a symbolic way of referring to God's knowledge and plan for mankind. This is similar to Paul's concept of "the fullness of the Gentiles" (cf. Rom. 11:12,25) which refers to God's knowledge of all the Gentiles who would be saved.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 6:12-17**

**<sup>12</sup>I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; <sup>13</sup>and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. <sup>14</sup>The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. <sup>15</sup>Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup>and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; <sup>17</sup>for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"**

**6:12 "He broke the sixth seal"** This verse is Jewish apocalyptic language for the end of the age (cf. Joel 2:30-31; 3:15-16; Isa. 13:9,10; 34:4; Jer. 4:23-28; Hag. 2:6; Matt. 24:29; and *The Assumption of Moses*, 10:5). Notice the seven items in Rev. 6:12-14. This language is used in the OT for the Lord's Day. Its use here in the sixth seal and later in the sixth trumpet is the one reason, I believe, that each of these series of sevens terminates with the end of the age, the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Rev. 6:12-17; 11:15-18; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; 19:11-21; 22:6-16). Revelation is not chronologically sequential. It is a drama of seven acts.

▣ **"there was a great earthquake"** There are many earthquakes mentioned in this book (cf. Rev. 8:5; 11:13,19; 16:18). It is interesting to note that there are seven aspects to this end-time, apocalyptic event.

There are also seven different categories listed in Rev. 6:15 (see Special Topic: Symbolic Number in Scripture at Rev. 1:4). This is another example of the highly structured, literary pattern of apocalyptic literature (cf. Rev. 5:12).

■ **"the sun became black. . . moon became like blood"** This is an OT allusion to judgment day (cf. Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 50:3; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:2,10,31; 3:15; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25).

**6:13 "stars of the sky fell"** This metaphor may have two origins:

1. the stability of God's created order (cf. Job 38:31-33; Ps. 89:36-37; Isa. 13:10; Jer. 31:35-36; 37:20-26; Enoch 2:1) dissolves amidst God's judgments (cf. Matt. 24:29)
2. stars falling is a common intertestamental apocalyptic metaphor (which usually refers to angels, i.e., Rev. 12:4; Dan. 8:10)

In this context #1 fits best.

**6:14 "the sky was split apart"** The ancients viewed the sky as a solid dome of stretched skin (cf. Job 22:14; Ps. 104:2; Pro. 8:27; Isa. 40:22). This is a metaphor of deity breaking into the natural order (cf. Isa. 34:4).

■ **"every mountain and island were moved out of their places"** In the OT, whenever God visited His creation, either for blessing or judgment, it convulsed. The description is often painted in apocalyptic terms. Rev. 15-17 describe God's wrath on the unbelieving persecutors (cf. Rev. 16:20). These same descriptions are used in the OT to make physical access to God's presence easier, like the lowering of mountains, the drying up of rivers, etc. (cf. Isa. 40:4).

**6:15 "hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains"** As God's persecuted people had to hide from the persecutions of unbelievers (cf. Heb. 11:38), so now the rich and powerful (possible allusion to Ps. 2:2) seek shelter from God's wrath (cf. Isa. 2:10,19,21). This verse describes fallen, unbelieving mankind in seven ways. This use of sevens is a basic pattern in John's book (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:4).

**6:16 "fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne"** This is an allusion to Hosea 10:8 (cf. Isa. 2:19,21 and Luke 23:30). Notice that the Father's and the Son's wrath are linked as they deplore what is happening to their family of faith. They act in history to vindicate the faithful and punish the rebellious (cf. Gal. 6:7).

■ **"wrath of the Lamb"** This is a powerful mixed metaphor. This imagery of a victorious lamb is from Jewish interbiblical literature. For "wrath" (*orgē*) see note at Rev. 7:14.

**6:17** Verse 17 seems to be an allusion either to Joel 2:11 or Mal. 3:2. Many commentators believe that Rev. 6:17 sets the stage for the interlude found in chapter 7, which attempts to answer the question, "What about the believers who are on the earth during these apocalyptic events and series of judgments?" There has always been a debate among commentators as to whether the seals in chapter 6 are redemptive or judicial (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:7-8; 16:9,11). Chapter 6 refers to God's judgment on unbelievers who refuse to believe. These judgments start out effecting 1/4 of the world, then 1/3 and finally in the bowls the entire unbelieving world (cf. Zeph. 1:14-18).

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO 7:1-17

- A. Chapter 7 forms an interlude between the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh seal (cf. Rev. 8:1, as does Rev. 10:1-11:13 between the sixth and seventh trumpets). It deals with the question of what is happening to believers during these cycles of God's judgment on unbelievers. The seventh seal becomes the seven trumpets.

B. This interlude deals with two groups of believers

1. The 144,000 from the Twelve Tribes on earth (cf. Rev. 7:1-8, esp. Rev. 7:4)
2. The innumerable host from the tribes of the whole earth who are now in heaven (cf. Rev. 7:9-17, esp. Rev. 7:9)

C. God acts in powerful, protective, assuring ways on behalf of His people. There is no distinction in Revelation between believing Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 3:22; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). The OT's racial distinctions have been universalized into believers and unbelievers.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 7:1-3

**<sup>1</sup>After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. <sup>2</sup>And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, <sup>3</sup>saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."**

**7:1 "I saw four angels. . .standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth"** In OT number symbolism, four referred to the whole earth (cf. Isa. 11:12; Jer. 49:36; Dan. 7:2; Zech. 1:8; 6:1,5; Matt. 24:31, see Special Topic at Rev. 1:4).

There have been several interpretations of these four winds.

1. the rabbis viewed the quarterly winds as evil (cf. Acts 27:14)
2. some refer it to the evil winds or possibly the judgments of God of Jer. 49:36 and Dan. 7:2
3. some see it as an allusion to the number four in Zech. 1:8 and 6:5, where the four horsemen and four chariots are servants of God throughout the world (cf. Matt. 24:31)

▣ **"no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree"** This, like Rev. 6:6 and 8, shows a limited judgment (cf. Rev. 7:3; 9:4).

**7:2 "saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun"** The east (sun) was a symbol of life, health, or a new day.

▣ **"having the seal of the living God"** God's seal is referred to again in Rev. 9:4 and 14:1 and probably 22:4. Satan's seal is mentioned in Rev. 13:16; 14:9; and 20:4. The purpose of this seal is to identify God's people so that the wrath of God will not affect them. Satan's seal identifies his people, who are the object of God's wrath.

In Revelation "tribulation" (i.e., *thlipsis*) is always unbelievers persecuting believers, while wrath/anger (i.e., *orgē* or *thumos*) is always God's judgment on unbelievers so that they might repent and turn to faith in Christ. This positive purpose of judgment can be seen in covenant curses/blessings of Deuteronomy 27-28.

The phrase "the living God" is a word play on the title YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:14; Ps. 42:4; 84:2; Matt. 16:16, see Special Topic at Rev. 1:8). This same word play is often found in biblical oaths, "as the Lord lives."

### SPECIAL TOPIC: SEAL

▣ **"the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea"** This is an aorist passive indicative. God is in control of the judgments on the earth and unbelievers. His limits on judgment have two purposes:

1. that believers will not be hurt by them

2. that unbelievers might repent, call upon His name, and give Him glory (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11; 21:7; 22:17)

**7:3 "until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads"** This is an allusion to Ezek. 9:4,6 (cf. Rev. 9:4; 14:1). The opposite of this sealing is Satan's sealing, the mark of the beast (cf. Rev. 13:16,17; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 7:4**

**<sup>4</sup>And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:**

**7:4 "one hundred and forty-four thousand"** This same mysterious group is mentioned in Rev. 14:1,3. There has been much discussion about this number and who it represents. This number is symbolic, not literal, for the following reasons.

1. the number itself is a round number and all the tribes have an equal number (which they never did in the OT)
2. the number is a multiple of twelve which is the biblical number of organization (or possible the people of God) and ten, which is the biblical number of completion (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:4)
3. chapter 7 is in apocalyptic language
4. the list of the tribes of Israel is slightly altered (Dan is omitted, and Ephraim is replaced by Joseph).

A Jew would know that it was not meant to be taken literally.

Some of the possible interpretations of this group have been:

1. that it is literally end-time believing Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10)
2. that it is those newly-converted believers present after the secret rapture of the Church
3. that it is the believing Jewish remnant (cf. Romans 11)
4. that it is a title for the NT Church (cf. Rev. 1:6)

The sealing is not limited in Revelation to one group, but represents God's ownership and protection of His people (cf. 2:20; 11:18; 19:2,5; 22:36). Satan seals all of his followers (cf. 13:16,17; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), mimicking God (cf. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1; 22:4).

The NT often describes the Church in terms which were used of Israel (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 4:11; 9:6,8; Gal. 3:29; 6:16; Phil. 3:3) and particularly in the book of the Revelation where in Rev. 1:6 the Church is addressed by a title used of Israel in Exod. 19:4-6 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5,9). In the books of James (cf. 1:1) and 1 Peter (cf. 1:1) the Church is also described as the "Diaspora," the name for scattered Jews who were not living in Palestine.

It seems best to me at this point in my study of this book to identify the 144,000 in Rev. 7:4 and "the great multitude" of Rev. 7:9 as the NT people of God—those who trust Christ, but viewed in two different senses (believing Jews and believing Gentiles).

**[SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NUMBER TWELVE](#)**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 7:5-8**

**<sup>5</sup>from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, <sup>6</sup>the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, <sup>7</sup>the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, <sup>8</sup>the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.**

**7:5 "from the tribe of Judah"** The list of tribes in Rev. 7:5 does not agree with any of the twenty-plus lists found in the OT. It especially does not agree with Ezek. 48:2-7, which lists the eschatological people of God. Dan is omitted, Judah is listed first, Ephraim is left out, but Joseph is listed in its place and Levi is

included with the other tribes. Any Jew would recognize that this list is irregular and meant to be taken symbolically.

F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 139, mentions that the reason the tribe of Dan was omitted from the list in Church tradition goes back to Irenaeus' interpretation of Jer. 8:16 in the Septuagint. It reads:

"We shall hear the neighing of his swift horses out of Dan: the whole land quaked at the sound of the neighing of his horses; and he shall come, and devour the land and the fulness of it; the city, and they that dwell in it."

Irenaeus saw the coming Antichrist as coming out of the tribe of Dan. This is mere speculation, not exegesis!

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 7:9-12**

**<sup>9</sup>After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; <sup>10</sup>and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." <sup>11</sup>And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup>saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."**

**7:9** The great multitude mentioned in this verse is obviously different from the one hundred forty-four thousand which are mentioned in Rev. 7:4. As the first group came from different tribes of Israel, this group comes from every tribe of the earth. It seems that these two groups represent the same group of people in two different senses. If Rev. 7:1-8 refer to believing Jews, then Rev. 7:9 refers to the people of God of all people groups (cf. Rev. 5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).

However, the fact that they are said to (1) have come out of the great tribulation (cf. Rev. 7:14); (2) were standing before the throne (cf. Rev. 7:9); and (3) they have white robes (cf. 6:11) may identify them as the complete number of martyrs (cf. Rev. 6:11; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4).

▣ **"which no one could count"** This may be an allusion to the promises to Abraham of abundant descendants.

1. dust of the earth – Gen. 13:16; 28:14; Num. 23:10
2. stars of heaven – Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; Deut. 1:10
3. sand on the seashore – Gen. 22:17; 32:12
4. a general statement – Gen. 16:10

▣ **"palm branches were in their hands"** Some try to identify this with Lev. 23:40 or Neh. 8:15 as a sign of joy and triumph. Others relate it to the rituals of the Feast of Passover as in John 12:13 and still others, because this passage is linked to the Wilderness Wandering Period (cf. Rev. 7:15-16), with the Feast of Tabernacles. The palm branches may simply be a symbol of victory.

**7:10 "Salvation to our God"** This is the normal Greek term for "salvation" (*sōteria* from *sōzō*), but it may be used in the sense of "victory" (NEB) or "have completely overcome." Therefore, it could refer to (1) deliverance from the problems of life on earth or (2) spiritual, eternal salvation. The OT term (*yasha*) meant physical deliverance (cf. James 5:15). This same term is used in a series of blessings to God three times in Revelation (cf. Rev. 7:10; 12:10; 19:1).

▣ **"and to the Lamb"** Notice that the Messiah is blessed in the same way as YHWH. This stresses the divine essence of the Son.

**7:11** Notice that several groups are differentiated.

1. the angels

2. the elders
3. the four living creatures

These groups are all connected to the throne room of God in heaven. They are separate from the 144,000 and the great multitude.

For "the elders" see [SPECIAL TOPIC: ELDER](#) at Rev. 4:4.

**7:12 "saying"** Notice the sevenfold blessing to God (and Messiah, cf. Rev. 7:10), which is similar to the sevenfold blessing of the slain lamb of Rev. 5:12.

▣ **"Amen"** Notice how it starts and concludes the blessing. See Special Topic at Rev. 1:6.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 7:13-17**

<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" <sup>14</sup>I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. <sup>16</sup>They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

**7:14 "I said to him, 'My Lord, you know'"** This is a common human response to angelic messengers (cf. Zech. 4:5,13; Dan. 10:16), which reinforces the identification of the elders with a group of angelic beings.

Apocalyptic literature is characterized by angelic mediation and interpretation. These interpretations become crucial (as are the choir's songs) in defining and understanding the symbolic language.

▣ **"these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation"** This is a present participle and is an allusion to the persecuted churches in John's day (cf. Rev. 1:9; 2:9,10,22). However, it is obvious that the historical allusions in the Revelation address the persecution of the saints in every age and also point to an end-time intensification of persecution (cf. Dan. 12:1). This is related to

1. the persecution of God's children (cf. Matt. 24:21-22; Mark 13:19; 2 Thess. 2:3ff; Rev. 2:10; Dan. 12:1)
2. God's coming wrath on unbelievers (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 3:10; 6:17; 8:2ff; 16:1ff)

These problems, to some degree, have been associated with every age. Christians have often suffered in Jesus' name (cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). Both of these events are often called the birth pangs of the new age of righteousness (cf. Mark 13:8 and the apocryphal book of II Baruch, chapters 25-30).

The Greek term *thlipsis* (tribulation) in Revelation is always used of believers' suffering persecution at the hands of unbelievers (cf. Rev. 1:9; 2:9,10,22; 7:14). The Greek terms *thumos* (cf. Rev. 12:12; 14:8,10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1; 18:3; 19:15) and *orgē* (cf. Rev. 6:16,17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15) are always used of the Father's or the Son's wrath on rebellious, stubborn unbelievers.

As a theological aside, if the book was written to encourage believers going through tribulations, why do some interpreters insist on a secret rapture to spare some future generation of believers persecution? Persecution was the lot of most of the Church's first leaders, and every generation of believers. Why then should one future group be spared?

▣ **"they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"** This apparently refers to martyrs who die for their faith in Christ during the Great Tribulation. What a striking metaphor of redemption (cf. Rev. 22:14)! This idea of cleansing by means of the sacrificial death of Christ can be seen in Rom. 3:25; 5:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; and 1 John 1:7. The truth of the



cross is often alluded to in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:5; 5:12; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4; 15:3; 19:7; 21:9,23; 22:3).

Notice the combination of Christ's provision and mankind's need to respond to God's invitation. The covenantal aspect of both Testaments asserts God's initiation and provision, but the sovereign God has also chosen that fallen mankind must respond (cf. John 1:12; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21; Rom. 10:9-13).

**7:15-16** A future time of bliss and heavenly peace is described in OT terms. This is an allusion to the wilderness wandering period and the Tabernacle (cf. Exod. 40:34-38; Num. 9:15-23). It is an additional allusion to the *Shekinah* cloud of glory, which symbolized God's presence with the people (cf. Isa. 49:10; Matt. 5:6; John 4:14; 6:35; 7:37). This period of Israel's history was in reality a period of judgment. However, YHWH was never closer and more attentive than during this period of judgment. It is often referred to by the rabbis as YHWH and Israel's honeymoon.

**7:15 "they serve Him day and night"** In the OT this referred to Levitical priests (cf. Ps. 134:1; 1 Chr. 9:33). The access to God and the service of God has been expanded to (1) persecuted believers and (2) all believers. There is no longer a Jewish elite priesthood! All believers are priests (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6).

The phrase "day and night" is a metaphor for continuance. It is found several times in Revelation (cf. Rev. 4:8; 7:15; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10).

■ **"in His temple"** It is somewhat difficult to relate this passage (and Ezekiel 40-48) to Rev. 21:22 which says there will be no temple in heaven. Some try to make a distinction between a temporal millennial reign and the eternal reign. Obviously, the metaphors and time frame in this book are fluid. This may refer to the spiritual Tabernacle in heaven (cf. Heb. 9:23).

■ **"will spread His tabernacle over them"** This is a verbal metaphor of God's dwelling intimately with His people. God's tent represents His permanent presence with His new people from every kindred and tribe. The initial purpose of the Garden of Eden is restored. Humanity is redeemed (cf. Gen. 3:15). Intimate fellowship with God is again possible (i.e., Gen. 3:8).

**7:16-17** These are blessings (from the OT) for all believers, not just martyrs.

**7:16 "they will hunger no more, nor thirst anymore"** Verse 16 is an allusion to Isa. 49:10-13. God's physical provisions are used as a symbol of God's spiritual provisions (cf. Matt. 5:6; John 4:14; 6:35; 7:37).

■ **"nor will the sun beat down on them; nor any heat"** This is an allusion to the shade provided by the *Shekinah* cloud of glory during the 38 year Wilderness Wandering Period (cf. Ps. 121:5-7).

**7:17 "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd"** This is an OT allusion to Ezek. 34:23. Notice that the slain but risen Redeemer is the focal point of God's redemptive activity. The Good Shepherd of John 10:11 is now the Shepherd of all the sheep (cf. John 10:16).

■ **"and will guide them to springs of the water of life"** For desert people water has always been a symbol of abundance and life. This is an allusion to Isa. 49:10 (cf. Ps. 23:2), which is repeated at the close of the book in Rev. 21:6; 22:1.

■ **"and God will wipe every tear from their eyes"** This allusion is to the Messianic banquet and new city of God in Isa. 25:6-9 (cf. Rev. 21:4). What a comfort this must have been to the persecuted believers of John's day and every age!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of



the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Who are the 144,000? Explain your answer from the text of Revelation.
2. How do the 144,000 relate to the large group in Rev. 7:9?
3. Why are these symbols so hard for us to interpret?
4. What is the major thrust of chapters 6 and 7?
5. What is meant when it is said that chapter 7 is an interlude? Where are other interludes found in the book?

# REVELATION 8:1-9:21

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer	Seventh Seal: Prelude to the Seven Trumpets	The Seventh Seal	The Seventh Seal	The Seventh Seal
8:1-2	8:1-6	8:1-2	8:1-2	8:1 The Prayers of the Saints Bring the Coming of the Great Day Nearer 8:2-5
8:3-5		8:3-5	8:3-5	
The Trumpets		The First Six Trumpets	The Trumpets	The First Four Trumpets
8:6	The First Six Trumpets	8:6	8:6	8:6-12
8:7	8:7 Second Trumpet: The Seal Struck	8:7	8:7	
8:8-9	8:8-9 Third Trumpet: The Waters Struck	8:8-9	8:8-9	
8:10-11	8:10-11 Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Struck	8:10-11	8:10-11	
8:12	8:12	8:12	8:12	
8:13-9:6	8:13 Fifth Trumpet: The Locusts from the Bottomless Pit 9:1-12	8:13 The Plague of Demonic Locusts 9:1-6	8:13 9:1-6	8:13 The Fifth Trumpet 9:1-6
9:7-11		9:7-11	9:7-11	9:7-11
9:12	Sixth Trumpet: The Angel from the Euphrates	9:12	9:12	9:12
9:13-19	9:13-21	9:13-19	9:13-19	9:13-21
9:20-21		9:20-21	9:20-21	

**READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")**

*FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO 8:1-9:21

- A. As the seven trumpets proceed out of the seventh seal, the question is, "what is the relationship between the trumpets, the seals, and the bowls?" There is a partial, if not complete, recapitulation. They cover the same time period. They are built on the same pattern and proceed out of each other. A partial recapitulation theory seems to have first been advanced in the third century by Victorinus of Pettau (see *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, pp. 344-360). He only mentions a parallel relationship between the trumpets and bowls. When one compares the three, they seem to be apocalyptic, progressively destructive metaphors of the same eschatological period. It is quite possible that as the sixth seal (cf. Rev. 6:12-17) brings us up to the end, the seven trumpets (cf. Rev. 11:15-19) and seven bowls (cf. Rev. 16:17-21) describe the events of the end.
- B. From where does John draw his imagery for these apocalyptic visions? There are several theories:
1. There are allusions to several OT passages, particularly in chapters 8 and 9, to the plagues of Egypt and to the locust invasion of Joel 2. As always in Revelation, the imagery of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah form the basic background.
  2. Jewish intertestamental apocalyptic writings, like I Enoch. I Enoch was widely known in first century Judaism, as well as in the church and was alluded to by NT authors (cf. 2 Peter 2 and Jude).
  3. The historical setting of the first century, particularly Roman Emperor worship and local persecution.  
The option we choose as the major source of imagery will determine how we interpret these two chapters. If we see this against the background of Imperial Rome, we will fit it into Roman history (preterist). If we see it against Jewish apocalyptic language, we will be more likely to interpret it as symbolic (idealist). If we see it against OT prophecies, we will project it into an end-time Jewish setting (futurist).
- C. These two chapters describe an incrementally intensifying judgment on unbelievers. However, it must be emphasized that God brings judgment on them for the purpose of their redemption (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:7; 16:9,11). Therefore, they function like the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy 27-29.
- D. As in previous chapters, the symbolism is so vague that what some commentators ascribe to Christ, some ascribe to Satan. With that kind of fluidity of symbolism, dogmatism is totally inappropriate. Interpreters must summarize the complete vision in one central truth. This central truth should guide the interpretation of the details and remain the central theological issue to be emphasized!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

**<sup>1</sup>When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the seven angels who stand before God. And seven trumpets were given to them.**

**8:1 "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal"** Jesus is the One who opens the seventh seal, but from this point on angels will be involved in announcing the seven trumpets and later the seven bowls.

- **"there was silence in heaven for about half an hour"** There have been several theories connected with this silence. The rabbis relate it to a period of silence to let the prayers of the saints be heard
  1. some relate it to the book of II Esdras 7:29-31, where the silence is the beginning of the New Age
  2. others relate it to several OT passages where humans are to be silent in the coming presence of God (cf. Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13)
  3. some relate it to dramatic effect for the coming intense judgment on unbelievers
  4. Victorinus related it to the beginning of eternity

**8:2 "and I saw the seven angels who stand before God"** It is interesting that the definite article appears, "the seven angels." In rabbinical Judaism the seven angels of the presence are named in Tobit 12:15; Jubilees 1:27,29; 2:1-2,18; and I Enoch 20:1-7. They are Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael or Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel. Others see this phrase as related to the Messiah (paralleled to "the Angel of His Presence") in Isa. 63:9 or to judgment on those who rebel and grieve the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 63:10). The Exodus connection may be seen in the angel in Exod. 23:20-23; 33:12-16.

- **"seven trumpets were given to them"** There are seven angels to correspond to the seven trumpets (cf. Rev. 8:6). In the OT trumpets were often used to communicate to God's people, either religiously or militarily (cf. Exod. 19:16; Num. 10:1-10; Isa. 27:13; Jer. 4:5-9; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14; II Esdras 6:23, see Special Topic at Rev. 1:10). In the NT a trumpet will announce the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52-53; 1 Thess. 4:16).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:3-5**

**<sup>3</sup>Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. <sup>4</sup>And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. <sup>5</sup>Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.**

**8:3 "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer"** This text and 5:8 have been used to promote the rabbinical theological concept that angels are the bearers of prayers to God. The Bible is silent on how to interpret this type of detail. These symbolic passages should not be used to define speculative theological details. This is a vision and not meant to define the role of certain angels. It does affirm that the prayers of the saints do affect God.

The altar has been identified as either the incense altar before the veil in the Holy Place (cf. Exod. 30:1-10) or the altar of sacrifice (cf. Rev. 8:5; 9:13). However, this vision is not the earthly Tabernacle or Temple in Jerusalem, but the throne room of God in heaven (cf. Heb. 8:2; 9:11,24). The incense altar fits this context best.

- **"the prayers of all the saints"** Exactly which group of saints this represents is uncertain, but this does show that God knows and responds to the needs of His people (cf. Exod. 3:7). Incense was a symbol of prayer (cf. Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8) because the smoke went up and disappeared from the visible realm to the invisible realm.

For "saints" see [SPECIAL TOPIC: SAINTS](#) at Rev. 5:8.

**8:4** Throughout the book of Leviticus incense arose to God's presence, therefore, incense came to represent the prayers of God's people.

**8:5 "the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth"** This is an allusion to Ezek. 10:2. Coals for the incense altar before the veil would have originally been taken from the altar of sacrifice at the front of the Tabernacle (cf. Rev. 9:13; Lev. 16:11-13). These are Tabernacle symbols whose meaning is fluid. The key theological thought is that this is occurring before God in heaven.

▣ **"and there followed peals of thunder"** These types of physical phenomenon are often associated with YHWH's presence (cf. Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:18; Exod. 19:16-19; Ps. 18:10-13).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:6**

**<sup>6</sup>And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.**

**8:1-6** These verses represent the actions during the period of silence.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:7**

**<sup>7</sup>The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.**

**8:7 "and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood"** Much of the imagery is drawn from the Egyptian plagues. This passage is an allusion to Exod. 9:24. It is also possible that this is taken from Ezek. 38:22, the overthrow of Gog's invading army.

▣ **"and a third of the earth was burned up"** This limited, but substantive, percentage is mentioned quite often in the next few chapters (cf. Rev. 8:7-8,9,10,11,12; 9:15,18; 12:4). The second series of judgments is more intense than the first (cf. 6:8, where one quarter is mentioned). YHWH is still attempting to reach sinful mankind by means of physical plagues (cf. Exodus 7-11; Deuteronomy 28-29), but they would not respond in repentance and faith!

▣ **"and all the green grass was burned up"** This must refer to the complete destruction of the green grass within the one-third area, because green grass is protected in Rev. 9:4.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup>The second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, <sup>9</sup>and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

**8:8 "like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea"** Once again the issue is the source of John's imagery— Roman, Jewish inter-biblical, or OT.

1. If it is the OT, then Ps. 46:2 or Exod. 7:20-21 is the reference.
2. If Jewish apocalyptic, then the reference is I Enoch 18:13-16 or possibly the Sibylline Oracles 5:158.
3. If Roman then possibly it is a historical allusion to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, which the Jews interpreted as God's judgment on Rome for destroying Jerusalem.

The exact source of John's metaphors is uncertain, but they do speak of God's wrath toward a rebellious creation with the purpose of redemption in mind.

■ **"and a third of the sea became blood"** This is another allusion to the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 7:20-21).

**8:9 "a third of the creatures. . .died"** This is another allusion to the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 7:21).

■ **"a third of the ships were destroyed"** This has no parallel in the OT, in apocalyptic literature, or in first century Roman literature. Obviously commerce is affected and goods and food would be scarce. It does confirm God's limited, progressive judgment. His judgment intensifies (1/4 in the seals, 1/3 in the trumpets) until in the bowls the time of repentance has passed and total, complete judgment occurs.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup>The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. <sup>11</sup>The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.**

**8:10 "a great star fell from heaven"** This may be an allusion to Isa. 14:12. Many have tried to relate this to Rev. 6:13 or 9:1, but this may be trying to lock down John's imagery too tightly. Be careful of attempting to interpret each and every detail. This is dramatic imagery. Usually in Jewish apocalyptic literature a star falling refers to an angel (i.e. 9:1).

**8:11 "The name of the star is called Wormwood"** In the OT wormwood is linked to idolatry (cf. Deut. 29:17-18). It is also seen as mixed with poison and is, therefore, deadly (cf. Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Amos 6:12). Wormwood, by itself (cf. TEV), was bitter but not lethal. Here it is a metaphor for Divine judgment.

A good example of the inappropriateness of moderns trying to force the details of Revelation into their day is the assertion that the Russian Chernobyl nuclear facility which experienced a meltdown was fulfilled prophecy because the name meant wormwood in Russian. This practice of interpreting the Bible based on the morning newspaper has been common throughout the last two thousand years and should warn us to beware of the same procedure!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:12**

**<sup>12</sup>The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.**

**8:12** Darkness has always been a sign of God's judgment (cf. Exod. 10:21; Isa. 13:10; 34:4; 50:3; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:2,10,31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; Mark 13:24). The heavenly bodies were often worshiped as spiritual powers. God created them (cf. Gen. 1:14-19; Isa. 40:26); named them (cf. Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26); controls them (cf. Isa. 48:13); and they praise Him (cf. Ps. 148:3).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 8:13**

**<sup>13</sup>Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"**

**8:13 "Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying"** The KJV has "angel" instead of "eagle," but this comes from a late ninth-century Greek manuscript. Both Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) and Alexandrinus (A) have "eagle." This can refer to: a vulture (or eagle), which often was a symbol of slaughter (cf. Ezek. 17:3; Hab. 1:8; Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:37)

1. an allusion to the judgment scene in Ezek. 39:17-20; Hos. 8:1

2. an allusion to the intertestamental apocalyptic book of II Baruch 77:21-22, in which a vulture sends a message to God's hurting people

3. the Roman army standards which were topped by eagles

The "flying in midheaven" is probably another allusion to birds of prey soaring above the earth (cf. Rev. 14:6; 19:17).

■ **"Woe, woe, woe"** This possibly corresponds to the last three trumpets which are to come (cf. Rev. 9:12; 11:14; 12:12); it may also be a symbol of intensity (like "holy, holy, holy" of Rev. 4:8). In Hebrew a three-fold repetition is a superlative (cf. Holy, holy, holy of Isa. 6:3). In the OT "woe" marks a certain poetic lament related to death and judgment.

■ **"to those who dwell on the earth"** This phrase refers to the unredeemed (cf. Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 13:8; 17:2).

## REVELATION 9

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 9:1-6

**<sup>1</sup>Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. <sup>2</sup>He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. <sup>3</sup>Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. <sup>4</sup>They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green tree, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. <sup>6</sup>And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.**

**9:1 "and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth"** There have been several theories as to the identity of this personified star who is called an angel.

1. because the verb is perfect tense, it could refer to Satan having fallen in the past and continues to be fallen from heaven (cf. Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:16; Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:9)

2. because of the context it could be just another servant angel involved in God's judgment (cf. Rev. 20:1)

Angels as falling stars are often found in the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature.

■ **"the key of the bottomless pit was given to him"** A "key" is mentioned in Rev. 1:18 and 20:1. It symbolizes authority. God exercises authority over the demonic hordes of judgment.

The abyss is a Greek term that meant "depth" negated by an alpha privative.

1. It is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) in Gen. 1:2; 7:11; Ps. 42:7; 107:26 for the depths of the waters of creation.

2. In Ps. 71:20 it refers to the holding place of the dead.

3. This is also true of I Enoch 18:12-16; 21:7-10; 108:3-6, where it is both a temporary and final prison of fallen angels.

4. It seems to be synonymous with the term "*tartarus*" (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4 and I Enoch 21:7), a place where evil angels are held in prison (cf. Luke 8:31; Jude 6; Rev. 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3; and I Enoch 10:4; 86:1; 88:1; Jubilees 5:6-11).

5. Paul used this term (abyss) in Rom. 10:7 for the place of the dead (cf. Isa. 24:21-22).

6. Later the rabbis said it was the name of the unrighteous part of *Sheol/Hades* (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:18).

■ **"was given"** There is a series of passive verbs in both chapters 8 and 9, which emphasizes God's

control of both history and the demonic (cf. Rev. 8:3,7,8,11,12; 9:1,3,4,5). Often Jewish writers used passive voice as a circumlocution for deity's actions.

**9:2 "smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace"** This terminology is used in several senses in the OT:

1. it accompanied the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 19:28)
2. it accompanied the judgment of God on the nations (cf. Isa. 34:10)
3. it accompanied the presence of God on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:18)

**9:3 "locusts"** These are often used as symbols of God's wrath (cf. Exod. 10:12-15; Joel 1:4; 2:1ff) because they symbolized an invading army (cf. Rev. 9:7; Joel. 2:4-5, 7-9).

**9:4 "They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree"** These demonic forces are limited in their punishment. They must not destroy any plant life and they can only torment, but not kill, the unbelievers (cf. Rev. 9:5; 7:4); the believers are protected by God (as they were in the Egyptian plagues).

▣ **"the seal of God on their foreheads"** See full note at Rev. 7:2. It is an allusion from Ezek. 9:4.

**9:5 "five months"** Some interpret this time span as the life expectancy of a locust. However, it is possibly one-half the number ten, which would be another metaphor for a limited judgment (cf. Rev. 6:6,8; 8:7-12).

▣ **"the torment of a scorpion"** The sting of a scorpion is another OT metaphor (cf. 2 Chr. 10:11,14).

**9:6** This is a direct parallel to 6:15-16, which may be additional evidence for the recapitulation theory among the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. This may be an allusion to the judgment of the faithless idolatrous Jews of Jerusalem in Jer. 8:2-3.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 9:7-11**

**<sup>7</sup>The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. <sup>8</sup>They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. <sup>9</sup>They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. <sup>10</sup>They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. <sup>11</sup>They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.**

**9:7-9 "the appearance of the locusts"** The physical description of these locusts is very similar to Joel 2:4-9 and also to a famous Arabian proverb that says, "locusts have a head like a horse, a breast like a lion, feet like a camel, a body like a serpent, and antennae like the hair of a maiden."

This is obviously an allusion to the book of Joel in its description of:

1. the lion's teeth (cf. Rev. 9:8; Joel 1:6)
2. the vast number of chariots and horses rushing to battle (cf. Rev. 9:9 and Joel 2:5)

**9:8** Some see this as a reference to the Parthian hordes, cavalry with long hair. These were known for their skill as mounted archers. The Romans feared these barbaric invaders.

**9:11 "They have as king over them"** Proverbs 30:27 says that locusts do not have a king, but this is an allusion to a demonic swarm, not physical locusts.

▣ **"the angel of the abyss"** The term "abyss" refers to the realm of the dead (cf. Rev. 9:1,2,11; 11:7;



17:8; 20:1,3; and Rom. 10:7).

See full note at Rev. 9:1.

▣ **"his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon"** The Hebrew (Aramaic) term meant "destruction" and the Greek term meant "destroyer." The Hebrew term was identified with *Sheol*, the realm of the dead (cf. Job 26:6; 29:22; 31:12; Ps. 88:11 Pro. 15:11; 27:20).

Robert B. Girdlestone has an interesting comment on this term in his book *Synonyms of the Old Testament*: "This word is rendered "perish" in about a hundred passages. When used of persons it generally signifies death, when used of lands it implies desolation" (p. 273).

In Job 28:22 it is personified along with Death. This personification is also characteristic of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature. This is somewhat unusual because the angel of death in the OT is a servant of YHWH (cf. Exod. 12:23; Job 15:21) or even a personification of YHWH (cf. Exod. 12:13,29). But here the angel seems to be the ruler of an imprisoned, demonic horde. This may be another way to show God's control of all things.

Some have even asserted that as the emperors Nero and Domitian claimed to be the incarnation of Apollo, that this Greek name is a corrupted form and an allusion to Apollyon. There are two pieces of evidences to support this,

1. locusts were a symbol of Apollo
2. the term Apollo and Apollyon both come from the same Greek root

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 9:12**

**<sup>12</sup>The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.**

**9:12** This verse links up with Rev. 11:14 and 12:2.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 9:13-19**

**<sup>13</sup>Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, <sup>14</sup>one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." <sup>15</sup>And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. <sup>16</sup>The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. <sup>17</sup>And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. <sup>18</sup>A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup>For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.**

**9:13 "I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar"** This is an allusion to the altar of incense in the Tabernacle (cf. Exod. 30:2,3,10). There are two altars mentioned in this section: the altar of sacrifice under which the souls of the martyrs were found (cf. Rev. 6:9-11), and the altar of incense upon which the prayers of God's people are placed (cf. Rev. 8:3-5). The horns were an OT symbol of power. Both the incense altar and altar of sacrifice had horns. See note at Rev. 8:3.

**9:14 "'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates'"** Those who are looking for historical first century allusions see this as the Parthian hordes just beyond the Euphrates River (i.e., the boundary of the Roman Empire, cf. I Enoch 56:5-8). Others, however, see this as an allusion to the OT where, as the four horses of the apocalypse are found in Zech. 1:8 and 6:1-8, these four angels seem to be another metaphor for God's appointed servants bringing judgment on a fallen, rebellious world (cf. Rev.

7:1). However, because these angels are bound, it may be a reference to evil angels (cf. Jude 1:6). These angels bring death to one-third of mankind (cf. Rev. 9:18).

The northern part of the headwaters of the Euphrates River was the northeastern boundary of the Promised Land (cf. Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Jos. 1:4).

**9:15 "And the four angels, who had been prepared for that hour and day and month and year, were released"** There is a definite article with the term "hour," which implies the definiteness of this complete phrase. This is a reference to God's sovereignty and control of history (cf. I Enoch 92:2). This is a great help to those who are undergoing persecution.

**9:16 "The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million"** This is a symbolic number of the demonic hordes that engulf unredeemed mankind. This number is comparable to the myriads of angels who serve God (cf. Rev. 5:11; Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22; Jude 1:14).

Again, to try to relate this to the modern nation of China is another example of forcing figurative literature into current history. The desire of Christians to figure out the future and impress each other with esoteric knowledge is a recurrent problem.

**9:17-19 "the horses and those who sat on them"** The description that follows sees the horses and riders as one unit. The real agents of death and torment are the horses themselves (cf. Rev. 9:19). The colors of the horses—red (fire), blue (hyacinth) and yellow (brimstone)—identify this particular demonic horde as related to the three plagues of fire, blue smoke, and sulphur mentioned in Rev. 9:18.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 9:20-21**

**<sup>20</sup>The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; <sup>21</sup>and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.**

**9:20 "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands"** This is a clear, unambiguous statement of the redemptive purposes of these plagues (cf. Rev. 9:21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11; 21:7; 22:17).

As God used the plagues on Egypt as a motivation for (1) Egyptians to believe and serve Him and (2) Israel to stay faithful and serve Him (cf. Deuteronomy 27-28), so these similar plagues were meant to turn unbelieving mankind back to their creator, but they refused. Their stubborn unbelief had become a settled state of rebellion (cf. Rom. 1:24,26).

▣ **"the works of their hands"** This an allusion to idolatry (i.e., the worship of demons, cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20) mentioned so often in the OT (cf. Deut. 4:28; 28:36,64; 29:17; 32:17; Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 2:8; 37:19; 40:19-20; 44:17; Jer. 1:16; 10:3-5; Dan. 5:23; Mic. 5:13). Notice in the NT that idolatry is linked to the demonic (cf. Rev. 16:14; 1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Tim. 4:1).

**9:21** These four things (idolatry, murder, sorceries, immorality) are condemned in the OT (cf. Deut. 18:10-11,14,20; Exod. 22:18; Lev. 20:6) and they characterize the immoral lifestyle of the unbelievers (cf. Romans 1-2; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 18:23). This same inclusive group of unrepentant unbelievers is mentioned in Rev. 13:15-17; 14:9; 16:2,9,11.

**NASB, NKJV,**

**NRSV** "sorceries"  
**TEV** "magic"  
**NJB** "witchcraft"

We get the English term "pharmacy" from this Greek word for sorceries (*pharmakeia*, cf. Gal. 5:20). This may have been a reference to magical potions or poisoning, like the wormwood mentioned earlier (cf. Rev.

8:11). In the ancient world drugs were often used to induce "religious" experience.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Where are we to find the source of the imagery of these chapters: (1) the OT; (2) Jewish apocalyptic literature; or (3) historical events of the Roman Empire?
2. Do these events refer to (1) the first century, (2) every century, or (3) the future?
3. Are these chapters meant to be taken literally or apocalyptically?
4. What is the major thrust of chapters 8-9?
5. How are the seven seals and the seven bowls related in chapters 8 and 9?
6. Why will there be increased angelic and demonic activity before the Second Coming?

# REVELATION 10:1-11:19

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Angel and the Little Scroll	The Mighty Angel with the Scroll	An Interlude	The Angel and the Little Scroll	The Imminence of the Last Punishment
10:1-7	10:1-7	10:1-7	10:1-4	10:1-7
	John Eats the Little Book		10:5-7	The Seer Eats the Small Scroll
10:8-11	10:8-11	10:8-10	10:8	10:8-11
			10:9	
			10:10-11	
		10:11		
The Two Witnesses	The Two Witnesses	The Measuring of the Temple and the Two Witnesses	The Two Witnesses	The Two Witnesses
11:1-13	11:1-6	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-10
	The Witnesses Killed	11:4-6	11:4-6	
	11:7-10	11:7-10	11:7-13	
	The Witnesses Resurrected			
	11:11-14	11:11-13		11:11-13
		The Seventh Trumpet		
11:14		11:14	11:14	11:14
The Seventh Trumpet	Seventh Trumpet: the Kingdom Proclaimed		The Seventh Trumpet	The Seventh Trumpet
11:15-19	11:15-19	11:15-19	11:15-18	11:15-18
			11:19	11:19

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. The first interlude (chapter 7) came between the sixth and seventh seals. This second interlude (Rev. 10:1-11:14) comes between the sixth and seventh trumpets. There is no interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls (Rev. 16), but there is another interlude before them (Rev. 12-14).

B. This interlude, like Rev. 7, uses OT terms (tabernacle, altar, Jerusalem). However, just as the Jewish allusions in Rev. 7 refer to the NT people of God, the Church, so too, in this chapter. The allusions are drawn from Daniel 9 but they have been adapted to the Greco-Roman, first century setting.

Here is a brief quote from Alan Johnson's *Commentary on Revelation*, "The Jewish view suffers from its inability to relate this chapter to the context of chapter 10, to the parallelism with the seal interlude (Rev. 7), to the ministry and significance of the two witnesses, and to the further chapters in Revelation (esp. Rev. 12-13). Therefore, it is better to understand Rev. 11 as referring to the whole Christian community" (p. 104).

C. As Alan Johnson sees Rev. 11 in its relationship to Rev. 7, 10, and 12-13, George Ladd sees it as an independent literary unit related to the preservation of the Jewish people and their final salvation (cf. Matt. 23:39; Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:26). See his *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 150-151.

It is difficult to decide between these two views. I certainly feel that because of God's promises to Israel, there will be an end-time revival among natural or proselyte Israel in which many will turn to faith in Christ (cf. Zech. 12:10); this is part of Paul's argument in Romans 11 (it is surely possible that the revival alluded to in Zech. 12:10 occurred in the Palestinian church of the first century). However, the context of Revelation 7, 10, and 12-13 implies a universal scope both of protection to all of God's people and judgment against all unbelievers. In this context a believing Jewish emphasis or even a Jewish-versus-Gentile emphasis is out of place.

D. Will there be two end-time witnesses, or is this symbolic of an end-time witness? It is so hard to be confident in interpreting the symbols of this book. If John intended them to be literal, he would have chosen a different genre to reveal this to believers of all ages.

Did this reference to "two witnesses" have special meaning to the first century believers experiencing persecution (probably Emperor worship cults)? This cannot be answered with finality. John's choice of imagery is drawn from several sources: the Old Testament, apocalyptic literature, Greco-Roman culture and at times Near Eastern mythology (chapter 12). Did the first hearers completely and fully understand his sources and symbolism? Possibly not, not in a specific way, but they did understand the genre! They would not have forced a literal historical fulfillment for all the details.

My only fear in making this statement is how OT predictive prophecy was interpreted by the inspired NT authors! Often they saw literal fulfillment of OT details in the life of Christ. Some of these fulfillments were rabbinical word plays or type/antitype symbols. Under the Spirit's guidance (or Jesus' teaching, cf. Luke 24:13-35) the Apostles' current historical setting was viewed through OT prophetic texts. This same thing may occur for the last generation of persecuted believers. However, intervening interpreters are not able to predict which of these details through theology or hermeneutics! Modern interpreters must not (1) force their history into these apocalyptic texts nor (2) seek literal fulfillment on every detail of this highly symbolic genre. Time will tell!

E. The literary patterns and imagery of the seals and the trumpets is almost identical. Both bring

human history up to the very end (cf. Rev. 6:12-17 and 11:15-19).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 10:1-7

<sup>1</sup>I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; <sup>2</sup>and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; <sup>3</sup>and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. <sup>4</sup>When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them." <sup>5</sup>Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, <sup>6</sup>and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, <sup>7</sup>but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

**10:1 "I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven"** Notice that John is back on earth after the vision of Rev. 4-5 (if John's call to heaven in Rev. 4 was the rapture of the church, is this the fall of the church?). This angel is described in terms which apply to YHWH in the OT and to Christ in Rev. 1:12-20. Because of this, many have asserted that this is Christ Himself. However, this is doubtful for the following reasons:

1. Christ is never called an angel in Revelation
2. there are other mighty angels listed in Revelation (cf. Rev. 5:2; 18:21)
3. this angel will swear by God in Rev. 10:6, which is inappropriate for Christ
4. there is an angel in Daniel 10 who is also described in similar terms.

This elaborate description may contrast this angel of light with the angel of the abyss in Revelation 9. As the angel in Revelation 9 was directed, this angel is self-directed. This may be an allusion to the powerful angel of Dan. 10:5-6 or to Michael, the archangel of Israel in Dan. 10:13 and 12:1.

- **"clothed with a cloud"** In the OT clouds were the unique transportation of deity (cf. Ps. 97:2; 104:3; Dan. 7:13; Acts 1:9).
- **"and the rainbow was upon his head"** Many see this as an allusion to Rev. 4:3 and therefore another title of power and authority reminiscent of deity. The allusion may go back to Ezek. 1:28, where a rainbow is the portable throne/chariot of YHWH.
- **"his face was like the sun"** This follows the description of Christ found in Rev. 1:16 (cf. Matt. 17:2).
- **"his feet like pillars of fire"** This description is also similar to Christ in Rev. 1:15.

**10:2 "he had in his hand a little book which was open"** There has been much discussion about this little book. Some see it as the little book of Rev. 5:1, now opened, but two different Greek words are used (Rev. 5:1, *biblion*; Rev. 10:2, *biblaridion*). Others see it as related to Ezekiel 2:8-3:14. Since this is an angel and not Christ, Ezekiel is the best allusion.

- **"He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land"** The size of the angel speaks of a universal message. The rabbis (in the Talmud) discussed an angel named Sandelfon, whose enormous height was the same as the distance of 500 miles taller than other angels (cf. Hagigah 13b).

**10:3 "he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars"** This term "roars" (*mukaomai*) is usually used for the voice of oxen (a low bellow). However, it seems appropriate given that this is an allusion to the OT passages where God spoke as a lion (cf. Jer. 25:30; Hos. 11:10; Joel 3:16; Amos 3:8).

▣ **"the seven peals of thunders uttered their voices"** The identity of these seven thunders is disputed. This could be:

1. an allusion to the seven "voices" of God in Ps. 29:3-9
2. parallel to the seven seals and seven trumpets, which were cycles of God's judgment on unbelievers (cf. Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18) for the purpose of redemption
3. a sound coming from God's throne (cf. Rev. 4:5)
4. it may also relate to the seven spirits of God (cf. Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6 from Isa. 11:22)

**10:4 "Seal up"** There are several places in the Bible where someone has received a revelation from God but could not reveal it. Two of these are (1) Daniel (cf. Dan. 8:26; 12:4,9) and (2) Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4). However, this is a very surprising statement. John is told to write what he sees (cf. 1:11,19; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). John is told in Rev. 22:10 that the words of this prophecy are not to be sealed up. It must refer to this message alone!

**10:5 "lifted up his right hand to heaven"** This is a gesture for oath-taking (cf. Gen. 14:22; Exod. 6:8; Num. 14:30; Deut. 32:40; Ezek. 20:15,28; Dan. 12:7). The form of this oath is very striking in its titles for God.

**10:6 "Him who lives forever and ever"** This characterization of God recalls His two most common OT names:

1. YHWH from the Hebrew verb "to be" (cf. Exod. 3:14). "I Am that I Am" was the covenant name for deity; it emphasized God as Savior and Redeemer (cf. Gen. 14:19; Exod. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 146:6).
2. *Elohim*, which was used of God in Genesis 1 as creator, sustainer, and provider of everything on earth (cf. Gen. 14:19; Exod. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 146:6).

This oath is a way of asserting the trustworthiness of the angel's message.

▣ **"there will be delay no longer"** This may be a response to the question of the martyrs in Rev. 6:10. It is literally "that time (*chronos*) no longer shall be." The concept of time is very fluid in this book for several reasons.

1. There are two different Greek words that express time
  - a. *chronos*, the passing of time (cf. Rev. 10:6)
  - b. *kairos*, a special time, season, or event (cf. Rev. 1:3; 11:18; 12:12,14).
2. There are several idioms used:
  - a. "the things which must shortly take place" (cf. Rev. 1:1; 22:6)
  - b. "the time is near" (cf. Rev. 1:3; 3:11; 22:10)
  - c. "I am coming quickly" (cf. Rev. 2:5,16; 22:7,12,20)
  - d. "I will come like a thief" (cf. Rev. 3:3; 16:15)

All of these speak of immediacy (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:3). However, some passages speak of a delay (cf. Rev. 6:11; 10:6; 14:13). Another idiom is that the day of judgment and rewards has arrived, "it is done" (cf. Rev. 16:17; 21:6) or "the time has come" (cf. Rev. 11:18; 20:12).

This fluidity has been exploited by the differing interpretive systems to emphasize a certain aspect of time (first century, every age, or last generation). The solemn oath of the angel is that the end-time events must now begin. The prayers of the martyrs have been answered! Revelation must be interpreted in light of its first readers (see John Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*).

**10:7**

**NASB**  
**NKJV**

**"the mystery of God is finished"**  
**"the mystery of God would be finished"**

NRSV	"the mystery of God would be fulfilled"
TEV	"God will accomplish his secret plan"
NJB	"the mystery of God will be fulfilled"

The term has several connotations.

1. Paul uses it often to refer to God's eternal plan of the redemption of Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13, see Special Topic at Rev. 4:1).
2. Revelation often refers to a mystery about part of a vision (cf. Rev. 1:20; 17:5,7).
3. In Rev. 10:7 it refers to God's eternal plan of redemption, as Paul did in Rom. 16:25-26 and Eph. 2:11-3:13.

It is possible that John took this term from Daniel, particularly chapter 2 (cf. Dan. 2:18,19,27,28,29,30,47). If so, it refers to God's ability to reveal His actions. God is knowledgeable of and in control of all history.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: MYSTERY IN THE GOSPELS

### ▣ "the prophets"

## SPECIAL TOPIC: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 10:8-11**

<sup>8</sup>Then the voice which I heard from heaven, *I heard* again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." <sup>9</sup>So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." <sup>10</sup>I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. <sup>11</sup>And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

**10:8 "the voice which I heard from heaven, *I heard* again"** There has been much speculation about the identification of the speaker. Some have asserted that it is God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, or one of the powerful angels.

In Rev. 10:11 the voice is plural, possibly referring to the Triune God. The plurals used of deity in the OT (the name *Elohim* and the "us" of Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 7:11; Isa. 6:8) have been explained in several ways.

1. a grammatical form called "the plural of majesty" whereby the plural intensifies the concept or term
2. YHWH speaking collectively of the angelic council (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19; Job 1:6; 2:1; Jer. 23:18; Dan. 7:10)
3. an incipient form of the concept of a Triune God or Trinity (cf. Ps. 110:1; Zech. 2:8; 17:10)

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 1:8.

**10:9 "Take it and eat it"** This is an allusion to Ezek. 2:8-3:14 or Jer. 15:16-17. This symbolizes being commissioned to speak God's message. The little book symbolizes God's message which contains both assurance to believers (honey, cf. Ps. 19:10-11; 119:103) and judgment to unbelievers (bitter). This scroll is not the same as the one that Jesus opened in chapter 6. This refers to the message from the almighty angel (cf. Rev. 10:7-11).

**10:11 "they said to me"** The powerful angel or the Triune God is affirming John as prophetic recorder and spokesman.

▣ **"many peoples and nations and tongues and kings"** This terminology is used of both unbelievers (cf. Rev. 11:9; 13:7-8; 14:6; 17:15) and believers (i.e., before Judgment Day cf. Rev. 7:9; 15:4 and after Judgment Day cf. Rev. 21:24,26; 22:2). This verse could refer to preaching the gospel (cf. Rev. 10:11;



14:6) to all nations (cf. Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10) or the prediction of further temporal judgments of the wrath of God.

## REVELATION 11

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. <sup>2</sup>"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. <sup>3</sup>"And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." <sup>4</sup>These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup>And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. <sup>6</sup>These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

**11:1 "a measuring rod like a staff"** In the previous sections John watched as the angels performed tasks, but in the seventh trumpet John will be involved in the action.

The term "measuring rod" (*kalamos*, used in this sense only here) possibly reflects the OT usage of river reeds which were used as horizontal measuring instruments (see [SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS](#) at Rev. 19:11). They were between eight and twenty feet long (cf. Ezek. 40:5-42:20).

■ **"Get up and measure"** Measuring was a sign of (1) promised growth and protection (cf. Jer. 31:38-40; Rev. 21:15). This could be an allusion to Ezekiel's end-time temple (cf. 40-48) or Zechariah's new Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 1:16; 2:1-13); or (2) judgment (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kgs. 21:13; Isa. 28:17; Lam. 2:8). Here, like the sealing of chapter 7, it is a sign of God's protection of believers. If this interlude parallels chapter 7 then this temple is the whole people of God (believing Jews and believing Gentiles). This then would also parallel Rev. 12.

■ **"the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it"** The identity of this temple depends on one's interpretive presuppositions.

1. If we assume that John's imagery is drawn from Ezekiel 40-48, then this is a literal end-time temple in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4).
2. If, however, we assume the allusion to be to Zechariah 2 then the imagery is the city of God, new Jerusalem.
3. If we assume the heavenly temple (cf. Rev. 7:15; 11:19; 15:58; Heb. 9:23) then the multitude of Rev. 7:9 (the Church, and the woman of Rev. 12) may be the focus (cf. Rev. 21:15-16).

It is interesting to note that John is told to measure the people who worship there. This is unusual terminology. This image involves more than just a building. This is imagery that marks off the people of faith from the unbelievers about to experience the wrath of God. Therefore, it is parallel to God's mark on believers' foreheads (cf. Rev. 7:3-4).

**11:2 "the court which is outside the temple"** This concept of the outer court refers historically to the court of the Gentiles in Herod's Temple. There are several OT allusions to the idea of Jerusalem and the Temple being trodden down by Gentiles (cf. Ps. 79:1-7; Isa. 63:18; Dan. 8:13; Zech. 12:3 in the Septuagint). Jesus seems to make a direct allusion to Dan. 8:13 in Luke 21:24.

■ **"the nations"** See notes at Rev. 2:26 and 10:11.

▣ **"forty-two months"** See Special Topic below.

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: FORTY-TWO MONTHS**

▣ **"the holy city"** This could refer to Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 52:1; Matt. 27:53). However, following the interpretation of the temple in Rev. 3:12 as referring to the NT believers, the same method must be followed with this phrase. In the later chapters of Revelation it refers to the NT people of God (cf. 20:9; 21:2,10; 22:19).

John is pulling metaphors from the OT but applying them to the NT people of God. The church is made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. There is no emphasis on racial Jews versus Gentiles in Revelation. There is no more Jew and Greek (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

**11:3 "I will grant authority to my two witnesses"** This seems to imply God the Father speaking because Jesus is referred to in Rev. 11:8 (although there is a Greek manuscript problem with the pronoun, which is omitted in P<sup>47</sup> and κ).

- ▣ **"two witnesses"** There have been many theories about the identity of these two powerful preachers:
1. The allusion (cf. Rev. 11:4) is from Zech. 4:3,11,14. This originally referred to the returning Davidic seed, Zerubbabel, and the returning High Priestly seed, Joshua, who were the two Spirit-led leaders (two olive trees) who led the return from Babylonian captivity (i.e., the restored people of God).
  2. The two lampstands (cf. 1:20) may imply the two faithful churches, Smyrna, 2:8-11 and Philadelphia, 3:7-13.
  3. The two witnesses may imply testimony in court (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).
  4. The description of these two witnesses implies Elijah (shut up the sky from Rev. 11:6, cf. 1 Kgs. 17:1; 18:1; Luke 4:25; James 5:17 and called down fire, cf. 1 Kgs. 18:24,38; 2 Kgs. 1:10,12) and Moses (turn water to blood from Rev. 11:6, cf. Exod. 7:17-19). Both of these appeared to Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:4).
  5. The intertestamental apocalyptic book of 1 Enoch 90:31 and two early church fathers, Tertullian and Hippolytus, asserted that they were the two persons from the OT who did not die natural deaths, Enoch (cf. Gen. 5:21-24) and Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:11).
  6. The NJB footnote asserts that it refers to Peter and Paul, both martyred in Rome in the reign of Nero (p. 435).

I personally see them as symbolic of the witness of the entire people of God because of the parallel structure of the seven seals and interlude and seven trumpets and interlude. Therefore, both the 144,000 (believing Jews) and the innumerable group (believing nations), as well as the two witnesses, refer to the church.

▣ **"clothed in sackcloth"** This can be either (1) a sign of mourning and repentance (cf. Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 3:31) or (2) simply the normal dress of a prophet (cf. 2 Kgs. 1:8; Isa. 20:2; Zech. 13:4).

▣ **"they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days"** Forty-two months of thirty days each equals twelve hundred and sixty days. The gospel will be proclaimed during this period of persecution by the unbelieving nations (cf. Matt. 24:8-14, 21-22). This symbolic number comes from Dan. 7:25; 12:7 and is used often in Revelation (cf. 12:6; 13:5).

**11:4 "the two olive trees"** This is an allusion to Zerubbabel, the Davidic seed of the returning exiles and Joshua, the Aaronic seed of the returning exiles (cf. Zech. 4:3,11,14). This may imply that the gospel witness of the end-time will represent a royal Messianic and priestly Messianic emphasis (Jesus as King and Priest, cf. Psalm 110; Heb. 1:3). These two inspired preachers of repentance bring God's light (cf. Zechariah 4) to a rebellious world (the rebellious Israel is now a rebellious humanity, cf. Isa. 6:9-11; 43:8-13; Jer. 5:21-29; Ezek. 12:2).

**11:5 "if anyone wants to harm them. . .if anyone wants to harm them"** Both of these are first class

conditional sentences which assume that there are those who want to hurt them, but they will be divinely protected until their mission is accomplished.

▣ **"fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies"** Notice that the power is in their mouth which implies the power of the message they proclaim. In Revelation the mouth is a weapon, the tongue a sword (cf. 9:17; 19:15; Heb. 4:12).

**11:6** These OT actions remind one of Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs. 17:1) and Moses (cf. Exod. 7:17-19).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:7-10**

**<sup>7</sup>When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. <sup>8</sup>And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup>Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. <sup>10</sup>And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.**

**11:7 "the beast that comes up out of the abyss"** If this is an allusion to Daniel 7, then the beast is a composite figure of all the four beasts mentioned in Daniel 7, which stands for the ultimate Anti-Christ of the end-time (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3).

The "abyss" is the home of the demonic (cf. Rev. 9:1; 20:1). This concept of a beast is developed in Rev. 13 and 17.

▣ **"will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:21 which will be more fully explained in Revelation 13. Here, the phrasing may imply that the two witnesses are symbolic of a large number of people (cf. Rev. 13:7 i.e., the people of God). Notice that they are not spared persecution and death.

**11:8 "their dead bodies will lie in the street"** This humiliation of exposed dead bodies was a way to express contempt (cf. Rev. 11:9; Deut. 28:26; Ps. 79:2; Jer. 7:33; 8:2; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). However, God used their visible bodies in a powerful resurrection manifestation of His power and confirmation of their message.

▣ **"this great city"** This seems to be a description of Jerusalem; however, the figurative language implies the spiritual struggle between the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom. Here are my reasons.

1. The phrase "that great city" is used of Babylon or Rome (cf. Rev. 16:19; 17:18; 18:10,16,18,19,21).
2. Although Jerusalem is called Sodom in Ezek. 16:46-49 and Isa. 1:9-10, she is never called Egypt; Sodom and Egypt seem to be metaphors for sin and bondage.
3. "Where the Lord was crucified" seems to refer to Jerusalem, but it could be another way of talking about the anti-God kingdoms of this world.
4. "The peoples and tribes and tongues and nations" in Rev. 11:9 implies
  - a. a city where the entire world will be present, which fits Rome better than Jerusalem
  - b. "city" used as a metaphor of rebellious mankind (cf. Gen. 4:17; 10:8-10)
5. "Those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate" in Rev. 11:10 implies that the message of these two witnesses was not simply for the Jews, but for the entire world of unbelievers. This describes the ongoing battle between the kingdoms of this earth and the Messianic kingdom (cf. Rev. 11:15), particularly as in Daniel 2 and Psalm 2.

**11:9 "those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations"** See note at Rev. 10:11.

▣ **"for three days and a half"** The time of Rev. 11:9 combined with Rev. 11:11 equals the number seven,

used so often in Revelation. This event was God's perfect timing.

**11:10 "celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another"** Some see this as a perverted Feast of Purim (cf. Esther 9:19,22). It is more likely an allusion to John 16:20 ("the world will rejoice"). This rejoicing of the unbelieving world reveals the power of the two witnesses' message, but the unbelievers would not repent (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9,11).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:11-13**

**<sup>11</sup>But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. <sup>12</sup>And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. <sup>13</sup>And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.**

**11:11 "the three and a half days"** This is an allusion from Daniel and is a symbolic period of persecution. See full note at Rev. 11:9.

▣ **"the breath of life from God came into them"** This is an allusion to Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones. This is a play on the Hebrew word "*ruach*" which meant breath, wind, and spirit (as does the Greek word *pneuma*).

**SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE**

**11:12 "And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here'"** As some see the secret rapture of the Church in Rev. 4:1 where John was summoned to heaven, others see here a mid-tribulation secret rapture of the Church as these two witnesses are called to heaven in this verse. Here again our presuppositions and theological grids drive the interpretation of symbolic, ambiguous texts!

▣ **"Then they went up into heaven in the cloud"** This is the divine transportation. The Messiah rode on the clouds of heaven in Dan. 7:13. Jesus ascended to heaven in the clouds (cf Acts 1:9). Jesus will return riding on the clouds of heaven (cf. Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7; 14:14).

**11:13 "in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell"** There are seven references in Revelation to earthquakes (cf. Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13,19; 16:18). This shows the ongoing, continuing, limited judgments of God on unbelievers. This may be an allusion to Ezek. 38:17-23.

▣ **"the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven"** There has been much discussion about the identity of term "the rest." It could refer to

1. the literal inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 12:10) or Rome
2. those who are saved during the tribulation period, i.e., those who truly repent
3. believing Jews, from Romans 11
4. people, like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, who were awed by God's acts, but not truly converted.

Because of Rev. 9:20-21; 14:7-8 and 16:10, #4 is the best option.

However, in Rev. 16:9, giving glory is related to repentance. It is surely possible that these (Jews or pagans) believed! This is the stated purpose of God's judgments (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9,11)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:14**

**<sup>14</sup>The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.**

**11:14** This is a transitional device (cf. Rev. 9:12; 12:12).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:15-16**

**<sup>15</sup>Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." <sup>16</sup>And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,**

**11:15 "The kingdom of the world"** The KJV and NKJV have "the kingdoms of this world." The plural is not present in any of the ancient Greek manuscripts.

▣ **"has become"** This is an aorist middle (deponent) indicative. This is a description of the end of the reign of fallen human governments and the beginning of the reign of our God (cf. 12:10). The new age of the Spirit has fully come. This confirms the recapitulation theory that the Second Coming occurs at the end of each of the three cycles of judgment: the seals (cf. Rev. 6:12-17), the trumpets (cf. Rev. 11:15-18), and the bowls (cf. Rev. 19). Revelation is not in a chronological, sequential order, but a dramatic presentation in seven cycles, each viewing the same period, but the seals, trumpets, and bowls in successive and intensifying degrees of judgment (1/4, 1/3, full).

▣ **"our Lord and of His Christ"** Notice how closely the Father and Son are linked (cf. Psalm 2). Notice, also, that the emphasis of 1 Cor. 15:24-28 and Eph. 5:5 has now been fulfilled. Some see an allusion to Zech. 14:9 which is possible because John's favorite sources of apocalyptic images in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah.

▣ **"and He will reign forever and ever"** This refers to the eternal reign of our God (cf. Exod. 15:18; Ps. 10:16; 29:10; Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 2:44; 4:34; 7:14,27; Zech. 14:9; Luke 1:33; 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Pet. 1:11), not a millennial reign (cf. Revelation 20) of Christ. This is really a fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in Matt. 6:10 that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom of God is a major theme in the Gospels and in the Revelation. There is a fluidity and tension between its current reality (post-millennial and amillennial) and its future consummation (historical premillennial and dispensational premillennial). This same fluidity is also between its earthly aspect (millennial) and its eternal aspect. Some commentators, schools, and denominations dwell on one aspect of the fluidity, but ignore or twist the others to fit their presuppositions and theological systems. It is so hard for western people to appreciate the fluidity, figurativeness, and tension of eastern literature, especially its apocalyptic genre. Our God and His Christ have reigned, are reigning and will reign; the details are insignificant! There may be an earthly messianic reign for some period (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23-28); national Israel may have some part (cf. Romans 11). However, the figures and symbols of Revelation address the Church universal, not Israel (cf. Dan. 2:34-35,44). I personally leave open the possibility of Israel having a part in end-time events because of God's OT promises to Abraham's descendants (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; Zech. 12:10) based on God's character (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38).

**11:16 "the twenty-four elders"** See Special Topic at Rev. 4:4.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:17-18**

**<sup>17</sup>"We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. <sup>18</sup>"And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."**

**11:17-18** This prayer of praise is written in poetic form in the NKJV, NRSV, and TEV and in prose form in NASB and NJB. These outbursts of prayer and praise are often the best interpreters of the preceding visions (along with the songs and angelic interpretations).

**11:17 "O Lord God, the Almighty"** This refers to the three major OT titles for God.

1. YHWH, the covenant God as Savior (cf. Exod. 3:14; Psalm 103)
2. *Elohim*, the Creator God as provider and sustainer (cf. Gen. 1:1; Psalm 104)
3. *El Shaddai* (cf. 1:8), the strong or compassionate God which was the Patriarchal name for deity (cf. Exod. 6:3)

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 1:8.

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"who art and who wast"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"The One who is and who was and who is to come"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"who are and who were"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"the one who is and who was"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"He who is, He who was"</b>

Notice that the future aspect of this common description of God (except for some sixteenth century late minuscule Greek manuscripts) is left out because God has begun to reign. The last of these three chronological aspects will never be mentioned again in the book of the Revelation. The Kingdom has come (cf. 11:15-16)! This gives evidence that the recapitulation theory of the parallel relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls is true!

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"Because You have taken Your great power and reigned"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"for you have taken your great power and begun to reign"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"that you have taken your great power and have begun to rule"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"For assuming your great power and beginning your reign"</b>

This is perfect active indicative followed by an aorist active indicative. The power has always been His, but His reign has now begun (ingressive aorist).

**11:18 "the nations were enraged"** This is an allusion to Ps. 2; 46:6; and Ezekiel 38-39 (and possibly the apocalyptic introduction to Esther in the Septuagint). This anger of the nations can be viewed in two ways.

1. the fallen world system hates God and His plans and His rule and His people
2. there will be an end-time rebellion against God characterized by a battle (Armageddon, cf. Revelation 20)

■ **"Your wrath came"** This may be an allusion to Ps. 2 or 110:5-6. This is the Greek term *orgē*. See full note at Rev. 7:14.

■ **"the time came"** The Day of the Lord is a day of judgment for some and reward for others. These twin aspects can be seen in Matt. 25:31-46 and Rev. 20:11-15. All humans (the small and the great) will one day stand before God and give an account of their lives (cf. Gal. 6:7; 2 Cor. 5:10).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THAT DAY**

■ **"the time came for the dead to be judged"** The end-time judgment of God is discussed in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20. This phrase confirms the interpretation of Revelation in seven acts (scenes) where the end of time occurs after each unit (especially clear in the seals, trumpets and bowls).

■ **"your bond-servants the prophets"** This exact phrase appears in Rev. 10:7. John identifies himself as a prophet and his book as a prophecy, therefore, this term is used often in the book of the Revelation. It can almost be said that this term takes the place of the title "apostle" (cf. 10:7; 11:10,18; 16:6; 18:20,24; 22:6,9). See Special Topic: NT Prophecy at Rev. 16:6.



■ **"saints"** The term "saints" referred to the believers' position in Christ, not their sinlessness. It should also describe their progressive Christlikeness. The term was always plural except in Phil. 4:21. However, even in this context it was corporate. To be a Christian is to be part of a community, a family, a body. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: SAINTS](#) at Rev. 5:8. This designation surely represents the NT people of God, the church.

■ **"the small and the great"** There seem to be only two groups mentioned in this verse, prophets and saints. This phrase "small and great" is found in Rev. 19:5. It was a favorite expression in John's Gospel (cf. Rev. 13:16; 19:5,18; 20:12; 19:5 is an allusion to Ps. 115:13, which included all of a given group).

■ **"to destroy those who destroy the earth"** This characterization of fallen humanity reflects Genesis 3 and Rom. 8:18-22. Evil humans allow greed and self to use, abuse, and misuse God's physical creation.

This could be interpreted as evil mankind that forces God to bring judgment on the earth (the flood, Genesis 6-9; the plagues of Egypt, Exodus 7-12; the covenant curses, Deuteronomy 27-28; or the earth destroyed by fire, 2 Pet. 3:10). In Revelation, the seals destroy 1/4, the trumpets 1/3, and the bowls total physical destruction of the earth.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 11:19**

**<sup>19</sup>And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.**

**11:19 "the temple of God which is in heaven was opened"** Remember that this vision began with a door being opened in heaven (cf. Rev. 4:1; 15:5). Now, the very inner sanctum of God's heavenly temple can be seen (cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:23-28).

When Jesus died the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom, indicating that access to God was now available to all through Christ (cf. Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; alluded to in Heb. 9:8; 10:20). This same symbolism is repeated here. God is available to all. Heaven's inner sanctum is now fully open and visible.

■ **"the ark of His covenant"** The ark of the covenant was lost sometime during the Babylonian Exile (or to Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt, cf. 1 Kgs. 14:25). It symbolized the presence of God after Israel's crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. It also symbolized God's covenant promises, which may refer to the mystery (cf. Rev. 10:7), God's plan of redemption for all mankind (cf. Rom. 16:25-26). In the OT only the High Priest could approach this article of holy furniture, once a year on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16). Now, all of God's people can come into the very presence of God.

■ **"flashes of lightning and sounds of peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm"** This is very similar to Rev. 8:5 and 16:18-21, which reflect Exod. 9:24 and 19:16-19.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the purpose of this interlude?
2. Why do so many interpreters try to identify the angel in chapter 10 with Christ?
3. What is the mystery of God mentioned in Rev. 10:7?
4. What was the little book that John was commanded to eat?
5. Who are the two witnesses? What was their message?

6. Does Rev. 11:9 describe the city of Jerusalem or anti-God world kingdoms? Why?
7. List the Old Testament allusions found in this interlude.

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# REVELATION 12-14

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Woman and the Dragon	The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon	The Vision of the Woman, the Child, and the Dragon	The Woman and the Dragon	The Vision of the Woman and the Dragon
12:1-6	12:1-6 Satan Thrown Out of Heaven	12:1-6	12:1-2 12:3-6	12:1-6
12:7-12	12:7-12 The Woman Persecuted	12:7-9 12:10-12	12:7-9 12:10-12	12:7-12
12:13-17	12:13-17	12:13-17	12:13-18	12:13-17
The Two Beasts	The Beast From the Sea	The Two Beasts	The Two Beasts	The Dragon Delegates His Power to the Beast
12:18	12:18	12:18		12:18-13:10
13:1-4	13:1-10	13:1-4	13:1-4	
13:5-8		13:5-8	13:5-8	
13:9-10	The Beast from the Land	13:9-10	13:9-10	The False Prophet as the Slave of the Beast
13:11-18	13:11-18	13:11-18	13:11-17 13:18	13:11-17 13:18
The Song of the 144,000	The Lamb and the 144,000	An Interlude	The Lamb and His People	The Companions of the Lamb
14:1-5	14:1-5	14:1-5	14:1-5	14:1-5
The Messages of the Three Angels	The Proclamation of Three Angels		The Three Angels	Angels Announce the Day of Judgment
14:6-7	14:6-13	14:6-7	14:6-7	14:6-7
14:8		14:8	14:8	14:8
14:9-12		14:9-11 14:12	14:9-11 14:12	14:9-13
14:13		14:13	14:13 14:13b	
The Harvest of the Earth	Reaping the Earth's Harvest		The Harvest of the Earth	The Harvest and the Vintage of the Gentiles
14:14-16	14:14-16 Reaping the Grapes of	14:14-16	14:14-16	14:14-16

	Wrath			
14:17-20	14:17-20	14:17-20	14:17	14:17-20
			14:18-20	

## READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHT TO REVELATION 12:1-17

- A. Another interlude begins in Rev. 12:1 and continues through Rev. 14:20. Many have asserted that this is really another series of sevens. This literary unit describes the spiritual conflict in dualistic terms among
1. the two kingdoms
  2. the two cities
  3. the two slain witnesses and their murderers
- B. Verses 1-6 describe the ultimate (cosmic) battle between good and evil in mythological terms taken from Ancient Near Eastern cultures (cf. Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* p. 229).
1. Babylonian creation account—Tiamat (chaos), a seven headed monster who threw down one third of the stars of heaven, versus Marduk, the chief god of the city of Babylon, who kills her and becomes the head of the pantheon.
  2. Egyptian myth—Set (Typhon), a red dragon versus Isis (Hathor), giving birth to Horus. He later kills Set.
  3. Ugaritic Baal legend—Yam (waters) versus Ba'al. Ba'al kills Yam.
  4. Persian myth—Azhi Dabaka (evil dragon) versus son of Ahura Mazda (the high good god).
  5. Greek myth—the Python (serpent/dragon) versus pregnant Leto (she gives birth to Apollo, who kills Python).
- C. It is very difficult to know how to interpret this chapter. Some try to interpret it in historical terms, but it seems to me that it is symbolic of the struggle between the anti-God kingdoms of this age and the new age kingdom of our Christ (cf. Rev. 11:18; Psalm 2). Therefore, this is both a historical allusion to the birth of Christ and an emphasis on the coming of the Messianic kingdom. This is a dualism of an individual (Messiah) and a group (the people of God) versus an individual (Satan) and a group (demonically inspired unbelievers). This same dualism is seen in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. The servant is Israel (cf. Isa. 41-50), yet the Messiah (cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12).
- D. Paul discusses the cosmic lordship of Christ in Colossians 1-2 (also note Heb. 1:2-3).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 12:1-6

<sup>1</sup>A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; <sup>2</sup>and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. <sup>3</sup>Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. <sup>4</sup>And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. <sup>5</sup>And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. <sup>6</sup>Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

**12:1 "A great sign appeared in heaven"** This may be the beginning of "the seven signs" of the Revelation. This is a special theological term (*sēmeion*) used often in John's Gospel (cf. John 2:11,23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2,14,30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18,37; 20:30). It now appears seven times between Rev. 12:1 and 19:20—three times of signs in heaven (cf. Rev. 12:1,3; 15:1) and four times of signs on the earth (cf. Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20).

■ **"in heaven"** This probably means "in the sky" and not in heaven itself. The term heaven(s) in the OT can refer to the atmosphere above the earth (cf. Gen. 1:1,8-9,17,20; Ps. 104:2-3) or the place where God dwells (cf. Ps. 11:4; 103:19; Isa. 66:1; 2 Corinthians 12). This ambiguity is what caused the rabbis to speculate on the number of heavens—three or seven.

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEAVENS AND THE THIRD HEAVEN](#) at Rev. 4:1.

■ **"a woman clothed with"** This woman is beautifully described, in antithesis to the great whore of Rev. 17:4 who symbolizes anti-God world empires such as Babylon, Rome, and the end-time anti-Christ world system. There have been two theories about the source of John's imagery:

1. Genesis 3, where there is a woman, a serpent and a man-child

2. other strong allusions to "birthing" in the OT (cf. Isa. 26:17-18 in the Septuagint and Isa. 66:7-13)

Israel is described as a woman giving birth (cf. Mic. 4:10), therefore, this woman represents the true people of God (cf. Rev. 12:1-6), but in Rev. 12:13-17 she will be the NT people of God fleeing from the wrath of the dragon. For other theories see Alan Johnson's *Revelation*, pp. 117-119.

In *Answers to Questions* F. F. Bruce said, "The woman I should think of as the messianic community or 'Israel of God' especially as manifested locally in the Palestinian church, the mother-church par excellence; . . . The 'remnant of her seed' will be Christians in other parts of the world, the target of attack in Rev. 13:7" (p. 140).

In *New Bible Commentary* George R. Beasley-Murray said, "Religious people of the ancient world would have seen in the travelling woman a goddess crowned with the twelve stars of the zodiac; a Jew would have understood her as Mother Zion (see Isa. 26:16; 27:1; 49:14-25; 54:1-8; 66:7-9), but for John she represented the 'Mother' of the Messianic community, the believing people of God of old and new covenants" (p. 1441).

■ **"twelve stars"** Here again our presuppositions drive the interpretation.

1. if it is OT then it refers to the twelve Jewish tribes

2. if it is intertestamental apocalyptic literature it refers to the signs of the zodiac

3. if it is NT then it refers to the twelve Apostles

Twelve is the regular biblical symbolic number of organization. See Special Topic: the Number Twelve at Rev. 7:4.

However, the meaning of chapter 12 is not conditioned on a proper identification of John's symbolism,

but the central truth of the context. This principle must be maintained. We must not

1. push the details
2. choose some things literally and some things symbolically
3. force our interpretations into our historical setting

**12:2** Birth pains were used as a symbol for

1. expected, but sudden events
2. the pain or problems associated with an expected event
3. the beginning of something new with great potential

The Jews believed that the coming of the "new age" would involve persecution and problems (cf. Isa. 13:8; 21:3; 26:17; 66:7-13; Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). John uses this concept to describe the conflict between Satan and his followers and God and His followers (cf. Isa. 66:7-24).

World events are going to get worse and worse, but God is in control of history (this is the view of premillennialism and amillennialism, while postmillennialism is much more optimistic about world history). His followers are protected amidst persecution and victorious amidst temporary defeat, even physical death (cf. John 16:20-21). The question is, "How will God protect His followers?" His seal on their foreheads protects them from "the wrath of God," but not from the persecutions of unbelievers (tribulation). God is for them, with them, and loves them, but many will still die!

**12:3 "a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems"** This is a description of evil and great power (cf. 13:1 and 17:3). The horns and heads symbolize perfect power (cf. Daniel 7) and the diadems represent the evil one's attempted usurpation of Christ's royal place.

The term "dragon" may go back to the OT

1. the serpent of Genesis 3
2. the two evil monsters of chaos
  - a. Rahab (cf. Ps. 89:10; Isa. 51:9-10; Job 26:12-13)
  - b. Leviathan (cf. Ps. 74:13-14; 104:26; Job 3:8; 7:12; 41:1; Isa. 27:1; Amos 9:3)

There are numerous titles for the evil one found in the NT

1. "Satan," used 33 times
2. the "Devil," used 32 times
3. the "Tempter," (cf. Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5)
4. the "evil one," (cf. Matt. 6:13; 13:19; 1 John 5:18)
5. the "Enemy," (cf. Matt. 13:39)
6. the "Prince of Demons," (cf. Matt. 9:34; 12:24)
7. "the Ruler of this world," (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)
8. "the Prince of the Power of the air," (cf. Eph 2:2)
9. "The god of this world," (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4)
10. "Belial," (cf. 2 Cor. 6:15)
11. "Beelzebul," (cf. Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15,18-19)
12. "the Dragon," (cf. Rev. 12:3,4,7,9; 20:2)
13. "the Serpent," (cf. Rev. 12:9,15; 20:2)
14. "the Accuser," (cf. Rev. 12:10,15)
15. "the Adversary," (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8)
16. "a roaring lion," (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8)

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: SATAN**

**12:4 "his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth"** Because the term "the stars of heaven" is used quite often in the OT to refer to the saints of God (cf. Gen. 15:5; Jer. 33:22; Dan. 12:3), some have assumed that this refers to saints, but the context could refer to angels (cf. Dan. 8:10; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6). Falling angels (i.e., falling stars) are a common motif in apocalyptic literature (i.e., I Enoch).

Satan is depicted with the angels in heaven before God in Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3. He was possibly a "covering cherub" (cf. Ezek. 28:12-18). This description, using metaphors from the Garden of Eden, does not fit the King of Tyre, but the king's pride and arrogance mimicked Satan's (I am becoming more and more uncomfortable with this approach because in Ezekiel 31 the king of Egypt is described as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ezekiel regularly uses Eden terms to describe kings). In the OT Satan is not an enemy of God, but of mankind (cf. 12:10). Satan was not created evil but developed into an arch enemy of all things good and holy (cf. A. B. Davidson's *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 300-306). Several times he is said to have been cast out of heaven (cf. Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:16; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; and Rev. 12:9,12). The problem is when. Is it:

1. during the OT period
  - a. before the creation of man
  - b. some time after Job but before Ezekiel 28
  - c. during the post-exilic period, but after Zechariah
2. during the NT period
  - a. after Jesus' temptation (cf. Matthew 4)
  - b. during the mission trip of the seventy (cf. Luke 10:18)
  - c. at an end-time moment of rebellion (cf. Rev. 12:9). See Special Topic at Rev. 12:7.

One wonders whether the third of the stars refers to angels who rebelled against God and chose to follow Satan. If so, this may be the only Scriptural basis for the demonic of the NT related to fallen angels (cf. Rev. 12:9,12). The number, one-third, may be related to the limit of the destruction during the trumpet judgments (cf. Rev. 8:7-12; 9:15,18) and not a specific number. Or, it may represent Satan's defeat of part of the angels in battle. It is also possible it simply reflects the ancient myth of Babylon. See Contextual Insights, B. 1.

At this point it may be helpful to remember that although this issue is interesting, it probably was not the author's intent in this context to discuss (1) the origin of the demonic; (2) the fall of Satan; or (3) an angelic rebellion in heaven. In apocalyptic literature the central theme of the vision is crucial, but the literalness of the presentation, the details and the images are dramatic, symbolic, fictional. It is our curiosity and respect for the Bible that motivates our detailed, logical, doctrinal formulations. Be careful of pushing the details; apocalyptic literature is often true theology presented in an imaginative frame-work. It is true, but symbolically presented!

■ **"he might devour her child"** This child refers to the promised Messiah (cf. Rev. 12:5). Satan wants to thwart God's plans at every level, both the universal plan for redemption (unconditional covenants) and the individual plan of redemption (conditional covenants, cf. Matt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:4).

**12:5 "she gave birth to a son, a male child"** This may be an allusion to Isa. 66:7-8. Notice how John moves from the incarnation of Jesus to the eschatological reign. All the things in between are dealt with in John's Gospel, but not in the Revelation.

■ **"who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron"** This is an allusion to Ps. 2:9 and is, therefore, Messianic. In Rev. 19:15 this phrase is used of the Messiah, while in Rev. 2:26-27 it is used of the saints. There is a fluidity between the Messiah (individual) and the believing community (corporate) here, as there is in the servant songs of Isaiah (i.e., national Israel, cf. Isa. 42:1-9,19; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). As the evil one now rules the nations, a new leader has come and will one day completely reign.

■ **"and her child was caught up to God and to His throne"** Some see this as the ascension of Christ, but we miss the point of this literary unit if we make it too strong an allusion to the historical life of Christ. John, in the book of Revelation, does not discuss Jesus' earthly life or death. He moves theologically from the incarnation to the exaltation. The focus of Revelation is the glorified, exalted Christ (cf. Rev. 1:4-20). John's presentation of the gospel in Revelation focuses on repentance and giving glory to God. This is meant not to depreciate Jesus' central role (cf. Rev. 5:9,12; 7:14; 12:11), but to focus on His role of bringing the eternal kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-28); the kingdom of both the Father and the Son!

**12:6 "the woman fled into the wilderness"** Many see here an allusion to the Exodus, which is found throughout this context. The time of wilderness wanderings was seen by the rabbis as a betrothal period between YHWH and Israel. During this time, He provided all of their needs and was intimately present with them.

■ **"a place prepared by God"** Although the general context reflects the Wilderness Wandering Period, this phrase carries other historical allusions.

1. Elijah by the brook Cherith (cf. 1 Kgs. 17:1-7)
2. Elijah's flight into the Sinai peninsula (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:1-14)
3. the seven thousand faithful (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:18)
4. those who fled the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 (cf. Matt. 24:15-20; Mark 13:12-18)

■ **"for one thousand two hundred and sixty days"** Again, this seems to be an undetermined, but limited, period of persecution. This same period of time is referred to in several different ways which equal about three and one half years.

1. "time, times and a half time" (cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14)
2. "2,300 evenings and mornings" (cf. Dan. 8:14)
3. "forty-two months" (cf. Rev. 11:2; 13:5); "1,260 days" (cf. Rev. 11:3; 12:6); "1,290 days" (cf. Dan. 12:11); and "1,335 days" (cf. Dan. 12:12).

Seven is the perfect number in Hebrew numerology (cf. Gen. 1:1-2:3). One less than seven speaks of human imperfection and 666 (cf. Rev. 13:17-18) is the ultimate imperfect human, the Antichrist (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2). In the same vein, three and one-half is symbolic of a limited, but indefinite, period of persecution. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: FORTY-TWO MONTHS](#) at Rev. 11:2.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 12:7-10a**

**<sup>7</sup>And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, <sup>8</sup>and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup>And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. <sup>10</sup>Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,**

#### **12:7 "there was war in heaven"**

#### **[SPECIAL TOPIC: WAR IN HEAVEN](#)**

■ **"Michael"** There are only two named angels in the Bible (i.e., Michael, Gabriel). This angel is named as the angel of the nation of Israel in Dan. 10:13,21 and 12:1. He is called an archangel in Jude 1:9. His name means "who is like God." Some see this as another name for Christ, but this seems to be going too far. God is not threatened by the rebellion of the evil one. The Bible is not a dualism, like Persian Zoroastrianism. God defeats the evil one by the use of an angel (although in reality it was the redemptive work of Christ).

In legal metaphor, Michael is the defense attorney, while Satan acts as the prosecution attorney and YHWH is the Judge! Michael wins the case through

1. the sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (cf. Rev. 12:16)
2. the faithful witness of the church (cf. Rev. 12:11b)
3. the perseverance of the church (cf. Rev. 12:11c)

■ **"the dragon and his angels waged war"** Exactly who Satan's angels are is hard to describe biblically. Many see them as demonic (cf. Matt. 25:41; Eph. 6:10ff). But there is always the nagging question of the angels in Tartarus (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4), and the angels mentioned in Rev. 9:14, who are

obviously controlled by God but are apparently evil angels. Much of the conflict in the angelic world is simply unexplained (cf. Daniel 10).

There is also an ongoing discussion related to the relationship between the fallen angels of the OT and the demons of the NT. The Bible is silent on this subject. Interbiblical apocalyptic literature (specifically I Enoch) asserts that the half-angel, half-human offspring of Gen. 6:1-4 are NT demons seeking human bodies to re-inhabit. This is just speculation, but it does reveal what some of the first century Jews thought about this subject.

The aorist infinitive does not seem to fit this context. It is possibly a Semitism and might be translated "had to fight" (cf. *The Expositor's Bible commentary*, vol. 12, "Revelation" by Alan Johnson, p. 519, footnote #7. This is one of my favorite commentators on Revelation).

**12:8** This is the first in a series of encouraging words to a persecuted Church. Rev. 12:8, 11, 14 give great comfort to the people of God who were undergoing persecution in the first century and in every century. Satan has already been defeated twice: once in his attempt to kill the Child (cf. Rev. 12:4) and now in his attempt to storm the throne of God (cf. Rev. 12:7-9); he will also be defeated in his attempt to wipe out the people of God on earth.

■ **"there was no longer a place found for them in heaven"** This implies that Satan has been in heaven for some time (cf. Job 1-2; Zechariah 3; and 1 Kgs. 22:21). Notice the plural pronoun, which implies other angels in league with Satan.

**12:9 "the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan"**

Here and Rev. 20:2 (cf. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:24), are the only places where Satan is explicitly identified with the serpent of Genesis 3 and implicitly in 2 Cor. 11:3. The term "devil" is the Greek term for "slanderer," while the term "Satan" is the Hebrew word for "adversary" (cf. 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kgs. 11:14). They both emphasize the function of the evil one as the accuser of the brethren (cf. Rev. 12:10). The term "Satan" in the OT (see Special Topic at Rev. 12:3) is not usually a proper noun, but it is in three specific occurrences: (1) Job 1-2; (2) Zech. 3:1-3; and (3) 1 Chr. 21:1. For "was thrown down" see full note at Rev. 12:4 and 7.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSONAL EVIL**

■ **"who deceives the whole world"** This describes the mission of the evil one. As the gospel is universal (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), so too the antigospel! The best book that I have read on the development of Satan in the Bible, from servant to enemy, is A. B. Davidson's *A Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 300-306. Satan's mission is described in 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 13:14; 19:20; 20:3,8,10; 2 John 7. It is hard to conceive of Satan as a servant of God but compare 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chr. 21:1.

■ **"he was thrown down to the earth"** The term "thrown down" is used several times in this context: twice in Rev. 12:9; in Rev. 12:10, and Rev. 12:13. It is also used in Rev. 19:20; 20:3,10,14,15 and is possibly an allusion to Isa. 14:12 or Luke 10:18; and possibly John 12:31.

The earth becomes the realm of Satan's activities. See fuller notes on Satan's fall at Rev. 12:4 and 7.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 12:10b-12**

**<sup>10</sup>Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. <sup>11</sup>And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. <sup>12</sup>For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time."**



**12:10b-12** This is the message of the one with the loud voice in heaven.

**12:10 "the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come"** This is a literary equivalent to Rev. 11:15-18. The end is already present and God is victorious! This was very helpful to a group of believers who were suffering extreme persecution, even death.

▣ **"for the accuser of our brethren"** This shows that the voice of Rev. 12:10 was not an angel, but apparently believers, possibly the martyrs of Rev. 6:9-11.

The Hebrew term *Satan* means "accuser." We see Satan in this role in Job 1:9-11 and Zech. 3:1.

▣ **"he who accuses them before our God day and night"** Satan is cast out of heaven yet he still accuses the faithful before God. This is the fluidity of this genre. His power is broken, but he is still active (however, limited by God, cf. Job 1-2).

**12:11 "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony"** The victory has already been won by the substitutionary atonement of God's Messiah (cf. Rev. 1:5; 7:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7). This atonement involves both

1. the grace of God through Christ's sacrificial death (cf. Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21)
2. believers' required faith response (cf. Rev. 6:9; Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21) and their sharing of that faith (i.e., lifestyle and verbally)

This phrase is much like Rev. 14:12. There is great similarity between Rev. 12:11 and 17. Rev. 11 seems to describe salvation, while Rev. 12:17 seems to describe Christian maturity and perseverance. Notice Christ's victory occurs at Calvary, not the millennium.

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"and they did not love their life even to death"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"and they did not love their lives to the death"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"for they did not cling to life even in the face of death"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"they were willing to give up their lives and die"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"because even in the face of death they did not cling to life"</b>

First century believers and their families faced horrible deaths (as do many in every age). They were sealed and protected by God, but still they are subject to persecution by unbelievers. Their faith in Christ was stronger than their fear of death (cf. Rev. 2:10; Mark 8:35; 13:13; Luke 14:26; John 12:25).

**12:12 "rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them"** This is a present middle imperative (cf. Rev. 18:20). It may be an allusion to Ps. 96:11 or Isa. 49:13. Heaven is to rejoice because Satan has been cast out, but woe be unto the earth!

The plural "heavens" is used in the OT to denote (1) the atmosphere above the earth (cf. Gen. 1) and (2) the place where God dwells. In this context it is #2.

The term "dwell" (NASB, NKJV, NRSV) or "live there" (TEV, NJB) is from the noun "tabernacle." It implies a permanent residence with God (cf. Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3 and John 1:14 of Christ with us).

▣ **"wrath"** See full note at Rev. 7:14.

▣ **"knowing that he has *only* a short time"** This seems to refer to the period of time between the Ascension of Christ (cf. Acts 1:9-11) and the Second Coming which John and the first century Christians thought would be in a short period of time. It has been almost 2,000 years now; every generation has the hope of the any-moment return of the Lord. Believers were warned of this delay in 2 Thessalonians and Matt. 24:45-51. Be careful that the delay does not reduce faith (cf. 2 Pet. 3:3-4).

**[SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ANY-MOMENT RETURN OF JESUS VERSUS THE NOT YET \(NT PARADOX\)](#)**

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## NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 12:13-17

<sup>13</sup>And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*. <sup>14</sup>But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. <sup>15</sup>And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. <sup>16</sup>But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. <sup>17</sup>So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

**12:13 "the woman"** Possibly originally "the woman" referred to the OT believing community; now it refers to the NT people of God (cf. Rev. 12:17; 13:7). In *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 6, A. T. Robertson calls her "the true Israel on earth" (p. 395).

**12:14 "the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman"** These eagle wings are symbolic of God's protection and provision (cf. Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; Ps. 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; 90:1,4; and Isa. 40:31). This may be another allusion to the new exodus.

■ **"so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place"** The wilderness is seen as a place of divine protection, alluding to the Wilderness Wandering Period of Israel's history (cf. Rev. 12:6). This would be great encouragement to a hurting church.

■ **"a time and times and half a time"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:25; 12:7. For a full note on this phrase see Rev. 11:2 and 12:6.

**12:15 "the serpent poured water"** There is no exact OT parallel to this. It may be a metaphor connected to God's wrath in Hosea 5:10 or metaphors of times of pressure and sorrow like Ps. 18:4; 124:4-5. But because chapter 12 has drawn so much of its imagery from Ancient Near Eastern creation myths, it possibly refers to watery chaos, the primeval struggle of good versus evil, order versus chaos.

Nature fought for Barak and Deborah against the Canaanite city of Hazor and her military general, Sisera: (1) the rain stopped their chariots (cf. Jdgs. 5:4) and (2) even the stars (thought of as angelic powers) fought against Sisera (cf. Jdgs. 5:20).

**12:17 ". . .and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring"** The evil one tried to destroy the Messianic community by

1. destroying the Messiah
2. destroying the mother church
3. by destroying all Messianic followers.

The phrase "to make war" is metaphorical of spiritual, political, and economic oppositions. This is an allusion to Dan. 7:21 (cf. Rev. 11:7; 13:7). This persecution is the very evidence of the church's victory through Christ (cf. Phil. 1:28).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Describe the content of the seventh trumpet.

2. Why is the vision of the Ark of the Covenant so encouraging to these first century Christians?
3. Who is the woman of Revelation 12?
4. When did this battle in heaven occur?
5. How are the devil's angels related to the demonic?
6. What does the phrase "a time, times and a half-time" mean in Daniel and Revelation?
7. How would this passage encourage first century, persecuted Christians?

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 13:1-18

- A. Chapter 13 is a further development of the imagery of Rev. 12:13-17.
- B. The OT background of this chapter is Daniel 7. The four predicted Near Eastern empires of Daniel are combined in this one ultimate, universal, anti-God, end-time kingdom.
- C. The emperor worship of the first century (esp. in Asia Minor) is one historical fulfillment of the worship of the beast, as will be the end-time man of sin (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2), and the little horn of Dan. 7 (cf. Rev. 13:8,11,20,25), which is out of the fourth kingdom, Rome.
- D. The beast has been identified in two ways
  1. As an ongoing, false teaching/teacher(s) (cf. 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is both plural and singular, both present and future.
  2. As an actual person, possibly foreshadowed in evil persons throughout history (Antiochus, Roman Emperors, Hitler, etc., but ultimately personified in an end-time figure, cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-10).
- E. See Special Topic below.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: HUMAN GOVERNMENT

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 12:17b-13:6**

**12:17b** And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. **13: 1** Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. **2** And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. **3** I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; **4** they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" **5** There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. **6** And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven.

**13:1 "the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore"** NASB, NKJV and NJB begin Rev. 13 with this phrase (i.e., Rev. 12:17b), while TEV concludes Rev. 12 with it.

There is a manuscript variant related to the verb in Rev. 12:18 and 13:1, "stood"

1. "he stood," referring to the beast/dragon which relates to Rev. 12 – MSS P<sup>47</sup>, x, A, C, (NASB, NRSV, TEV, REB, NET, NIV)
2. "I stood," referring to John which relates forward to Rev. 13 – MSS P, 046, 051 (NKJV, NJB)

The UBS<sup>4</sup> gives option #1 a "B" rating (almost certain).

The "sea" may be an allusion to Dan. 7:2-3. It was a symbol of

1. the whole of humanity (cf. Isa. 17:12-13; 57:20; Rev. 17:15)
2. the forces of chaos (cf. Gen. 1; Isa. 51:9-10)

■ **"Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea"** The wild beast (cf. Rev. 13:14,15; 15:2; 16:13; 15:8) is first mentioned without fanfare in Rev. 11:7 as coming out of the abyss (cf. Rev. 17:8). It seems to refer to "the Antichrist" of 1 John 2:18a,22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7, also known as "the man of lawlessness" in 2 Thess. 2:3. The same description of this beast is found in Rev. 12:3 and 17:3,8.

The phrase "coming out of the sea" has been interpreted in several ways.

1. literally, as in intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature as Leviathan and in Rev. 12:11 as Behemoth
  2. an allusion to Daniel 7, where the beast comes up out of the sea in Rev. 13:3 and out of the earth in Rev. 13:17, which in Daniel 7 are synonymous, but John has separated the last beasts into two separate end-time evil personalities: the sea beast, Rev. 13:1 and the land beast, Rev. 13:11
  3. a symbol of fallen humanity (cf. particularly Rev. 17:15, but also Dan. 7:2-3; Isa. 17:12-13; 57:20)
- The reason that the two beasts of chapter 13 are mentioned as coming out of the sea and the land is (1) because this chapter follows Daniel 7 so closely or (2) because they combine to represent the whole earth. It is also possible that these two beasts plus Satan form an evil parody of the Trinity.

■ **"Ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems"** This is not exactly like the dragon (cf. Rev. 12:3) but it is very similar (cf. Rev. 17:3,7-12). The ten horns speak of complete power; the seven heads represent a perfect manifestation of evil, and the ten diadems are a claim to royalty. Evil is often a counterfeit of good. This is the first of several parodies of Christ.

■ **"blasphemous names"** The Greek manuscripts are equally divided between the plural (MS A) "names" (NRSV, NJB) and singular (MSS P<sup>47</sup>, κ, C, P) "name" (NKJV, TEV). UBS<sup>4</sup> cannot decide which is original. Whichever is true, this is obviously an allusion to Dan. 7:8,11,20,25 or 11:36. These blasphemous titles are connected with the (1) claim of deity or (2) evil titles (cf. Rev. 17:3).

**13:2 "the beast which I saw was like a leopard. . . a bear. . . a lion"** This combination of several beasts is another allusion to Dan. 7:4,5,6, where it refers to a series of kings, but here the symbolism has been changed into a composite of all the anti-God world systems personified in one leader (cf. Dan. 7:24).

■ **"And the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority"** This is parallel to 2 Thess. 2:9, which speaks of a Satanically-inspired power. The beast is not Satan, but a supernaturally empowered human manifestation or incarnation of him (cf. Rev. 13:4,12). This is another parody of Christ (cf. Rev. 5:6).

**13:3 "I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain"** This is a perfect passive participle, which is syntactically parallel to the Lamb of Rev. 5:6. This is another parody of Jesus' death and resurrection.

■ **"and his fatal wound was healed"** Does Satan have the ability to resurrect this person, or is this trickery, deception, and mimicking (cf. Rev. 13:15)? Satan is parodying the power of God in raising Christ. This may be a historical allusion to the "Nero redivivus" myth, which asserted that Nero would come back to life, and return with a large eastern army (Parthians), and attack Rome (cf. *Sibylline Oracles*, books III-V).

■ **"And the whole world was amazed and followed after the beast"** Satan will use miracles to convince the unbelieving world to follow him (cf. Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:5; 17:8), which is another parody of Christ. The world was impressed by the power of the two witnesses in Rev. 11:13; now their fickleness is seen in their worshipping the beast.

**13:4 "they worshiped the dragon. . .and they worshiped the beast"** Evil desires not only political power, but religious worship (cf. Rev. 13:8). Satan wants worship (cf. Rev. 13:12; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20; Matt. 4:8-9). He wants to be like God (cf. possibly Isa. 14:12-15). Implicitly, this is related to the Serpent's lie in Gen. 3:5 and in Matt. 4:9; Luke 4:5-7.

- **"Who is like the beast"** There have been three suggested origins for this phrase. Some see it as
  1. a parody for the title of YHWH found in Exod. 15:11; Ps. 35:10; 113:4
  2. a parody of YHWH in Isa. 40:18-22;43:11; 44:6,8,9-20 45:6
  3. a reference to Leviathan and Behemoth in Jewish apocalyptic literature (one example in the OT is Job 41, especially Rev. 13:33-34)

**13:5** In Rev. 13:5-7 and Rev. 13:14-15 there are several passive verbs which imply that permission was given by Satan and ultimately by God (cf. Job). God is using Satan for His own purposes! Evil reveals its own motives by its words and actions.

- **"a mouth speaking arrogant words"** This is an allusion to:

1. "the beast" in Dan. 7:8,11,20,25; 11:36
2. Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Dan. 8; I Macc. 1:24
3. "the man of sin" in 2 Thess. 2:4
4. the abomination of desolation of Matt. 24:15, which refers to the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman general, and later Emperor, Titus, in A.D. 70

This is a good example of how the historical focus of these symbols changes. In Daniel 8 it refers to Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the interbiblical period; in Matthew 24 it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 and in Daniel 7 (and possibly Dan. 11:36-39) it refers to the activity of the end-time Antichrist.

- **"to act for forty-two months"** This is a direct allusion to Dan. 7:25. It was first mentioned in Rev. 11:2-3. It is a metaphor which denotes a period of persecution. See Special Topic at Rev. 11:2 and notes at Rev. 12:6.

**13:6 "he opened his mouth in blasphemies"** There is either a two or three-fold blasphemy in this verse against God's name, God's tabernacle, and God's people. It depends on how one translates this Greek phrase.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 13:7-10**

**<sup>7</sup>It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. <sup>8</sup>All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. <sup>9</sup>If anyone has an ear, let him hear. <sup>10</sup>If anyone is *destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.**

**13:7 "It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them"** This is an aorist passive indicative and an aorist active infinitive. The implication of the passive voice is that God allowed this to occur. We do not understand all that is behind this but it is obvious from the book of the Revelation that God is in control of all history. This war on His saints is mentioned in Dan. 7:21,25. It refers to the physical death of God's people. There is a time when the enemy seems to be the victor (like Calvary), but Revelation and Daniel teach that this victory is short-lived! Notice that God's people are protected from the wrath of God, but not from the wrath of the beast and his followers. God allows evil an apparent victory in order to reveal its true intentions and nature.

- **"saints"** See Special Topic at Rev. 5:8.

■ **"and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him"** This phrase indicates (1) that Revelation needs to be interpreted in a wider sense than the Roman Empire only, because of this universal, inclusive phrase or (2) that this refers to an Empire-wide event.

**13:8 "All who dwell on the earth"** This is a recurrent phrase referring to unbelievers in Revelation (cf. Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,12,14; 17:8).

■ **"whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain"** It is uncertain syntactically whether the phrase "from the foundation of the earth" is to be taken with (1) "our name written" (cf. RSV, NRSV, TEV, NJB and 17:8; Eph. 1:4) or (2) "the Lamb being slaughtered" (cf. KJV, NKJV and 1 Pet. 1:19-20). The word order of this text and Rev. 17:8 implies that the phrase probably describes believers' names written in the book of life even before creation!

The phrase "the foundation of the earth" is used several times in the NT (cf. Matt. 25:34; John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). There is also a very similar phrase in Matt. 13:35; Luke 11:50; Heb. 4:3; 9:26 and Rev. 17:8. The combination of these phrases shows God's redemptive activity before the creation of the world. Believers are secure in Christ (cf. Rev. 7:4; 11:1; 13:8). Evil is limited by a sovereign God (number of passive verbs in this chapter and the time limit). It looks bad in the short run, but look at the big picture!

■ **"the book of life"** From Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 20:11-15 we understand that there were two metaphorical books mentioned in connection with human destiny:

1. the Book of Life, which contains the names of those who have personally known God (OT) and have received Christ (NT) [cf. Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Isa. 4:3; 34:16; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27]
2. the Book of the Deeds of Mankind, which record human activity, both positive and negative (cf. Ps. 56:8; 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16)

These are obviously metaphors, but they do accurately describe God's ability to know those who are His and to hold those who have rejected Him accountable (cf. Gal. 6:7).

■ **"who has been slain"** See note at Rev. 5:12.

**13:9 "If anyone has an ear, let him hear"** This is a recurrent theme in the letters to the seven churches (cf. Rev. 2:7,17; 3:6,13,22). It, like the other phrases in Rev. 13:9-10, is a first class conditional sentence, which is assumed to be true for the author's literary purposes. The fact that these phrases relate to the churches seems to imply that the next phrase (v. 10) is also directed to the people of God.

**13:10** This verse may be an allusion to Jer. 15:2 or 43:11, which speaks of God's judgment. There are several Greek manuscript variants related to the verb "kill." This has caused the different English translations of this verse.

1. The KJV and NKJV relate both of these phrases to the persecutors of God's people.
2. The RSV and NRSV make the first clause relate to the persecuted Christians and the second clause to the anti-God persecutors.
3. A third possible interpretation (TEV and NJB) is that both clauses refer to persecuted Christians. The very fact that there is so much variance in the translations shows the uncertainty. It is obviously a spiritual truth that God is in control of history. The only question is to whom the phrase was directed.
  1. to Christians to encourage them to remain faithful (cf. Matt. 26:52; Phil. 1:28)
  2. to persecutors to assure them that they will one day be accountable before God for their choices and actions?

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"Here is the patience and the faith of the saints"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"Here is the call for endurance and faith of the saints"</b>

TEV            **"This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people"**  
NJB            **"This is why the saints must have perseverance and faith"**

Rev. 13:9 and the end of Rev. 13:10 show that this phrase must refer to the people of God (cf. Matt. 26:52). This verse also describes the true believers (cf. Rev. 14:12; 12:11,17). They are encouraged to hold out until the end (cf. Rev. 2:3,7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). Perseverance is evidence of true salvation (cf. 1 John 2:19). See note and Special Topic at Rev. 2:2.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 13:11-18**

**<sup>11</sup>Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. <sup>12</sup>He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. <sup>13</sup>He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. <sup>14</sup>And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. <sup>15</sup>And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. <sup>16</sup>And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, <sup>17</sup>and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. <sup>18</sup>Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.**

**13:11 "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:17. Many have assumed that these two beasts are a parody of the two witnesses of God in Rev. 11:13-14, while others have assumed that the dragon and the two beasts are a parody of the Trinity.

As the beast from the sea is an allusion to Leviathan (cf. Job 41:1-34), the ancient master of watery chaos, so the beast from the land is an allusion to Behemoth (cf. Job 40:15-24), the corresponding land monster (this in no way refers to dinosaurs, but to ancient eastern mythology).

These beasts are symbols of evil (chaos) and rebellion in God's created order (cf. Ps. 74:12-14; Job. 3:8; Isa. 51:9-11; Amos 9:3). Sometimes Leviathan is called *Rahab* ("the twisted one," i.e., the serpent, cf. Isa. 51:9). In other places *Rahab* is a name for Egypt (the Nile, i.e., twisting river, cf. Ps. 87:4; Isa. 30:7 and possibly Ezekiel 32, especially Rev. 13:2-3).

▣ **"he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon"** The reference to a lamb is an obvious parody of Christ (cf. Rev. 5:6). His voice and/or message reveals his true character. Later in Revelation the second beast is always referred to as the false prophet (cf. Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). He does not seek glory for himself, but recruits the world to worship the beast (cf. Rev. 13:12). This is a parody of the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14-16) in promoting Christ. So we have an unholy trinity:

1. Satan as a parody of God the Father
2. the sea beast as a parody of God the Son
3. the land beast as a parody of God the Spirit

**13:13 "He performs great signs"** This is a present tense verb which means he continues to perform wonders. It was expected that the end-time false teachers would be able to do the miraculous and lead even the elect astray, if that were possible (cf. Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; 2 Thess. 2:9-11; the Didache 16:3,4). Miracles are not automatically signs of God (cf. Exod. 7:8-13). This is another parody of Christ's ministry.

■ **"he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men"** This is similar to Elijah in 1 Kgs. 18:38, which may be the source of the description of the two witnesses found in Rev. 11:5. It may refer to fire that fell as a judgment of God in Ezek. 38:22 or 39:6. This may be another parody

1. of the two witnesses
2. of God's OT acts
3. of Pentecost in Acts 2

**13:14 "who had the wound of the sword and has come to life"** The word "wound" (*plēge*, cf. Rev. 13:3,12,14) is usually translated "plague" in Revelation (cf. 9:18,20; 11:6; 15:1,6,8; 16:9,21; 18:4,8; 21:9; 22:18). The footnotes of the NRSV have

1. for Rev. 13:3 "the plague of its death"
2. for Rev. 13:12 "whose plague of its death"
3. for Rev. 13:14 "that had received the plague of the sword"

The theological intent of these translations is to show that the antichrist is not a person, but a world system. The term can be used metaphorically of a "blow of fate" or a plague (cf. BAGD, p. 674), but its basic meaning is a stroke, or a wound.

The accompanying phrase "and has come back to life" shows that "plague" is not the best translation in these verses related to the beast. The idea of an end-time, anti-God Antichrist leading the nations in rebellion is predicted in the OT in Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 14; Daniel 7:21-27; 9:24-27; 11:36-39 and in the intertestamental apocalyptic literature, Sibylline Oracles, book III; IV Esdras 5.4,6 and Apocalypse of Baruch XL, and in the NT, 2 Thess. 2:3,8-9.

**13:15 "it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast"** Elsewhere this beast from the land is called the false prophet (cf. Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Perhaps this is the metaphor of injecting life (i.e., Hebrew *ruah* = breath) into the movement (cf. Ezekiel 37).

**13:16 "to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead"** As the saints were sealed unto God in Rev. 7:3 (cf. Rev. 13:16; 14:9), here the evil one mimics God's action by marking his own. The Greek word implies an animal brand or a seal on a governmental document. Because of the location of the sign, some have thought that it was

1. a perversion of a Jewish phylactery (cf. Deut. 6:8)
2. relating to the first century Roman culture, in which slaves were branded with their owner's name
3. soldiers tattooed in honor of their general

**13:17** The mark of the beast relates to the purchase of food, and possibly employment. God's people are not protected from this economic privation.

**13:17-18 "the number of his name"** Ancient languages used the letters of their alphabets to also stand for numbers. As the Hebrew consonants of Jesus' name adds up to 888 (cf. *Sibylline Oracles*, 1.324), so the name of the beast, the end-time incarnation of Satan, adds up to 666. Six is one less than the perfect number 7 (cf. Gen. 1:1-2:3, seven days of creation); repeated three times it forms a Hebrew superlative (cf. Isa. 6:3; Jer. 7:4).

It is also possible that since six is the human number, it may refer to a personification of each person of the unholy trinity—the dragon (Satan), the sea beast (Antichrist) and the land beast (false prophet). It seems to me that the first beast is a personification of an anti-God political system and the second beast is a personification of an anti-God religious system. We are moving toward the great whore of chapter 17, the epitome of an anti-God world system from Daniel 7. Whether it is ancient Babylon, first century Rome, or an end-time composite world kingdom, it shows that human history is moving toward the ultimate conflict between "the god of this world" (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) and his minions versus the God of creation and His Messiah (cf. Psalm 2).

**13:18 "his number is six hundred and sixty six"** There is no consensus on who this number refers to.

There have been countless conjectures, but none have been conclusive. Here are the three best theories in my opinion.

1. Since there is a manuscript variant between 666 and 616, it is possible to use Nero Caesar. The Greek letters translated into Hebrew equal 666 and the Greek letters translated into Latin equal 616.
2. Since a threefold repetition counts for a Hebrew superlative, 666 may mean the most evil person.
3. Since the context denotes a parody on the Trinity, the three Divine Persons are reflected in 777, while the three counterfeit ones 666.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 14:1-20

- A. It is possible that Rev. 14 is a response to the presentation of the overwhelming evil of Rev. 12 and 13. I am sure that the readers wondered what would be happening to the saints during this terrible end-time persecution.
- B. Some have seen another literary structure of "seven" in Rev. 14:6-20. There is a series of seven angels, but this structure does not seem to be theologically significant.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup>And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard *was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.* <sup>3</sup>And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. <sup>4</sup>These *are* the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. <sup>5</sup>And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

**14:1 "the Lamb"** This is a reference to the Messiah (cf. Rev. 5:6,8,12-13; 13:8; Isa. 53:7; John 1:29,36; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

- **"standing on Mount Zion"** There have been numerous theories identifying this phrase.
  1. that it stands for Mt. Moriah and the Temple area in Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:32)
  2. that it stands for heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22-23; 13:14; Gal. 4:26)
  3. that it is an apocalyptic symbol found in the non-canonical book of II Esdras 2:42-47; 13:35,39-40
  4. that it refers to the OT passages which speak of the end-time gathering of the people of God (cf. Psalm 48; Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:1,7; Obad. 1:17,21)
  5. that the background, like several other passages in this section, is Psalm 2, particularly Rev. 14:6. Remember that commentators relate each of these visions to either
    1. the OT passages or Palestinian places
    2. intertestamental apocalyptic literature
    3. first century Greco-Roman history

For me these visions of OT things beginning with chapter 6, relate to the NT people of God (believing Jews and Gentiles), the saints, the church. In this particular case, it is an allusion to the heavenly temple (cf. Heb. 8:2; 9:11,24).

- **"with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand"** This is the same group of the redeemed as in



Rev. 5:9; of the sealed in Rev. 7:4-8 (see full note at Rev. 7:4); of those washed in the Lamb's blood in Rev. 7:14-17. Therefore, in my opinion, this stands for the NT people of God, the saints, the church. For the full note on the identity of the 144,000, see Rev. 7:4. In the earlier references they were sealed but still persecuted, but here they are victorious!

▣ **"having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads"** Does this refer to one name or to two? It may refer to the titles of Isa. 9:6, which relate to both the Father and the Son. These are those who have been sealed and belong to God (cf. Revelation 7). See note at Rev. 7:2.

**14:2 "I heard a voice from heaven, like"** These descriptive phrases were used of God's voice in Ezek. 43:2, of Jesus' voice in Rev. 1:15, and of the heavenly multitudes' voices in Rev. 19:6. Often it is used to denote that the speaker is in heaven (cf. Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:8).

**14:3 "they sang a new song before the throne"** This is an allusion to Rev. 5:9. The "they" could refer to (1) the angelic creatures who sing the song in Rev. 5:9 or (2) the song of the one hundred and forty-four thousand in the concluding part of Rev. 14:3 and 15:2. This new song is an allusion to Isa. 42:10 and possibly Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1. The promised new age of the Spirit has come!

▣ **"elders"** See Special Topic at Rev. 4:4.

▣ **"who had been purchased from the earth"** This is the OT concept of a near relative purchasing a family member's release (*go'el*, i.e., Ruth and Boaz). It is used of those for whom Christ died (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:14). See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem at Rev. 5:9.

**14:4 "These are the ones who have not been defiled with women"** There has been much discussion over this verse because it seems to imply that this is a select, celibate group of males out of the 144,000 of chapter 7. However, I think that these phrases can be explained in symbolic, or at least, in OT terms, and were never meant to be taken literally. The phrase "had not been defiled with women" can be understood in several ways.

1. it refers literally to celibacy
2. it refers to spiritual adultery with the beast or the great whore (cf. Rev. 14:8; 17:2; 18:9)
3. it refers to specific comments made to the seven churches (cf. Rev. 2:14,20,22; 3:4)
4. it refers to OT ritual purification for worship or battle (cf. Exod. 19:14-15; Deut. 23:9-10; 1 Sam. 21:4-5; 2 Sam. 11:6-13)
5. it is simply an allusion to an OT title for the people of God, "the virgin daughter of Zion" (cf. 2 Kgs. 19:21; Jer. 18:13; Lam. 2:13; Amos 5:2; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27).

It must be asserted that sexual intercourse between married partners is not an unspiritual activity. Sexuality (marriage) is God's idea, His way of filling the earth, His command (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1). Celibacy is surely a spiritual gift for ministry (cf. 1 Corinthians 7), but it is not a holier state. Greek asceticism is not biblical (neither is pre-marital or extra-marital sexual activity)!

▣ **"These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes"** This speaks of discipleship and service (cf. John 7:17; 10:4).

▣ **"from among men as first fruits to God"** This term was used in the OT to show God's ownership of the entire crop (cf. Exod. 23:19; 34:76). In the NT it refers to the church (cf. Heb. 12:23; James 1:18), the people of Jesus, who are the first fruits of the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20,23; Rev. 1:5).

**14:5 "no lie was found in their mouth"** There are several possible origins for this metaphor:

1. it is related to a similar phrase in Rev. 21:27 and 22:15
2. it is related to Emperor worship where Christians never yielded to the command of the persecutors to say, "Caesar is Lord"
3. it is symbolic of OT defilement (cf. Ps. 32:2; Zeph. 3:13)

4. it may be a reference to unbelief as in Rom. 1:25; 1 John 2:22

■ **"they are blameless"** This is literally "without defect" (cf. Phil. 3:6). Originally it referred to sacrificial animals, but came to be used metaphorically of humans (cf. Noah, Gen. 6:9,17 and Job, Job 1:1). It is applied to Jesus in Heb. 9:14 and 1 Pet. 1:19. This is another way of referring to a Christlike life. Christlikeness is God's will for His people (cf. Lev. 19:2; Deut. 18:13; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16).

### SPECIAL TOPIC: BLAMELESS, INNOCENT, GUILTLESS, WITHOUT REPROACH

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:6-7**

**<sup>6</sup>And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; <sup>7</sup>and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."**

**14:6 "I saw another angel flying in midheaven"** In Rev. 8:13 there is an eagle flying in midheaven, which implies something well visible and able to proclaim to the whole earth.

■ **"having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth"** This phrase, "an eternal gospel" is found only here. It is significant that the "gospel" here is for those who live (dwell) on earth and this is used often in Revelation of unbelievers. Some see this as a fulfillment of Matt. 28:18-20 or more specifically, Matt. 24:14 and Mark 13:10. The content of this gospel is much like the message of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 3:3-14) or Jesus' statement to the evil one in Matt. 4:10. The message of judgment is a significant element in this gospel. Verses 6-7 are significant, for they show us that all of these God-sent judgments on lost mankind are for the purpose of redemption (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9,11).

In Rev. 14:12 true believers are characterized as those who (1) keep (i.e., present participle) the commandments of God and (2) keep (i.e., the same present participle) faith in Jesus.

■ **"to every nation and tribe and tongue and people"** See note at Rev. 10:11.

**14:7 "Fear God, and give Him glory"** This is an aorist passive (deponent) imperative and an Aorist active imperative. There are three aorist imperatives in Rev. 14:7. Mankind is commanded to respond to God in decisive acts of faith (cf. John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-13). In Rev. 11:13 fallen mankind seems to give God glory, but is quickly drawn away by the miracles of the beast in chapter 13 (a similar theology to the Parable of the Soils in Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8).

■ **"because the hour of His judgment has come"** The term "hour" is significant in the Gospel of John (cf. John 2:4; 4:21,23; 5:25,28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:21,32; 17:1). It speaks of the divine timing of a preset event (the Day of the Lord, cf. Rev. 14:15 and 9:15).

### SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HOUR

■ **"worship Him"** This is another aorist active imperative which is a decisive command.

■ **"who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters"** This is similar to the affirmation found in Acts 14:15, which quotes Gen. 1:9; Exod. 20:11 or Ps. 146:6. God is described as creator as in Job 38-41. The only unusual phrase is "the springs of water," which some see as

1. being connected to the earlier plagues of the angels (cf. Rev. 8:10)
2. in contrast to the undrinkable sea water

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:8**

**<sup>8</sup>And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,**

**she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."**

**14:8 "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great"** The verb is not only repeated, but occurs first in the Greek sentence, emphasizing these aorist active indicatives. It is very difficult to interpret the book of the Revelation because concepts are expanded at different places (the beast is briefly mentioned in Rev. 11:7 but not fully discussed until chapter 13). The full discussion of Babylon's fall is found in Rev. 16:19 and 17:1-18:24. It stands for Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13; II Baruch 11:1; 67:7; Sibylline Oracles 5:143, 159, 424), but ultimately it stands for all human societies organized and functioning apart from God (see Special Topic at chapter 13, E). This human self-sufficiency is a direct result of the fall (cf. Genesis 3) and was first expressed in the Tower of Babel (cf. Genesis 10-11). The world empires are becoming more anti-God, which will issue in the ultimate world kingdom of the Antichrist at the end-time (cf. Dan. 2:7-8). This may be an allusion to Isa. 21:9; Jer. 51:8.

▣ **"has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality"** The allusion is to Jer. 51:7-8 (cf. Rev. 17:2,4; 18:3). The term "passion" is the Greek term "*thumos*," which relates to an outburst of emotion (see full note at Rev. 7:14, cf. 17:2,3; 18:3). Those who drink Babylon's wine will drink YHWH's wine (cf. Rev. 14:9)!

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:9-12**

**<sup>9</sup>Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup>he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup>"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." <sup>12</sup>Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

**14:9 "If. . ."** This is a first class conditional sentence with two verbs, "worships" and "receives." Some humans, many humans, will commit these idolatrous acts. This is the exact opposite of receiving God's Messiah in Rev. 14:7 and 12. Those who do will experience the wrath of God (cf. Rev. 14:10).

**14:10 "he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God"** Humans have only two spiritual options, God or evil. The Greek term *wrath* *orgē* refers to "a settled opposition." See full note at Rev. 7:14. The allusion is to Isa. 51:17 or Jer. 25:15-16 (cf. Rev. 16:19; 19:15). Believers must face the wrath of Babylon (cf. Rev. 14:8), but unbelievers will face the wrath of God (cf. Rev. 14:10).

This strange combination of terms (literally "mixed unmixed") means that the wine of God's wrath has been mixed with other elements in order to make it extremely intoxicating, but unmixed as far as being watered down. The term "cup" was often used in the OT for God's judgment (cf. Isa. 51:17,22; Jer. 25:15-17,27-29; Ps. 75:8). Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath for all mankind (cf. Mark 14:36). The unbelieving world will not respond to Him by faith, and therefore, they face the cup themselves!

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AND ALCOHOLISM**

▣ **"and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone"** This is an allusion to God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 19:24,28; Luke 17:29; or judgment in general, cf. Ps. 11:6; Isa. 34:8-11; Ezek. 38:22). Torment is the ultimate fate of the two beasts (cf. 19:20), of the evil one (cf. 20:10), and of unrepentant mankind (cf. 20:15; 21:8).

Fire (see Special Topic at Rev. 16:8) was an OT metaphor of God's holiness (cf. Num. 9:15-16, etc.) It was used as a means of cleansing (cf. Lev. 8:17,32; 9:11,24; 13:32,55,57, etc.) and judgment (cf. Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 11:1-3, etc.). This association with judgment was expanded to describe a place of judgment.

Jesus used the garbage dump south of Jerusalem in the valley of the sons of Hinnom (*Gehenna*) as a symbol of eternal punishment (cf. Rev. 20:10, 14-15).

**14:11 "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever"** I wish that I could believe in universalism or at least in a second opportunity to respond to the gospel, but according to the Scriptures humans must respond to God's offer in faith (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21) while they live (cf. Heb. 9:27); if they refuse to respond, the consequences are ultimate and eternal (cf. Mark 9:47-48; Matt. 25:46; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). The permanent punishment of the wicked is compared to the transitory suffering of the saints. This is supported in the phrase "they will have no rest day and night," while in Rev. 14:13 the saints do have rest.

This is not an easy subject to discuss. The love of God and His heart for redemption are in contrast to His verdict of eternal punishment. Most of God's judgments in Revelation are for redemption, like the plagues on Egypt and the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 27-29. Yet, God's ultimate rejection is permanent. It is not disciplinary, it is punitive! This is so hard to understand, to emotionally handle. It does accentuate the need for evangelism!

Before I leave this subject let me share with you a thought I have had in this area. As bad as hell is for humankind, it is worse for God. God created humans in His image for fellowship. All of creation is a stage for God to meet and know mankind. God loves all the sons and daughters of Adam (cf. Ezek. 18:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). He loves them so much He was willing to send His own Son to die in their place (cf. John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21). But He has chosen that sinners must respond to Him in trust, faith, repentance, obedience, service, worship, and perseverance. God does not send anyone to Hell, but unbelievers send themselves (cf. John 3:17-21). Hell is an open, bleeding sore in the heart of God that will never be healed! I am not sure God ever has "a good day." Oh, the pain of willful rebellion in the face of sacrificial love!

**14:12** Perseverance is a major theme throughout the book (cf. Rev. 1:9; 2:7,11,17,19,26; 3:5,10,12,21; 13:10; 21:7). God's people have been shown to be faithful even in the midst of persecution. See full note and Special Topic at Rev. 2:2.

■ **"saints"** See Special Topic at Rev. 5:8.

■ **"who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus"** A similar description of believers is found in Rev. 12:17. Notice that the emphasis is on a personal faith relationship with Jesus, followed by a lifestyle of obedience (cf. Rev. 12:17; Luke 6:46).

Mature Christianity consists of

1. a person to welcome (a personal relationship with Christ)
2. truths about that person to believe (doctrinal truths of the NT)
3. a life to live like that person (daily Christlikeness)

All three are required for a mature, healthy, growing faith.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:13**

**<sup>13</sup>And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."**

**14:13 "Blessed"** This is the second of seven blessings found in the book of the Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

■ **"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord"** This refers to the martyrs (as did the 144,000), but the exact time of this death is uncertain. Some commentators relate it to John's day and some relate it to the end-time. Though the time element is uncertain, it is important to know that the death of God's saints is precious in His sight (cf. Ps. 116:15).

Although this group is made up of Christian martyrs, it is best to interpret this as "witnesses" in a more general sense of believers. Not all believers were killed in the first century, not all will be killed in the

tribulation of the end-time, but all believers must remain faithful to Christ. This metaphor is inclusive, not exclusive.

▣ **"for their deeds follow with them"** It is a paradox of Christianity that as believers we are gifted by the Spirit at salvation for effective ministry to and for the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7,11). God calls, equips, and produces eternal fruit through imperfect believers. It is His gift, His Spirit that empowers, but saints receive a reward for their faithfulness, availability, and perseverance (see Special Topic at Rev. 2:10). Believers are not saved by works (self-effort), but they are saved unto good works (cf. Eph. 2:8-9,10). God's will for every believer is Christlike service (cf. Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 1:4)!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:14-16**

**<sup>14</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. <sup>15</sup>And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." <sup>16</sup>Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.**

**14:14-16** There are two different harvests (cf. IV Ezra 13:10-11) described in Rev. 14:14-16 and 17-19. The first is a grain harvest and the second a grape harvest. If this distinction can be maintained (in Joel 3:13 the two crops are viewed as one judgment), the first refers to the harvest of the righteous (cf. Matt. 9:37-38; 13:30,38; Mark 4:26-29; Luke 10:2; John 4:35-38), while the second grape harvest mentioned in Isa. 63:2-6; Jer. 51:33; Lam. 1:15; Joel 3:13 and Rev. 19:15 refers to the wicked.

**14:14 "a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head"** The same identity problems in chapters 6 and 10 apply to these verses. Is this a description of the divine Messiah (cf. Dan. 7:13) or just another angel serving on His behalf? I think it is another powerful angel, because

1. this is in a series of angels (cf. Rev. 14:15,17,18)
2. Matt. 13:39, 41-42, 49-50 says that angels will gather and separate people at the end-time (some for blessing and some for judgment)
3. an angel commands him (cf. Rev. 14:15)

**14:15** This is an allusion to Joel 3:13.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 14:17-20**

**<sup>17</sup>And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. <sup>18</sup>Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." <sup>19</sup>So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. <sup>20</sup>And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.**

**14:17 "another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven"** This refers to the spiritual tabernacle in heaven (cf. Heb. 8:2; 9:11,23-24).

**14:18 "who has power over fire"** Angels have power over the wind (cf. Rev. 7:1), over fire (cf. Rev. 14:18), and over the water (cf. Rev. 16:5). This reflects rabbinical Judaism's concept of angelic involvement in the natural world. Although the NT does not emphasize this, that does not mean that it is

inaccurate (cf. Heb. 1:7,14).

**14:20 "outside the city"** Some see this as an allusion to Christ being crucified outside the city (cf. Heb. 13:12). Others see it as simply an allusion to OT purification laws where the unclean were taken outside the camp (cf. Lev. 8:17; 9:11). However, it may refer to the end-time gathering of the enemies of God around the city of Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 2:2,6; Dan. 11:45; Joel 3:12-14; Zech. 14:1-4; and the intertestamental apocalyptic book of I Enoch 53:1). Here again, the problem of what is literal and what is figurative becomes a major interpretive issue!

▣ **"the blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles"** This will be the result of a huge battle which is described in later chapters, or simply a metaphor coming from the color of grape juice. The real question is whether it is literal or symbolic. Does this describe a battle in time/space or a symbolic cosmic battle of good and evil? The genre leans toward the latter, but Jesus' words of Matthew 24: Mark 13 and Luke 21 lean toward the former.

The exact distance is uncertain. Some say (1) 165 miles; (2) 184 miles; or (3) 200 miles. The exact words are 6,600 furlongs. This is an unusual symbolic number. Some say that it refers to the distance from Dan to Beersheba, which means judgment symbolically covering the entire Holy Land.

The "wine press" is an OT metaphor for judgment (cf. Isa. 63:3; Lam. 1:15). This is probably because of the similarity between red grape juice and blood. It is also mentioned in Rev. 19:15.

▣ **"the wrath of God"** See full note at Rev. 7:14.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the relationship between the 144,000 found in chapters 7 and 14?
2. To what does Mt. Zion refer?
3. Are the qualifications found in Rev. 14:4 a description of a select celibate group or the whole people of God?
4. What is the significance of Rev. 14:6 and 7?
5. Who or what is Babylon?
6. Is hell eternal?
7. Who is the person sitting on the cloud in Rev. 14:14-16 and why?

# REVELATION 15-16

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Angels with the Last Plagues	Prelude to the Bowl Judgments	The Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God	The Angels with the Last Plagues	The Hymn of Moses and the Lamb
15:1	15:1-16:1	15:1	15:1	15:1-4
15:2-4		15:2-4	15:2-4	The Seven Bowls of Plagues
15:5-8		15:5-16:1	15:5-8	15:5-8
The Bowls of God's Wrath			The Bowls of God's Anger	
16:1	First Bowl: Malignant Sores		16:1	16:1
16:2	16:2	16:2	16:2	16:2
	Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood			
16:3	16:3	16:3	16:3	16:3
	Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood			
16:4-7	16:4-7	16:4-7	16:4-7	16:4-7
	Fourth Bowl: Men are Scorched			
16:8-9	16:8-9	16:8-9	16:8-9	16:8-9
	Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain			
16:10-11	16:10-11	16:10-11	16:10-11	16:10-11
	Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dries Up			
16:12-16	16:12-16	16:12-16	16:12-14	16:12-16
	Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken		16:15	
			16:16	
16:17-21	16:17-21	16:17-21	16:17-21	16:17-21

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of

the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 15:1-16:21

- A. The seven bowls which are introduced in Rev. 15 and described in Rev. 16 are the third in a set of three cycles of divine plagues sent for the purpose of redemption (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11). Each cycle gets progressively more severe: 1/4, 1/3, and total destruction (the judgment and isolation of evil). This is possibly based on "the cursing and blessing" section of Deuteronomy 27-28.
- B. There is a literary relationship between these cycles. The seventh seal is the seven trumpets. The first four trumpets are also directly parallel to the first four bowls.
- C. The seventh bowl is the fall of Babylon, which is a symbol of fallen human society organized and functioning apart from God. In John's day it was Rome. In Daniel 2 each successive world empire becomes more and more anti-God until the last world-wide, anti-God empire in which the Messiah is born which is Rome (see Introduction to Daniel 8, [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org)).
- D. Chapters 15 and 16 draw their imagery from the Exodus experience of Israel (as did Rev. 12-14). This end-time deliverance from evil is seen as the ultimate Exodus (i.e., deliverance).
- E. The beasts and the whore of Babylon (rebellious human society) are defeated at Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16), while Satan is defeated along with Gog and Magog (rebellious humans) at the very end (cf. Rev. 20:7-10). The Second Coming of Christ in Rev. 19 is an extension and fulfillment of the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl judgments. This is God's answer to the martyrs' question of Rev. 6:9-11.
- F. The difficulties in interpreting these end-time battles are:
  1. The type of literature in which they are expressed, apocalyptic/prophetic.
  2. They are dealt with in successive stages, cycles, or dramatic acts.
  3. There is fluidity between the groups and symbols.
  4. There is difficulty separating first century fulfillment from end-time fulfillment.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 15:1-3a

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which* are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. <sup>2</sup>And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. <sup>3</sup>And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,



**15:1 "in heaven"** This is the third in a series of signs John saw in heaven. See Special Topic at Rev. 12:1.

▣ **"great and marvelous"** This phrase occurs only here and points toward the OT allusion in Rev. 15:3, which may come from one of several places (i.e., Deut. 32:3-4; Ps. 111:2; 139:14; or Hos. 14:9).

Verses 3-4 make up one long composite OT allusion from several possible places.

▣ **"the wrath of God"** See full note at Rev. 7:14.

▣ **"is finished"** This is an aorist passive indicative of *te/eō* to finish or fulfill. The bowls are a complete and final judgment on incalcitrant unbelief! There is no more hope of repentance and faith, only judgment and isolation!

It is theologically possible that the sequence of the seals, trumpets, and bowls was a way of showing God's hope of human repentance, but in the end, His total judgment, removal, and isolation of evil is justified! Hell is the only option left.

**15:2 "I saw something like a sea of glass"** This is first mentioned in Rev. 4:6. Because of its use in Rev. 21:1, it seems to be a metaphor for God's holiness, which kept sinful mankind from approaching Him (i.e., possibly a metaphor for the waters of heaven). One day this barrier will be removed. The OT allusion is to either Exod. 24:10 or Ezek. 1:22; 10:1. See full note at Rev. 4:6.

▣ **"mixed with fire"** This is a new element not found in Rev. 4:6. There have been numerous theories.

1. it is the reflected setting sun on human history
2. it represents fire which stands for God's judgment
3. it is the blood of the martyrs

4. it is connected to the victory at the Red Sea and the Song of Moses since the OT background of chapters 15 and 16 is the plagues of the Exodus (cf. Exod. 7-12; 15)

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"those who had been victorious"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"those who have the victory"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"those who had conquered"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"those who had won the victory"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"those who had fought against"</b>

At first this seems to refer to the martyrs, but Rev. 12:11 shows that it must apply to those who have experienced natural deaths but who have not worshiped the beast (cf. Rev. 20:4).

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"over the beast, over his image and over his mark"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"the beast and its image and the number of its name"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"over the beast and its image and over the ones whose name is represented by a number"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"the beast and man, and against his statue and the number which is his name"</b>

The beast is first mentioned in Rev. 11:7. From chapter 13 it is obvious that there are two wild beasts; one is the incarnation of Satan (i.e., a parody of Christ) and the other is his false prophet (i.e., a parody of the Spirit). From Rev. 13:18 we know that his number is 666, which is not so much a number of a person as it is of the fallenness and inadequacy of human society (i.e., government) apart from God.

▣ **"standing on the sea of glass"** Some translations have "on" (NASB, NKJV), and some have "beside" (NRSV) or "by" (TEV, NJB). The Greek preposition's basic meaning is "upon." This metaphor speaks of those overcomers being close to God. The "sea" in Revelation stands for a separation between a holy God and sinful creation. This sea is completely removed in Rev. 21:1 when full fellowship is restored (i.e., the fellowship of the Garden of Eden is restored).

For interpretive options on the meaning of "the sea of glass" see note at Rev. 4:6.

- **"holding harps of God"** Angels are described as having harps in Rev. 5:8 and 14:2. In this context it refers to believers who are synonymous with the 144,000 of chapter 14. As the angels worshiped with music before the God in heaven, now too, the victorious believers!

**15:3 "And they sang the song of Moses. . .and the song of the Lamb"** This shows the unity of the old covenant and the new covenant in this song of redemption. The song of Moses is an allusion to Exod. 15:1-19, where Moses thanks God for the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. However, it is possible that John had Deuteronomy 32 in mind because the first phrase may be an allusion to Deut. 32:3-4. The song of the Lamb has previously been noted in Rev. 5:9 and 14:3. Notice that it is a song of corporate, not individual, salvation (cf. Gen. 3:15).

- **"the bond-servant of God"** This is an honorific title for OT characters like Moses, Joshua, and David. It may be the origin of Paul's "servant of Christ."

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 15:3b-4**

**3b"Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, For Your righteous acts have been revealed."**

- **"Great and marvelous are Your works"** This is a composite allusion to Ps. 40:5; 92:5; 111:2; 139:14 and Hos 14:9.

- **"O Lord God, the Almighty"** This is an allusion to the three most used OT titles for God (cf. Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 16:7).

1. "Lord" refers to YHWH, the Savior, Redeemer, Covenant God.
2. "God" refers to *Elohim*, the Creator, Provider and Sustainer of all life on earth.
3. The "Almighty" refers to *El Shaddai*, the Patriarchal name for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Exod. 6:3).

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 1:8.

- **"Righteous and true are Your ways"** In the midst of the suffering of the saints, this emphasis is tremendously important (cf. 16:7). This may be an allusion to Hosea 14:9.

**NASB, NRSV,**

**TEV, NJB      "Thou King of the Nations"**

**NKJV          "O King of the saints"**

There are three different translations of this verse available in modern English.

1. "King of the ages" (ASV, NIV, REB) which is found in the ancient Greek MSS P<sup>47</sup>,  $\kappa^*$ ,<sup>2</sup>, and C (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17; I Enoch 9:4)
2. "King of the nations" (NRSV, TEV, NJB) which is found in MSS  $\kappa^a$ , A, P, and most minuscules (cf. Rev. 15:4; Jer. 10:7)
3. "King of the saints" (NKJV) MSS 296, 2049 (Metzter, *Textual Commentary*, p. 753) which comes from a misunderstanding of a late Latin text

Option #2 is probably the original. UBS<sup>4</sup> gives it a "B" rating (almost certain).

**15:4 "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name"** This is the transcendent Holy One of creation (cf. Rev. 14:7; Jer. 10:7-10). Yet He offers salvation to any and all who will fear Him and glorify His name.

■ **"For all the nations will come and worship before You"** In OT prophecy all the nations will one day flow into Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 22:27; 66:4; 86:9; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:19-24; 27:13; 56:7; 66:19-24; Mal. 1:11). John is using OT prophecy and imagery to describe a universal salvation. Jerusalem of the OT has become the heavenly Jerusalem of believing Jews and Gentiles. This book does not focus on Jews versus Gentiles as the OT did, but on believers versus unbelievers (compare Isa. 45:23 with Phil. 2:9-11). See Crucial Introduction at the beginning of the commentary.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 15:5-8**

**<sup>5</sup>After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, <sup>6</sup>and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. <sup>7</sup>Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. <sup>8</sup> And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.**

**15:5 "the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened"** In Rev. 4:1 a door in heaven was opened for John; in Rev. 11:19 the Ark of the Covenant appeared in the temple for believers to see. Now the entire heavenly tabernacle appears (cf. Exod. 25:9,40; 38:21; Num. 10:11; 17:7; Acts 7:44). This OT allusion is developed in Heb. 8:5 and 9:23. This literary unit uses the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings Period as an OT backdrop. This symbolizes the second and ultimate exodus from bondage (bondage to sin).

**15:6 "clothed in linen, clean and bright"** These seven angelic beings come from the very innermost part of heaven's temple, which shows their authority because they come from the very presence of God. In rabbinical Judaism there are seven powerful angels surrounding the throne of God, called "the angels of the presence."

Their dress is described as (1) "linen" (*linon* or *linoun* [P<sup>47</sup>]) which was worn by priests in Exod. 28:4 (UBS<sup>4</sup>, "B" rating) or (2) the ASV translates this as "precious stone" (*lithon*) which follows the Greek uncial manuscripts A and C, and may be an allusion to Ezek. 28:13 as an angelic clothing of the Garden of Eden.

If the two basic presuppositions of textual criticism (see Appendix): (1) the most difficult reading is probably original and (2) the reading that best explains the variants is probably original, then "stone" is the probable choice.

■ **"and girded around their chests with golden sashes"** This is very similar to the angel found in Dan. 10:5 or to Christ Himself in Rev. 1:18. These are obviously very powerful angels representing God or Christ.

**15:7 "seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God"** These shallow golden bowls are mentioned in Rev. 5:8, where they contain the prayers of the saints. There is a connection throughout Revelation to the prayers of His persecuted children and the wrath of God on unbelievers (see note at Rev. 7:14).

■ **"who lives forever and ever"** This is an oath based on the root meaning of the term YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:14). YHWH is the only living One; all else derives life from Him. See Special Topic: Names For Deity at Rev. 1:8.

For "forever and ever" see Special Topics at Rev. 1:6.

**15:8 "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God"** This was a common OT description of the presence of God (cf. Exod. 19:18; 40:34; 1 Kgs. 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 5:13-14; Isa. 6:4). This is an allusion to the *Shekinah* cloud of glory which represented God's presence to Israel during the

Exodus. But because of the contextual connection with the bowls, it may refer to the abundance of incense representing the prayers of God's children for justice.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (DOXA)**

■ **"no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished"** This possibly means that there was no stopping God's wrath once it had begun. This wrath is difficult to correlate theologically with 16:9 and 11, which implies that redemption is still the goal, even in the bowls it is still the hope and intent that fallen mankind, made in God's image, will repent and return to Him!

### **REVELATION 16**

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:1**

**<sup>1</sup>Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."**

**16:1 "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels"** Revelation 15:8 shows that this must be the voice of God Himself. This last group of angels had ultimate authority to destroy God's earth. In the OT the death angel and the angel of destruction are God's servants, not Satan's.

■ **"Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God"** This is an OT symbol for the judgment of God on unbelieving nations (cf. Ps. 79:6; Jer 10:25; Ezek. 22:31; Zeph. 3:8). This term is used often in this context for God's wrath on unbelievers (see note at Rev. 7:14, cf. Rev. 16:1,2,3,4,8,10,12,17) because of

1. their blasphemy (cf. Rev. 16:9)
2. their persecution of believers (cf. Rev. 16:6)
3. their stubborn refusal to repent (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9-12)

For "wrath of God" see full note at Rev. 7:14.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:2**

**<sup>2</sup>So the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.**

**16:2** This first bowl is very much like one of the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 9:10-11). Some see this as related to Deut. 28:35, which is in the cursing and blessing section of Moses' covenant renewal. It is to be noted that, like the Egyptian plagues, these plagues affected unbelievers.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:3**

**<sup>3</sup>The second *angel* poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like *that* of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.**

**16:3-4** The second and third bowls parallel the second and third trumpets (cf. Rev. 8:8-11) and also reflect the Exodus plagues of Exod. 7:17-21; Ps. 78:44.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:4-7**

**<sup>4</sup>Then the third *angel* poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. <sup>5</sup>And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; <sup>6</sup> or they poured out the blood**

**of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." <sup>7</sup>And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."**

**16:5 "the angel of the waters"** This may reflect the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic terminology of I Enoch 66:2. In Revelation there has been an angel in charge of the wind (cf. 7:1) and an angel in charge of fire (cf. 14:8), so it is not unusual to see an angel in charge of the water. Again, angelic mediation and activity are common in intertestamental apocalyptic literature. We must interpret Revelation in light of its own genre, its own day, and not our modern western theological systems of eschatology.

▣ **"Righteous are You"** This is an allusion to Moses' song in Deut. 32 (especially Rev. 16:5) or possibly Ps. 119:137.

▣ **"who are and who were"** Notice that there is no future element as in Rev. 1:4,8; 4:8, because there is no future time (cf. Rev. 11:17). This is the end! This is purposeful; note the threefold designation of Rev. 1:4. Time is no more! The end (i.e., *Parousia*) is revealed several times in Revelation, not just Rev. 19. Each of the seals, trumpets, and bowls ends with the Second Coming and culmination of history. This is why I think the recapitulation theory for the interpretation of Revelation is best!

**16:6 "saints"** See Special Topic at Rev. 5:8.

▣ **"prophets"** For OT Prophecy see Special Topic at Rev. 10:7. See Special Topic below.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY**

**16:7 "And I heard the altar saying"** The horns of the altar had already spoken in Rev. 9:13. This seems to refer to (1) souls that are under the altar (cf. Rev. 6:9; 14:18) or (2) the prayers of God's children (cf. Rev. 8:3-5). It may also be simply a personification for graphic emphasis.

▣ **"Lord God, the Almighty"** See note of Rev. 15:3b and the Special Topic at Rev. 1:8.

▣ **"true and righteous are Your judgments"** This may be an allusion to Ps. 19:9; 119:137. This is a helpful reminder in the midst of such terrible persecution toward Christians (cf. Rev. 15:4 and 19:2). God will set all things straight one day!

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup>The fourth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. <sup>9</sup>Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.**

**16:8** This fourth bowl is similar to the sixth seal of Rev. 6:12 and very similar to the fourth trumpet of Rev. 8:12.

▣ **"it was given to it to scorch men with fire"** The sun is personified as it is in Ps. 19:1-6. God controls the heavenly bodies (cf. Gen. 1:14-19). They are not gods. They do function as messengers (natural revelation) and signs for the seasons (for worship).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRE**

**16:9 "they did not repent so as to give Him glory"** The purpose of God's wrath is redemptive in the seals and trumpets (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11), even though stubborn, rebellious mankind refuses to repent. In the bowls the hope of repentance has passed; only judgment remains!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup>Then the fifth *angel* poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, <sup>11</sup>and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.**

**16:10 "the fifth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast"** The throne of Satan was given to the beast in Rev. 11:7. His power is described in Rev. 13:2ff. This seems to refer to the capital city of his end-time, one world government.

■ **"his kingdom"** Satan mimics God. As God has a kingdom, so Satan has a kingdom. Throughout these remaining chapters the ministry of God in Christ is parodied by the evil trinity. Satan's kingdom, through the beast, is international (cf. Rev. 13:14-17).

■ **"became darkened"** This is another allusion to the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 10:21-23). God controls the light (cf. Rev. 8:12; 9:2; Gen. 1:5,14-18).

**16:11 "they blasphemed the God of heaven"** These unbelievers recognized the source and reason for their pain, but would not repent and turn to Christ! The plagues on Egypt were sent to expose the false gods of Egypt and cause the Egyptians to trust the God of Israel. The "curses" of Deuteronomy 27-28 were sent to restore unbelieving Jews to faith and obedience. Judgment has a redemptive goal (except for the last one)!

The title "the God of heaven" was used earlier in Rev. 11:13 and reflects a Babylonian and Persian title for Deity used often by Daniel (cf. Dan. 2:18, see my commentary on Daniel at [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org)).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:12-16**

**<sup>12</sup>The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. <sup>13</sup>And I saw *coming out* of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; <sup>14</sup>for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. <sup>15</sup>("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.") <sup>16</sup>And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.**

**16:12 "the sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates"** This river was mentioned in Rev. 9:13-19 when the demonic army crossed its borders to torture mankind. The headwaters of the Euphrates were the northern boundary of the Promised Land and the outer limits of the Roman Empire. The possible historic basis for this metaphorical demonic army was the Parthian calvary. These fierce anti-Roman invaders were a terror to the Roman legions.

■ **"its water was dried up"** Quite often in the OT the drying up of the water was seen as an act of God as seen in

1. the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 14:21)
2. the Jordan River (Jos. 3:17)
3. several allusions in prophetic literature (cf. Isa. 11:15-16; 44:27; Jer. 51:36; Zech. 10:11)

This physical act symbolizes that God is allowing the end-time conflict to culminate. It is theologically parallel to 2 Thess. 2:6-7, "what/who restrains."

■ **"that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east"** There has been much discussion as to how "the kings of the east" in Rev. 16:12 are related to "the kings of the whole world" in Rev. 16:14:

1. they are the same
2. they are antagonists (Nero Redivivus myth and the Parthian army)
3. the kings of the east refer to the army of God

If so, it is an allusion to God's calling His people from Babylon (cf. Isa. 41:2,25; 45:1-3; 46:11). It is possible from the context that the kings of the east are God's tools to attack the armies of the beast (i.e., a historical allusion to Parthians attacking Rome). However, Rev. 16:14 and chapters 19 and 20 imply that there is only one human army and it is united against God (cf. Psalm 2; Jer. 25:15-26).

**16:13 "the dragon, the beast, the false prophet"** This is the first time that the second beast (cf. Rev. 13:11) is called "the false prophet," but from now on he will be referred to by this name every time (cf. Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 21:10).

These three refer to a Satanic trinity which will be defeated in two stages: the two beasts in the valley of Megiddo (cf. Rev. 16:12-16) and Satan at the end of Christ's earthly reign (cf. Rev. 20:7-10).

■ **"three unclean spirits like frogs"** The term "unclean" is used in the NT gospels to refer to demons. Why they are characterized as frogs has been greatly disputed:

1. this is another reference to the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 8:6)
2. in Zoroastrianism frogs are the symbol of ultimate evil
3. they refer to unclean animals (cf. Lev. 11:10,31)

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE DEMONIC (UNCLEAN SPIRITS)**

**16:14 "they are spirits of demons, performing signs"** It is very interesting to note that these signs and wonders will lead all unbelievers astray, but not even the least of the children of God (cf. Rev. 13:13; Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; 2 Thess. 2:9-11). This last literary unit (the bowls) is a comparison between what will happen to the children of God and what will happen to the inhabitants of the earth. Christ speaks words of truth, righteousness, and mercy to bring peace to the earth, but the demonic frog spirits speak lies and gathers the nations for war.

■ **"which go out to the kings of the whole world"** This may be an allusion to Ps. 2:2, which forms the imagery of these last chapters of Revelation.

■ **"gather them together for the war of the great day of God"** The description of an end-time battle appears in Rev. 6:2-8; 11:7-10; 12:17; 16:14; 17:14; 19:19 and 20:8. It is possible these all represent one battle from different perspectives (i.e., parallelism).

**16:15** This parenthetical phrase contains the words of Christ which are interjected to encourage and warn the people of God. This is the third of the seven blessings to believers (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

■ **"I am coming like a thief"** These words of Jesus (cf. Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40) were used earlier in Rev. 3:3 and alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:2 and 2 Pet. 3:10. It seems to refer to the any-moment, sudden coming of Christ in judgment at the *Parousia* (Second Coming).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE SECOND COMING**

■ **"Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes"** This is the third of seven blessings given to faithful believers (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). This almost seems to be a summary of the eschatological warning found in Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:37. This verse must be out of place if the theory of a secret rapture of the Church before this time of persecution is affirmed. To whom, then, is Jesus speaking? See Matt. 24:37-42 online at [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org).



■ **"so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame"** This may be an allusion to Rev. 3:18. In the OT nakedness was a symbol of judgment (cf. Ezek. 23:29; Hos. 2:3; Amos 2:16; Mic. 1:8). However, it refers not to the loss of salvation, but to Christians who will be ashamed of their activities and lack of lifestyle faith at Jesus' Second Coming. Jesus' coming as the Judge and Conqueror, which is exactly how the Jews expected the Messiah to return, is described in Rev. 19:11-16.

**16:16 "and they gathered them together"** This is repeated in Rev. 20:8.

**NASB** "in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon"  
**NKJV, NJB** "in Hebrew, Armageddon"  
**NRSV** "in Hebrew is called Harmagedon"  
**TEV** "in Hebrew is Armageddon"

This word is spelled differently in several Greek manuscripts. There have been several theories to describe this name (which appears nowhere else in Hebrew or Greek literature).

1. it refers to "the mountain of Megiddo," a northern city in the tribal allocation of Manasseh, built on a hill
2. it refers to "the city of Megiddo," but the problem is that this is not the exact spelling of that city
3. it is a translation of a phrase "the mount of assembly" found in Isa. 14:13, which refers to the ultimate mountain of Deity which Satan attacks
4. it refers to the whole Promised Land (cf. "the mountains of Israel" mentioned in Ezek. 38:8,20,21; 39:2,4,17)
5. it refers to "the fruitful mountain" which would symbolize Jerusalem, the end-time site of many of these final battles between good and evil (cf. the prophecy of Joel)
6. the root meaning of "megiddo" might be "to cut or to attack," making this a reference to "the destroying mountain" of Jer. 51:25, a symbol of Rome's destruction.

John has chosen a city that was well known and has slightly changed its spelling (see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 755). This is similar to his inaccurate listing of the twelve tribes in Rev. 7:5-8 in order to show their symbolic nature. This symbolic interpretation is further seen in the use of the phrase "in Hebrew," which indicates symbolism, as in Rev. 9:11. It is true that the Valley of Jezreel or the Plain of Esdraelon was the site of many OT battles (cf. Jdgs. 5:19-21; 2 Kgs. 9:27; 23:29-30; 2 Chr. 35:22; Zech. 12:11). This northern invasion route of Mesopotamian powers had become a cultural symbol of evil (cf. Isa. 14:31; Jer. 1:13-14; 4:6; 10:22; 46:20-24; 47:2-7; 50:3,9,41; 51:48; Ezek. 38:6,15; 39:2).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 16:17-21**

**<sup>17</sup>Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." <sup>18</sup>And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. <sup>19</sup>The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. <sup>20</sup>And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. <sup>21</sup>And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.**

**16:17 "Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air"** This could be a reference to Satan's kingdom as found in Eph. 2:2. The air above the earth was considered the realm of evil by the first century world. The battle with evil is finished (cf. Rev. 16:17c-21).

**16:18** This imagery is used several times in Revelation (cf. Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).



**16:19 "The great city"** Some see this as a reference to Jerusalem because of Rev. 11:8. However, I think even Rev. 11:8 is a symbol of Rome (cf. Rev. 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10,18-19,21). Rome is described as the great whore of Babylon (cf. Rev. 14:8) which was the ancient seat of godless society. In John's day Rome was that center of the emperor cult that persecuted the Church. In the period of the end-time Antichrist it may be another world city. John continues to describe the destruction of the seat of fallen human, anti-God government in Rev. 17-18.

▣ **"was split into three parts"** This possibly is an allusion to the vision of Ezekiel 5, which describes utter defeat.

▣ **"the cities of the nations fell"** This shows the ineffective alliance of fallen human governments against our God and His Christ (cf. Psalm 2). See note at Rev. 10:11.

▣ **"Babylon the great was remembered before God"** The phrase "then God remembered" is often a symbol of God's judgment (cf. Rev. 18:5; 19:15). This particular cup of judgment was discussed earlier in Rev. 14:10.

▣ **"the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath"** Drunkenness was an OT metaphor for God's judgment (cf. Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Isa. 51:17,22; Jer. 25:15-16, 27-28; see Special Topic at Rev. 14:10).

"Wrath" is the term *orgē*. See full note at Rev. 7:14.

**16:20 "every island fled away"** This is similar to the sixth seal (cf. Rev. 6:14).

▣ **"the mountains were not found"** These were OT symbolic phrases for cataclysmic end-time events (cf. Ps. 97:5; Mic. 1:4; Nah. 1:5).

**16:21 "huge hailstones"** Hailstones have always been the sign of God's judgment (cf. Jos. 10:11; Isa. 28:2). This is another possible allusion to the Egyptian plagues (cf. Exod. 9:23-24). In Ezek. 38:22 hail is used on the end-time enemies of God. The weight of the hailstones has varied.

▣ **"about one hundred pounds each"** This is literally "a talent weight." The weight of "talents" in the Ancient Near East has varied from 45 to 138 pounds. Their exact weight is unknown, but these are obviously exaggerated weights to show the damage and death they will cause.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What does the "sea of glass" symbolize?
2. Why does God show John a vision of the heavenly tabernacle?
3. List the similarities between the seals, trumpets, the bowls, and the plagues of Egypt.
4. How are the kings of the east in Rev. 6:12 related to the kings of the whole earth in Rev. 6:14?
5. What or where is Armageddon? (Rev. 16:16)
6. To what does the "great city" refer? (Rev. 6:19)

# REVELATION 17-18

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Great Harlot and the Beast	The Scarlet Woman and Scarlet Beast	The Fall of Babylon	The Famous Prostitute	The Great Prostitute
17:1-6a	17:1-6	17:1-6a	17:1-2	17:1-7
	The Meaning of The Woman and the Beast		17:3-6a	
17:6b-14		17:6b-8	17:6b-8	
	17:7-18			The Symbolism of the Beast and the Prostitute
				17:8
		17:9-14	17:9-11	17:9-11
			17:12-14	17:12-14
17:15-18		17:15-18	17:15-17	17:15-18
			17:18	
The Fall of Babylon	The Fall of Babylon the Great	Dirge Over the Fallen City	The Fall of Babylon	An Angel Announces the Fall of Babylon
18:1-3	18:1-8	18:1-3	18:1-3	18:1-3
				The People of God Summoned to Flee
18:4-8	The World Mourns Babylon's Fall	18:4-8	18:4-8	18:4-8
18:9-10	18:9-20	18:9-10	18:9-10	18:9-13
18:11-20		18:11-20	18:11-17a	
				18:14
				18:15-17a
			18:17b-19	18:17b-20
	Finality of Babylon's Fall		18:20	
18:21-19:4	18:21-24	18:21-24	18:21-23	18:21-24
			18:24-19:4	

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of

the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 17:1-18:24

- A. These two chapters describe in detail the destruction of Babylon whose fall was mentioned earlier in Rev. 14:8 and 16:19, as well as 18:2,21. Each of these occurs in a separate literary unit (12-14), (15-16), and (17-19). This could be another example of parallelism or recapitulation.
- B. The Old Testament background of these two chapters is found in the funeral dirges written to applaud the fall of ancient godless cities:
1. Babylon (cf. Isa. 13,14,21 and Jer. 50-51)
  2. Tyre (cf. Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 26-28)
  3. Nineveh (cf. Nahum)
  4. wicked Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 1:1-26; Ezek. 16:51-52)
- C. This concept of a fallen world system that is antagonistic to God is presented in Psalm 2, Daniel 2; 7; 9:24-27; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; and 1 John 2:15-20.
- D. Revelation uses OT funeral dirges to describe the fall of Rome, the anti-God world empire of John's day. However, this same independent, arrogant, materialistic, anti-God world system is present in every age (cf. 1 John 2:18). It will also ultimately manifest itself as an end-time ruler and world empire (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2). The details that will help John's last generation readers identify the end-time Antichrist may reappear in the last days. The problem has been that every generation of believers has tried to force Revelation into its day!
- This book has first-century relevance, every-century relevance, and last-century relevance. It is best not to push the details. They had meaning (first hearers); they will have meaning again (the last generation). But for the great majority of the generations of believers, they are mysteries. It is much better to assert the central truths of the seven literary units. These are eternally relevant! If the details become strictly literal for the last generations of persecuted believers they will not need a commentator to tell them!
- E. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, asserts the parallelism of all seven sections of Revelation (see note C. p. 10). In so doing he asserts the parallel of the fall of believers' enemies (Satan; two beasts; and Babylon, anti-God, anti-Christ world system). Although their destruction is dealt with separately (Satan, Rev. 20:7-10; the two beasts, Rev. 19:17-21; and Babylon, Rev. 18:1-19:4), they are really simultaneous, just like the seals, trumpets, and bowls.
- In many ways this is an attractive interpretive structure that extends the obvious parallelism of the seals (Rev. 4-7), trumpets (Rev. 8-11), and bowls (Rev. 15-16) to Rev. 17-19 and Rev. 20-22.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 17:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, <sup>2</sup>with

whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of immorality*, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." <sup>3</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup>The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, <sup>5</sup>and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." <sup>6</sup>And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. <sup>7</sup>And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

**17:1 "one of the seven angels"** Another angel is described in the same way in Rev. 21:9. The chronological relationship between Rev. 17 and 18 and the pouring out of the bowls in Rev. 16

1. may predate the pouring out of the bowls
2. it may be a further description of the result of the bowls

■ **"will show you the judgment of the great harlot"** This spiritual seductress is described in Rev. 17:5 as "mighty Babylon, the mother of harlots," and in Rev. 18:10 as "the great city, Babylon." According to earlier chapters these designations refer to a fallen world system epitomized in:

1. Daniel's Babylon
2. Daniel's interbiblical Antiochus IV
3. John's Roman Emperor claiming deity.

In chapter 17 the seductive power of luxury and greed is matched with the commercial power of chapter 18. In the OT three cities are called whores.

1. Tyre (Phoenicia) in Isa. 23:15-16
2. Nineveh (Assyria) in Nahum 3:4
3. Jerusalem (fruitless Judah) in Isa. 1:21; Ezek. 16:31,35; 23.

■ **"who sits on many waters"** The OT allusion is Jer. 51:11-14, which refers to the ancient city of Babylon, which was located on the Euphrates (as Nineveh was located on the Tigris River) and had an extensive system of manmade irrigation and transportation canals. However, in light of Rev. 17:15, this phrase is interpreted as an international kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:2,3).

## 17:2

**NASB** "with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of immorality*"  
**NKJV, NRSV** "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication"  
**TEV** "the kings of the earth practiced sexual immorality"  
**NJB** "with whom all the kings of the earth have prostituted themselves"

This prostitution has two primary aspects:

1. commercial alliances (cf. Tyre, Isa. 23:13-18; and Nineveh, Nahum 3:4)
2. political alliances which involved the contractual worship of the gods of the nations in the ratification ceremonies (cf. Jerusalem also called a harlot in Isa. 1:21 and Jeremiah 3)
3. the worship of the Roman Emperor as divine

■ **"those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality"** This is an allusion to Jer. 51:7. It is also introduced in Rev. 14:8. The phrase "those who dwell on the earth" is a recurrent theme in Revelation denoting unregenerate, fallen mankind apart from God (cf. Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,14; 17:8).

"Drink" is an OT metaphor for judgment (cf. Ps. 75:6-8).

**17:3 "And he carried me away in the Spirit"** This phrase is used to introduce John's visions (cf. Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Many commentators base their understanding of the structure of Revelation on these visions. Remember, apocalyptic literature is a highly structured genre. The structure becomes a key in interpretation.

■ **"into a wilderness"** This may be

1. a metaphor of a place of safety (cf. Rev. 12:6,14, where it is an allusion to the wilderness wandering period of Israel)
2. a place where evil and the demonic live (i.e., Lev. 16:8; 17:7)
3. an allusion to the ancient city of Babylon found in Isa. 21:1-10, where it is a metaphor of judgment

John's imagery is very fluid. In Rev. 17:1 the woman sits on many waters (the Euphrates River) and in Rev. 17:3 she sits on a scarlet beast in the wilderness.

■ **"and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast"** The term "scarlet" could refer to

1. murder, cf. Rev. 17:6-7
2. luxury, cf. Rev. 18:12-16
3. Satan as a red dragon, cf. Rev. 12:3

The beast is described in detail in Rev. 13:1-10. It refers to the end-time Antichrist (cf. Daniel 7:9-14; 9:24-27; 11:36-45; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 John 2:18).

■ **"full of blasphemous names"** This is similar to Rev. 13:1,5-6. These titles are related historically to the Roman Emperor's self-deification. They claimed titles for themselves such as "divine," "savior," "lord." The beast's ultimate goal is not world political power, but religious worship (cf. Dan. 7:8,20; 8:11,25; 9:36,37) as a representative or incarnation of Satan (possibly represented in Isa. 14:13-14 and Ezek. 28:16-17).

■ **"having seven heads and ten horns"** This description is similar to that of the red dragon (cf. Rev. 12:3) and the sea beast (cf. Rev. 13:1). The similarity is intended to show the unity of these different anti-God persons.

In numerical symbolism (1) the seven heads relate to "perfect" knowledge or the ultimate end-time world leader, while (2) the ten horns relate to complete power or worldly authority (cf. Rev. 17:7,9,12,16).

**17:4 "The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet"** These colors can refer to royalty (purple) and immorality (scarlet) or simply a metaphor for luxury, wealth, and opulence (cf. Rev. 18:12,16).

■ **"adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls"** This is a symbol of earthly and spiritual power and position (used by Ezekiel as an Edenic metaphor for the pride of the King of Tyre cf. Ezek. 28:13).

■ **"a gold cup"** This is an allusion to the city of Babylon (cf. Jer. 51:7).

**17:5 "on her forehead a name was written"** Seneca's *Controversies* 1:2 and Juvenal's *Satires* 6:122-123, record that Roman whores wore a band with either their own name or the name of their owner on their foreheads. This may be a historical allusion to John's day or in the context of Revelation; it may be a reference to the marking of the forehead of unbelievers (cf. Rev. 13:16-17; 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) which mimics God's sealing of believers (cf. Rev. 7:2; 9:4).

NASB	"a mystery, 'Babylon the Great'"
NKJV	"Mystery, Babylon the Great"
NRSV	"mystery: 'Babylon the great'"
TEV	"a secret meaning: 'Great Babylon'"
NJB	"a name, a cryptic name: 'Babylon the Great'"

There is some disagreement as to whether the term "mystery" should be a part of the title or a way of

referring to the symbolic nature of the title (cf. Rev. 17:7). Babylon has its origin in the first civilization, started by Nimrod (Babel), which rebelled against God and was dispersed in Genesis 11. From this usage and from the fact that Babylon took the people of God (Judah) into exile, it became a synonym for an evil, imperial world power. In John's day, this power was Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13).

**17:6** This verse speaks of the persecution and martyrdom of believers (cf. Rev. 11:7; 13:7; Dan. 7:21).

■ **"I wondered greatly"** The KJV translates this as "with great admiration" but the NKJV has "I marveled with great amazement." John was not admiring her, but he was utterly astonished at her actions. She was allowed to persecute and kill God's people (cf. Rev. 13:5,7,15; 11:7).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 17:8-14**

**8**"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. **9**Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, **10**and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. **11**The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction. **12**The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. **13**These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. **14**These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the called and chosen and faithful.*"

**17:8 "the beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up"** This chronological description has caused great consternation among commentators.

1. Some of them see it in a historical sense which applies particularly to the legend of Nero's return.
2. Others as a progression of world empires relating to Daniel 2, culminating in an anti-God end-time world system.
3. Others see it as related to the end-time activity of the beast described in Rev. 13:3,12,14, which relates to its mimicking or parodying the ministry of Christ.
4. It may relate to 1 John's concept of a spirit of antichrist in every age, which culminates in the Antichrist of the last day (cf. 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

It is also another parody on YHWH's name (cf. Rev. 1:4,8).

■ **"the abyss"** This is the Greek term for "depth" with the alpha privative. It is first mentioned in Rev. 9:1 and 11:7. It is the figurative abode of evil and the demonic. See note at Rev. 9:1.

■ **"the book of life"** See notes at Rev. 5:1 and 13:8.

■ **"from the foundation of the world"** See note at Rev. 3:5 and 13:8.

#### **17:9**

**NASB, NKJV** "Here is the mind which has wisdom"

**NRSV** "This calls for a mind that has wisdom"

**TEV** "This calls for wisdom and understanding"

**NJB** "This calls for shrewdness"

This phrase is similar to 13:18, which deals with the number of the name of the beast. This little Scripture teaser has caused everyone to put forth his/her own theory! However, the very fact that there is such a

multiplicity of interpretations shows that there are not too many wise among us! (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31). To me, it is just another way for John to assert the mysterious, symbolic, cryptic nature of his writing (cf. Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, p. 317).

▣ **"the seven heads of the seven mountains on which the woman sits"** This is an allusion to Rome. Rome, like Jerusalem, was built on seven hills. This phrase appears in many ancient writings to describe the city of Rome. Therefore, it is incumbent on interpreters to at least see this in light of the Roman Empire, although obviously the whole allusion of chapters 17 and 18 is an anti-God world system that will be in place at the end-time and in reality is in place in every age.

**17:10-11** Some commentators see this as a series of Roman Emperors: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero as "the five who have fallen." Vespasian is "the one who is current" and Titus is "the one who will come for a little while" (cf. F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 141). This interpretation is rather arbitrary; the three relatively minor Emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) who vied for the throne in A.D. 68-69 have been omitted. However, even with its problems, this seems to be the focus of Rev. 17:10 and 11, with an emphasis on the myth of Nero's resuscitation and return with the Parthian hordes to attack Rome (this may explain Rev. 17:16, cf. The Sibyllian Oracles, 5:361-368).

Others see this prophecy as being fulfilled in the persecutions of Domitian. There are some major hindrances to this interpretation:

1. it would require Revelation to have been written during the reign of Vespasian, which is at variance with the ancient church tradition that John wrote during the reign of Domitian
2. the symbolic use of numbers throughout the book

Why make this historically literal? Again, this may have been something that John did intentionally to show the symbolic nature of his visions, which were not meant to be totally locked into any historical period.

Another possible interpretation is that this refers to the series of OT empires who were enemies of God's people: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece ("five have fallen"), Rome ("one is"), end-time anti-God empire ("the other has not yet come"). This interpretation fits into the overall pattern of a series of anti-God world empires from Dan. 2:1-8 (cf. George Ladd, *Revelation*, pp. 227-231).

Still another ancient interpretation is the symbolic nature of all of the numbers and details of Revelation, which would simply turn this chapter into another example of the ultimate conflict between God and the evil one (cf. Alan Johnson's *Revelation*, pp. 152-153, 157-161).

This is a good example of my inner conflicts as an interpreter. There are so many different interpretations by godly scholars whom I trust. The first theory is by my favorite writer, F. F. Bruce. The next two are by my favorite commentators on Revelation, George Ladd and Alan Johnson. They all disagree! The crucial issue is whether the text is an allusion to first century Rome (F. F. Bruce), the OT (George Ladd), or apocalyptic imagery (Alan Johnson). At this point in my personal study I think Johnson's view is best.

**17:12 "the ten horns which you saw are ten kings"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:7,23-24. Daniel 7 is a description of the end-time Antichrist. Some see this as being related historically to ten vassal kings of Rome, while others see it as the demonic hordes of Revelation 9. To many, the symbolic nature of the numbers in the book of the Revelation simply makes Rev. 17:12 refer to end-time world leaders, but without a specificity.

Many elaborate, literal interpretations of the book of the Revelation are based on the specific details of Rev. 17:10-12. These prophecies are very specific, which tends to imply a literal fulfillment at the end-time. However, the nature of the literary genre points toward a symbolic interpretation of these numbers and details (at least for those of us who are not the last generation of persecuted believers).

**17:13** This verse shows the unity of evil, while Rev. 17:15-16 shows the disunity of evil. Evil will ultimately be turned against itself as in Rev. 16:12.

**17:14 "these will wage war against the Lamb"** The Lamb is identified with His people (cf. Matt. 25:35-40; Acts 9:4).

- ▣ **"but the Lamb will overcome. . .and those who are with Him"** Notice the close identification between the victory of Christ and the victory of His people.
- ▣ **"He is Lord of lords, and King of kings"** This same title is mentioned in Rev. 19:16 as a characterization of the returning Messiah. Its origins are found in (1) a description of YHWH from Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:2-3 or (2) a Babylonian title used for Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 2:37,47. The number value of this phrase equals 777 in Aramaic, although this is not mentioned in the text.
- ▣ **"the called and chosen and faithful"** Notice the allusion to predestination found in the terms "chosen" and "called," but also notice they are called to perseverance linked to "faithfulness." We are His by call and faith (both initial and continuing). See Special Topic on Perseverance at Rev. 2:2.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 17:15-18**

**<sup>15</sup>And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. <sup>16</sup>And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. <sup>17</sup>For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. <sup>18</sup>The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."**

**17:15** This verse shows the universal reign of the end-time anti-God leader and his empire. See note at Rev. 10:11.

**17:16** This is an allusion to Ezek. 16:39-40; 23:25-27; 28:18. It seems to refer to internal strife among the forces of evil, as in Rev. 16:12. This infighting was a strategy of God (cf. Rev. 17:17).

**17:17 "hearts"** See Special Topic at Rev. 2:23.

**17:18** This great city is mentioned in Rev. 11:8 and 16:19 with allusions either to Jerusalem (dispensationalists) or Rome (preterists). The context of the literary unit suggests an anti-God power structure symbolized as a city. Which city is not the issue; the point is the existence of a governmental system totally apart from God, humans attempting to meet all of their own needs (atheistic humanism).

**REVELATION 18**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 18:1-3**

**<sup>1</sup>After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. <sup>2</sup>And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. <sup>3</sup>For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."**

**18:1 "I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory"** This was a tremendously powerful angel. The term "authority" (*exousia*) is not used for any other angel in the book. In John 5:27, it is used of God's authority given to Jesus. In Rev. 22:16 Jesus says He sent an angel to speak for Him as a representative.



**18:2 "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"** This is one example of the difficulty in interpreting the book of the Revelation. A piece of information is brought in at one point in the vision, partially developed at another point, and fully developed in yet another vision (e.g., cf. Rev. 11:8; 14:8; and 16:19-20 or this may be another example of recapitulation between the seven literary units). This is an allusion to Isa. 21:9 and/or Jer. 51:8.

▣ **"She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird"** This is an allusion to the ruins of ancient cities:

1. Babylon (cf. Isa. 13:21-22; 14:23; Jer. 50:39; 51:37)
2. Edom (cf. Isa. 34:10-15)
3. Nineveh (cf. Zeph. 2:14)

In the OT animals are often said to roam about in ruined cities. This is a symbol of both destruction and the presence of evil spirits (cf. NEB). Many of these birds represented demons.

John's writing is very fluid. This verse describes the city as desolate and indwelt with the demonic, while Rev. 19:3 describes it as burnt and smoldering.

**18:3 "all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality"** This phrase is an allusion to the OT prophecy of the destruction of Babylon (cf. Jer. 51:7). Jeremiah specifically uses drunkenness (i.e., "a golden cup") as a symbol of lust for wealth.

▣ **"passion"** This is literally "anger" (*thumos*). See full note at Rev. 7:14.

▣ **"the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality"** This is an allusion to the major problem of fallen mankind embodied in the self-centeredness and materialism of an end-time, anti-God world system. There are three groups of humans who mourn the fall of the great whore:

1. businessmen (cf. Rev. 18:3,11-16)
2. kings of the earth (cf. Rev. 18:3,9-10)
3. merchant sailors (cf. Rev. 18:3,17-19)

These three represent worldwide human economic systems.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 18:4-8**

**<sup>4</sup>I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; <sup>5</sup>for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. <sup>6</sup>Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. <sup>7</sup>To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.' <sup>8</sup>For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong."**

**18:4 "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues"** This is an OT allusion to Isa. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8,28; 51:6,9,45 or Zech. 2:6-7. It is an aorist active imperative which speaks of the urgency of God's people not being caught up in this fallen world system.

**18:5 "for her sins are piled up as high as heaven"** This is an allusion to Gen. 18:20-21 or Jer. 51:9. God's patience was used as an excuse to sin more instead of repenting (cf. Rev. 2:21; Rom. 2:4).

▣ **"God has remembered"** Often in the Bible, when God remembers the acts of the wicked it results in judgment (cf. Rev. 16:19; Ps. 79:8; Isa. 64:9; Jer. 14:10; 17:1-4; 44:21-23; Hos. 7:2; 8:13; 9:9; Amos 8:7).

**18:6 "Pay her back even as she has paid"** This is an allusion to the truth that we reap what we sow (cf. Gal. 6:7; for full list see [www.freecommentary.org](http://www.freecommentary.org)). This truth is presented in many different forms in the Bible (cf. Ps. 137:8; Jer. 50:15,29; Matt. 7:2; Rev. 13:10).

▣ **"give back to her double according to her deeds"** This is an allusion to Jer. 16:18 and 17:18, but the truth is expressed in many contexts (cf. Exod. 22:4-9; Ps. 75:7-8; Isa. 40:2). This idiom speaks of complete and full judgment, as does the next phrase. This verse would have been very encouraging to persecuted Christians.

▣ **"the cup which she has mixed, mix twice for her"** "Cup" is an OT metaphor for the judgment of God (cf. Ps. 11:6; 60:3; 75:6-8; Isa. 51:17,22; Jer. 25:15-16,27-28).

**18:7 "for she says in her heart 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning'"** This specifically relates to Zeph. 2:15 and Isa. 47:7-8. It alludes to the self-sufficiency and pride, which may have been the source of Satan's fall (possibly alluded to in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28), mankind's fall (cf. Genesis 3), and this end-time world system. The problem is arrogant independence!

For "heart" see Special Topic at Rev. 2:23.

**18:8 "for this reason in one day her plagues will come"** This is a specific allusion to Isa. 47:9. The concept of grief overtaking her in a single day is repeated in Rev. 18:17-19, where the Johannine term "hour" is used. This was a major encouragement to persecuted Christians.

▣ **"she will be burned up with fire"** This may be an allusion to Lev. 21:9. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRE](#) at Rev. 16:8.

▣ **"for the Lord God who judges her is strong"** This is an allusion to Jer. 50:34.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 18:9-10**

**<sup>9</sup>"And the kings of the earth, who committed *acts of* immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, <sup>10</sup>standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'"**

**18:9-10 "the kings of the earth"** These must be different from the kings mentioned in Rev. 17:12,16, who participated in the destruction and fall of the great whore. These kings were apparently merchant nations who benefitted from commercial trade with the anti-God world system. This is an allusion to the powerful commercial city of Tyre and its prideful king in Ezekiel 26-28. The remainder of chapter 18 deals with the intoxicating commercial power associated with all fallen world systems.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 18:11-20**

**<sup>11</sup>"And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more— <sup>12</sup>cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every *kind* of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article *made* from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, <sup>13</sup>and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. <sup>14</sup>The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and *men* will no longer find them. <sup>15</sup>The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, <sup>16</sup>saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen**

and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; <sup>17</sup>for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste! And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, <sup>18</sup>and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' <sup>19</sup>And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!' <sup>20</sup>Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

**18:11-19 "the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her"** This is similar to Ezekiel 27:

1. Rev. 18:11 – Ezek. 27:31,36
2. Rev. 18:12-13 – Ezek. 27:12,13,22
3. Rev. 18:15 – Ezek. 27:31,36
4. Rev. 18:17 – Ezek. 27:26-30
5. Rev. 18:18 – Ezek. 27:32
6. Rev. 18:19 – Ezek. 27:30-34

It describes international trade:

1. silver from Spain
2. fine linen from Egypt
3. silk from China
4. citron wood from North Africa
5. ivory from Africa
6. iron from Spain or the Black Sea
7. cinnamon from India
8. the universal practice of slave trading

**18:13**

**NASB, NKJV,**

**NRSV, NJB** "chariots"

**TEV** "carriages"

This refers to private, four-wheeled, luxury chariots, not war chariots.

**18:14 "luxurious and splendid"** This is a word play on the Greek terms *lipara* (luxury) and *lampra* (splendid).

**18:17** This is an allusion to Ezekiel 26-28 (city of Tyre), where those employed in the transportation of these luxuries mourned because their own livelihoods had been affected.

**18:19 "threw dust on their heads"** See [SPECIAL TOPIC: GRIEVING RITES](#) at Rev. 1:7.

**18:20 "Rejoice over her"** This is an allusion to Jer. 51:48, although some see it as referring to Deut 32:43 (in the Septuagint) as the economic partners' grief over the fall of Babylon, so believers rejoice!

■ **"God has pronounced judgment for you against her"** Throughout the book, God's judgments are connected with the prayers of His children (cf. Rev. 6:10).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 18:21-24**

<sup>21</sup>Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. <sup>22</sup>And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will

**not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; <sup>23</sup>and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. <sup>24</sup>And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."**

**18:21 "Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea"** This is an allusion to Jer. 51:63-64. It is a strong passage showing that Babylon will never, never rise again. As a matter of fact, in Rev. 18:21-33, there are six double negatives, "certainly not," "not under any circumstances," and "never, no, never."

▣ **"and will not be found any longer"** This shows total, permanent destruction (cf. Ezek. 26:21).

**18:22-23** These were the sounds of everyday life in the Ancient Near East. God's judgment brings an end to this godless society (cf. Isa. 24:8; Jer. 7:34; 25:10; Ezek. 26:13).

**18:23 "all the nations were deceived by your sorcery"** This is an allusion to Nahum 3:4. Notice that in Rev. 18:23-24 there are listed three reasons for the fall of the great city.

1. pride and wealth ( cf. Isa. 23:8)
2. idolatry and sorcery (cf. Lev. 19:26,33; Deut. 18:9-12)
3. persecution of the people of God (cf. Rev. 16:6, 17:6).

**18:24** This is an allusion to Jer. 51:49.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Are Rev. 17 and 18 a literary unit? If so, why?
2. Why is it so difficult to interpret when Babylon fell?
3. Who does Babylon, the great whore, refer to in John's day? In our day? In the end-time?
4. What is the immorality and wine referred to in Rev. 14:8; 17:2; 18:3 in connection with this world system?
5. Please explain your interpretation of Rev. 17:10-11.
6. From what OT book are most of John's allusions taken?

# REVELATION 19

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
(18:21-19:4)	Heaven Exults Over Babylon	Praises in Heaven	(18:24-19:4)	Songs of Victory in Heaven
The Marriage Supper of the Lamb	19:1-10	19:1-4	The Wedding Feast of the Lamb	19:1-4
19:5-8		19:5-8	19:5-8	19:5-10
19:9-10		19:9-10	19:9 19:10a-b 19:10c	
The Rider on the White Horse	Christ on a White Horse	The Victory of Christ and His Heavenly Armies	The Rider on the White Horse	The First Eschatological Battle
19:11-16	19:11-16  The Beast and His Armies Defeated	19:11-16	19:11-16	19:11-16
19:17-21	19:17-21	19:17-21	19:17-18 19:19-21	19:17-18 19:19-21

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 19:1-21

- A. The chapter division in this section of Revelation was made in an inappropriate place (chapter divisions, paragraph divisions, verse divisions, capitalizations, and punctuation are not part of the inspired original Greek text). Revelation 19:1-10 is obviously the concluding remarks about the destruction of the great whore described in Rev. 17:1-18:24. As people rejoiced over the fall of

Assyria and Babylon in the OT, now holy angels (cf. Rev. 19:4) rejoice over the fall of Babylon, the harlot (i.e., human government apart from God), as did the believers in Rev. 18:20.

B. The series of praises of Rev. 19:1-10 is in response to 18:20.

C. This is generally understood as being the chapter which describes the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Rev. 19:11-16). But it must be seen that this chapter closes another cycle of judgment. The return of Christ is described in this chapter in very Jewish terms, which seem to be altogether different from the Pauline description of 1 Thess. 4:14-18. The Jews expected the Messiah to return in the manner described in Rev. 19:11-16. The NT describes the Second Coming in several different, but related, ways. Most Christians see the end-time in terms of Jesus' Mt. Olivet discourse (cf. Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) and Paul's discussion of the "man of sin" (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2).

D. To those suffering persecution, Jesus as Warrior, Defender, and Judge was a comforting perspective.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:1-5a

**<sup>1</sup>After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; <sup>2</sup>because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her." <sup>3</sup>And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever." <sup>4</sup>And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" <sup>5</sup>And a voice came from the throne, saying,**

**19:1 "I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven"** This is an allusion to Jer. 51:48. Chapters 17-18 draw heavily from Jeremiah 50-51 (the destruction of Babylon) for their imagery. This same phrase or concept is also found in Rev. 11:15 (the Second Coming after the seventh trumpet) and 19:6. There has been much discussion about who the multitude might be, but it is simply speculation as to whether it is the faithful angelic host, redeemed humanity, or both.

■ **"Hallelujah"** This Hebrew term means "praise YHWH" (BDB 237 II and 219). This is the only occurrence of this term in the NT. It appears in this context four times: Rev. 19:1,3,4, and 6. The OT background to this is found in the praise Psalms used in the liturgy of both the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Rev. 104:35; 105:45; 106:48; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1; 116:19; 117:2; 125:1,21; 146:1,10; 147:1;148:1,14; 149:1,9; 150:1,6). A parallel phrase is found in Rev. 19:5b.

■ **"salvation"** This characterizes God's desire for all mankind (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11; 21:7; 22:17; Ezek. 18:23,30-32; John 3:16; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 4:14). It can refer to the OT concept of physical deliverance, but probably relates to a total, eternal, cosmic salvation for believing individuals, and all physical creation (cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 1:19).

■ **"glory and power"** Throughout the book heavenly choirs break into songs of praise to God. Often these praise songs are the key to interpreting the immediate context.

**19:2 "because His judgments are true and righteous"** This may be an allusion to Ps. 19:9; 119:138 and 142. God's judgments are appropriate and fair (seen in the three cycles of judgment). This would have been very encouraging to a group of Christians undergoing persecution (cf. Rev. 19:11; 15:3,4; 16:7).

■ **"the great harlot"** This fallen, anti-God world system goes by several names:

1. the great city
2. Babylon
3. the prostitute (cf. Rev. 14:8; 16:19-21; 17:1-18:24)

Verses 1-4 continue the context from Rev. 17 and 18.

■ **"who was corrupting the earth with her immorality"** This refers to materialism, idolatry, or immoral pagan fertility worship, or emperor worship (cf. Rev. 2:14,20,21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: DESTROY, RUIN, CORRUPT (PHTHEIRŌ)**

■ **"He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on Her"** This may be an allusion to Deut. 32:43 or 2 Kgs. 9:7 (cf. Rom. 12:19). God acts on behalf of the prayers of His saints (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; Matt. 7:7-8; 21:22; John 21:22; 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23-24, 26; James 4:2; 1 John 3:22; 5:14-16).

The anti-God world system has always been involved in the persecution and killing of God's people. God allows evil to reveal its true intentions (cf. Rev. 13:5,7,15).

**19:3 "Her smoke rises up forever and ever"** This is an allusion to Isa. 34:10 which describes universal judgment. We must remember that this literary genre (apocalyptic) uses symbols to communicate truth. The truth here seems to be one of two possible foci:

1. eternal punishment (cf. Rev. 6:10; Matt. 3:12; 25:41; Luke 3:17; Mark 9:43,48)
2. complete destruction (cf. Isa. 34:8-10). This same truth is found in Rev. 14:11

**19:4 "the twenty-four elders"** See Special Topic at Rev. 4:4.

■ **"Amen"** This term is used in Rev. 1:6,7; 3:14; 5:14 and 7:12; 19:4; 22:20; and 22:21. It is a form of the OT Hebrew word for "faith" (*emeth*, cf. Hab. 2:4). Its original etymology was "to be firm" or "to be sure." It came to be applied in the OT to the trustworthiness of God. However, in the NT, its use is primarily liturgical in the sense of "I agree" or "I affirm." See [SPECIAL TOPIC: AMEN](#) at Rev. 1:6.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the Old Testament (אמן)**

**19:5 "and a voice came from the throne saying"** Because of the phrase "our God" (Rev. 19:5b), this must be an angel, not Deity. Jesus never calls God "our God" (Michael McGill, *NT Transline*, p. 1011).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:5b-6a**

**<sup>5b</sup>"Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." <sup>6</sup>Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying,**

■ **"Give praise to our God"** This is an allusion to Ps. 115:13; 134:1; 135:1. The term is a present active imperative, but it is a different term than "Hallelujah," which is found in Rev. 19:1,3,4 and 6. It is theologically unusual that an angel would use the words, "Our God," but Rev. 19:10 shows that angels identify themselves not only with the saints in service, but also with the saints in their testimony concerning Jesus.

■ **"all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great"** This is an allusion to Ps. 115:13 (used earlier in Rev. 11:18).

**19:6** These descriptive phrases were used

1. of God in Ezek. 43:2
2. of a powerful angel in Dan. 10:6



3. of Christ in Rev. 1:15
4. of the redeemed community in Rev. 14:2
5. in context this seems to be an angelic choir

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:6b-8**

**6b** "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup>It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

- **"the Lord our God, the Almighty"** This threefold title for God from the OT (YHWH, *Elohim*, and *El Shaddai*, see [SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#) at Rev. 4:8) appears in various forms in Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:15; and 21:22.

The pronoun "our" is very unusual because it is spoken by an angel. It appears in no other occurrence with this threefold title. However, the textual evidence for its inclusion is strong.

1. "Lord the God of us" in an early corrector of MS  $\kappa^2$  (UBS<sup>4</sup> puts this in the text but gives it a "C" rating)
2. "the God, the Lord of us" in the original MS of  $\kappa^*$
3. in some later minuscule Greek texts, "the God of us" (MSS 051, 209)
4. "Lord God" (MS A)
5. "Lord" (Peshitta and Coptic versions)

- **"reigns"** There has been much discussion over this aorist tense verb (cf. Rev. 11:17). Some see it as God beginning to reign (an ingressive or inceptive aorist, cf. Ps. 93:1; 97:1, NJB). However, God has always reigned (a constative or gnomic aorist, cf. Ps. 99:1). Some see it as God reigning on the earth now as He has in heaven (a culminative or effective aorist, cf. Matt. 6:10). The end of time and the consummation of God's kingdom occurs several times in Revelation at the end of the different cycles of judgment (seals, trumpets, bowls). This seems to be parallel to Rev. 11:15. It may be an allusion to Isa. 24:23; 52:7 or Micah 4:7. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: REIGNING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD](#) at Rev. 5:10.

**19:7** The first two verbs in Rev. 19:7 are subjunctives.

1. let us rejoice – present active
2. let us exult – present active

The third verb has several variants.

1. *dōsōmen* (irregular aorist active subjunctive) – MS P
2. *dōsomen* (future), "we will give glory" – MSS  $\kappa^2$ , A
3. *dōmen* (aorist active subjunctive) – MS  $\kappa^*$

Numbers 1 and 3 would be translated like the first two verbs, "let us give glory." Number 2 would be translated "we will give glory" (RSV). The UBS<sup>4</sup> gives #1 a "C" rating; the UBS<sup>3</sup> gave it a "D" rating. The committee could not decide which was original.

- **"give the glory to Him"** This may be a metaphorical phrase for trusting, believing, or placing faith in Christ. In Rev. 11:13 it could mean that some repented and became believers as a result of God's acts of judgment. This phrase is used of God's people in Rev. 14:7 and of tormented unbelievers' refusal to worship God in Rev. 16:9.

- **"the marriage of the Lamb"** "Lamb" has an OT sacrificial connotation (cf. Lev. 1-7). This phrase links a sacrifice element with a communal meal (peace offering). There is an allusion to this marriage feast in Matt. 8:11; 26:29; Luke 14:15; 22:16. It focuses on the Jewish marriage custom of a betrothal period, a waiting period, and a seven-day wedding feast. It is interesting to note that within a few passages the



metaphor changes to God's people, not as bride, but as wedding guests (cf. Rev. 19:9 and Matt. 22:1-14). The metaphor will change again in Rev. 21:2,9 to God's people as "the New Jerusalem." The concept of a marital relationship between God and His Church is found in the OT in Isa. 54:4-8; 62:5; Jer. 31:32; Ezekiel 16; and Hosea 2:14-19. The metaphor is seen in the NT in 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:21-31; Rev. 19:9; 21:2,9; 22:17. Also, Jesus is depicted as a bridegroom (cf. Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29). Several parables in Matthew continue this theme (cf. Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13). Marriage may be the best human example of the concept of a biblical covenant.

■ **"His bride has made herself ready"** This is an aorist active indicative. Some have interpreted this as meritorious human works. The aorist passive of Rev. 19:8 shows this interpretation cannot be true. This context affirms the paradoxical relationship between God's initiating activity (cf. John 6:44,65) seen in the invitation of Rev. 19:9, which is a perfect passive participle, and mankind's necessary faith response (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21). This paradoxical relationship can be seen in Phil. 2:12-13. It is supported by the fact that in Rev. 19:8 God gives permission to dress, but the dress refers to the good deeds (righteous acts) of God's people (cf. Rev. 14:13; Eph. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:25).

In *Word Pictures in the New Testament* A. T. Robertson has an interesting comment on Rev. 19:7. "Three metaphors of women appear in the Apocalypse (the Mother in chapter 12, the Harlot in 13 to 19, and the Bride of Christ here to the end). The first and third present the Church under two different aspects of her life, while the second answers to her great rival and enemy (Swete)" (p. 449).

**19:8 "the righteous deeds of the saints"** The term "righteous acts" (*dikaiōma*) has several usages in the NT.

1. it refers to God's acts of justice (cf. Rev. 15:4)
2. it refers to Jesus' act of dying on behalf of mankind (cf. Rom. 5:16,18)
3. it refers to believers' lives of justice (cf. Rev. 19:8)
4. it refers to a decree, a law, or an ordinance, usually the Law of Moses (cf. Luke 1:6; Rom. 1:32; 2:26; 8:4; Heb. 9:1,10).

The main theological issue related to this family of Greek terms (*dikaioō, dikaiōsis, dikaios, dikaiosune*) is how fallen mankind can claim to be right, righteous, just, justified. It must be stated emphatically that this spiritual condition was not accomplished by human effort (cf. Rom. 3:21-30; Eph. 2:8-9), but by Divine choice (the Father), through a Divine act (the Son), and the Divine drawing of the Spirit (cf. John 6:44,65). Mankind can only receive the finished result (cf. Rom. 5; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The goal of right standing is right living, Christlike living (cf. Rom. 9:29; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 1:4; 2:10). Righteous living is evidence of a relationship with God (cf. Rev. 14:13), not the grounds of that relationship (cf. Gal. 3:1-3)! See Special Topic at Rev. 19:11.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:9-10**

**<sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." <sup>10</sup>Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."**

**19:9 "Blessed are"** This is the fourth of seven blessings to the redeemed in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

■ **"those who are invited"** This is a Perfect passive participle, which emphasizes God's call to salvation (cf. Rev. 17:14; John 6:44,65).

■ **"These are the true words of God"** This phrase emphasizes the trustworthiness of the angel's message (cf. Rev. 21:5; 22:6).

**19:10 "Then I fell at his feet to worship him"** There has been much discussion about John's attempt to worship an angel (cf. Rev. 22:8). Possibly John included it intentionally as a word against angel worship (cf. Rev. 22:9; Col. 2:18). John was awed by this powerful angelic person and may have assumed that he was either a divine personification (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16; Exod. 32,4; 13:21; 14:19; Jdgs. 2:1; 6:22-23; 13:3-22; Zech. 3:1-2; Luke 24:5) or a physical manifestation of the Spirit (cf. Rev. 22:8-9).

■ **"I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus"** John called himself by this same term in Rev. 1:1. The angel identifies himself not only as a servant of God (cf. Deut. 33:2; Ps. 103:21; Dan. 17:10) but also of redeemed mankind (cf. Heb. 1:14). This angel also identifies himself with the testimony of Jesus, which is normally said of saints rather than angels (cf. Rev. 12:17).

■ **"for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"** This is a highly unusual phrase and has been widely interpreted. It may refer to either

1. Jesus as the focus of prophecy
2. the fact that prophecy has returned as a sign that Jesus has brought in the new age of the Spirit (cf. Rev. 1:2; 6:9; 12:17 and 14:12 for a similar use of this phrase)
3. Jesus is the very breath of prophecy (similar to "God breathed" of 2 Tim. 3:16)

The context shows that those who have trusted in Christ have been led by the Spirit. No one can come to Christ unless

1. the Spirit woos him (cf. John 6:44,65)
2. helps him understand the gospel message
3. encourages him to trust Christ
4. baptizes him into Christ
5. forms Christ in him (cf. John 16:8-11)

The Spirit's ministry is magnifying Christ!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:11-16**

**<sup>11</sup>And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup>His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. <sup>13</sup>He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup>And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. <sup>15</sup>From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."**

**19:11 "And I saw heaven opened"** This is a perfect passive verbal form and may relate to Ezek. 1:1. Several times in Revelation heaven has been opened (in partial ways) to reveal truth to John in progressive stages (cf. Rev. 4:1; 11:19; 15:5). See Special Topic at Rev. 3:7.

■ **"a white horse"** The bridegroom in the previous paragraph is revealed further as an all-conquering warrior. This describes Jesus' coming as the Jews expected Him the first time, a powerful military general. This is somewhat different from Paul's description of the Second Coming (the *Parousia*) found in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. For a group of persecuted Christians this is an extremely encouraging metaphor. Interpreters must remember

1. that this is not a full and complete discussion of the Second Coming
2. that it is clothed in symbolic, apocalyptic language
3. that it is true; our God, in Christ, is personally coming again to receive His own (cf. John 14:2-3) and

to judge all mankind according to their deeds (cf. Gal. 6:7)

- ▣ **"He who sat on it"** Although there is a white horse in Rev. 6:2, this is obviously different.
- ▣ **"called faithful and true"** The terms "Faithful and True" in Hebrew convey trustworthiness (cf. Rev. 3:14 as well as Rev. 1:5; 3:7).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: "TRUTH" (THE CONCEPT) IN JOHN'S WRITINGS**

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: "TRUE" (THE TERM) IN JOHN'S WRITINGS**

- ▣ **"in righteousness He judges and wages war"** This is an allusion to Isa. 11:3-5 (cf. Isa. 9:7; 16:5; 32:1; Ps. 96:13), which describes the New Age of righteousness, the New Age of the Spirit. See Special Topic below.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS**

**19:12 "His eyes are a flame of fire"** This is a description of Jesus from Rev. 1:14 and 2:18. It has an OT angelic background from Dan. 10:6.

- ▣ **"On His head are many diadems"** This refers to royal crowns. Jesus has more crowns than
  1. the rider on the white horse in Rev. 6:2 (which symbolizes effective warfare)
  2. Satan (the red dragon of Rev. 12:3)
  3. the beast of Rev. 13:1
- ▣ **"and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself"** This may be an allusion to Rev. 2:17, but if it is, its meaning is still uncertain. Some see it as an allusion to the ancient belief that to know the name of gods was to have power over them. Others believe that it represents the fact that no one can completely know the character of Christ. Since the title is unknown, it does not refer to any of the titles of Jesus ("Faithful and True" of Rev. 19:11, and "The Word of God" of Rev. 19:13) found in this passage (or in the book) including "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" of Rev. 19:16.

**19:13 "He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood"** This is an allusion to a poem of YHWH's judgment from Isa. 63:3, which is also alluded to in Rev. 19:15. The term "dipped" (MS A, UBS<sup>4</sup> gives it a B rating) or "sprinkled" (MSS  $\kappa^*$ , P from Isa. 63:3) is in perfect tense; commentators disagree as to whether it refers to

1. the blood of his enemies, which seems to be the focus of the paragraph and is reflected in a Targum on Gen. 49:10-11 (however, in context, the battle has not occurred)
  2. His own redemptive, sacrificial blood in which the saints have washed their own garments white (cf. Rev. 7:14)
  3. it is even possible it is the blood of His witnesses, who are precious to Him
- In context option #1 seems best.

- ▣ **"and His name is called The Word of God"** This is the term *logos*, which links the book of the Revelation with the Apostle John, for he is the only biblical author who uses this as a title of Jesus (cf. John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1).

The gospel is both a person (the Living Word of God, Jesus) and a message (the written Word of God, the Bible). This same dual aspect is reflected in the biblical use of the term "faith," which is both a personal act of welcoming Jesus and a cognitive act of believing doctrinal truths ("the faith," cf. Jude 1:3,20).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: HEBREW AND GREEK BACKGROUND OF LOGOS**

**19:14 "the armies which are in heaven"** This has been interpreted in two ways.

1. Because of Rev. 17:14 and the description of the saints in Rev. 19:8 in this immediate context, many have assumed that this refers to the saints.
2. Because of the OT background of Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; and Zech. 14:5 as well as the NT passages of Matt. 13:41; 16:27; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:7, many believe that it must refer to the angels.

This same ambiguity is present in many passages.

**19:15 "from His mouth"** This is an allusion to Isa. 11:4 and Rev. 1:16 and 2:16. This same judgmental metaphor has been found in Jewish apocalyptic literature (cf. IV Esdras 12:6; the Psalms of Solomon 17:10,45,49; and the book of I Enoch 62:6).

▣ **"a sharp sword"** This is a metaphor for the power of the gospel or of God's spoken word (cf. Gen. 1; Isa. 55:11; John 1:1; 2 Thess. 7:8), not a literal description.

The end-time destruction of rebellious human armies is depicted in Ezek. 38-39. This destruction is accomplished by (1) the sword (cf. Ezek. 38:21 and Rev. 19:15,21) or (2) fire from heaven, cf. Ezek. 38:22; 39:6; and Rev. 20:9. This parallel between Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 (i.e., the different ways of destroying the armies of the nations), both of which reflect Ezekiel 38-39, implies a recapitulation. The Second Coming of Christ in 19 is repeated in different language in Rev. 20:1-10. Recapitulation has already been seen between the seals, trumpets, and bowls.

▣ **"the nations"** The OT origin of these armies is the godless nations listed in Ezekiel 38 from all over the Ancient Near East (cf. Rev. 19:2,5,6,13). John is using the end-time battle of Ezekiel 38-39 (or possibly Psalm 2) as the source of his imagery about the eschatological battle between good and evil! Jesus has by far the biggest sword! See notes at Rev. 2:26 and 10:11.

▣ **"He will rule them with a rod of iron"** This is the second of three descriptions about the one riding on the white horse. This description of judgment comes from Ps. 2:9 and 110:5-6 (cf. Rev. 2:27; 12:5).

▣ **"and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty"** This third description of judgment is an allusion to Isa. 63:2-3; Jer. 51:33; Lam. 1:15; Joel 3:13 (cf. Rev. 14:19-20). The color of crushed grapes reminded the ancients of blood, death, and battle!

For "wrath of God" see note at Rev. 7:14.

**19:16 "on His thigh a name written"** There has been much discussion about the term "His thigh":

1. this was the place that a sword normally hung
2. this was the place that His garment was most clearly seen on horseback
3. it was the strongest muscle of his body and was symbolic of His might

▣ **"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"** Does this refer to one name or two? Revelation 17:14 shows that it refers to one name (cf. 1 Tim. 6:15). It has two possible OT backgrounds:

1. a description of YHWH (cf. Deut. 10:17 and Enoch 9:4)
2. a Babylonian and later Persian title of deity transferred to YHWH (cf. Dan. 2:37)

It is interesting to note that this phrase in Aramaic adds up to 777, in contradistinction to the number of the beast, which is 666. Ultimate perfection versus ultimate imperfection.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:17-18**

**<sup>17</sup>Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup>so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."**

**19:17 "to all the birds"** This gruesome paragraph is an allusion to two OT passages which deal with

battle scenes. This context is the same battle discussed in Rev. 16:12-16, called Armageddon. The predatory birds are described as drawn to battlefields as in 1 Sam. 17:46 (cf. Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:37) and Ezek. 39:17-20, which is the end-time battle of Gog and Magog. John often uses the OT imagery in new ways. In chapter 20 the battle of Gog and Magog deals with Satan after the millennium, whereas the battle in chapter 19 occurs before the millennium and deals with the wild beast and his false prophet.

■ **"Come, assemble for the great supper of God"** The word translated "come" is an adverb used as an aorist active imperative plural which matches the second word, "assemble," which is an aorist passive imperative plural. This is an antithesis to the Lamb's banquet mentioned in Rev. 19:7 and 9. The Lamb invites lost people to come and be saved and join His wedding feast. But the angel invites the birds of prey to come to the feast of dead bodies (and dead souls) at the great end-time battle (cf. Jer. 12:9; Ezek. 39:17). God's wrath is real and symbolized as a feast, on the flesh of His enemies (cf. Isa. 34:6; Jer. 12:12; 46:10; Zeph. 1:7).

**19:18** This goes back to Rev. 6:15, which is also an eschatological setting where these same general categories of mankind were also mentioned. The horror of being unburied was especially shocking to the people of the Ancient Near East.

The victorious return of Jesus occurs at the end of each judgment cycle: seals, Rev. 6:12-17; trumpets, Rev. 11:15-18; and bowls, Rev. 19:1-21.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 19:19-21**

**<sup>19</sup>And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. <sup>20</sup>And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. <sup>21</sup>And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.**

**19:19** The actual battle begins. This is an allusion to Psalm 2. Does this refer to a specific, literal end-time battle, or is it symbolic of the struggle between good and evil? The genre of Revelation implies symbolic; the parallel passages in Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; and 2 Thessalonians 2 imply literal. This ambiguity is the source of great disagreement in the interpretation of Revelation by godly people. Dogmatism is surely inappropriate!

**19:20 "the false prophet who performed the signs"** He is the second beast (cf. Rev. 13:11-18; 16:13). This goes back to Rev. 13:12-13, where the false prophet's relationship to the sea beast is a parody of the Holy Spirit's relationship to Christ.

■ **"received the mark of the beast"** (cf. Rev. 13:16-17).

■ **"these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire"** The phrase "lake of fire" is unique to the book of the Revelation, but is a synonym for the term *Gehenna* (see Special Topic at Rev. 1:18), which Jesus used so often to denote Hell. The specific OT allusion may be to Isa. 30:23-33 and Dan. 7:11. There are so many prophetic passages that connect judgment with fire or burning. This theme of an eternal fire is developed in apocalyptic Judaism (cf. Enoch 27:1ff; 54:1ff; 56:3ff; 90:26; IV Ezra 7:36; Apoc. of Baruch 59:10; 85:13 [list taken from George E. Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 258]). This phrase is used in Revelation in Rev. 20:10,14; 21:8. It was a place prepared for Satan and his angels, but humans who rebel against God will also find this as their ultimate dwelling place. It is the final dwelling place of Satan. It is the natural result of rebellion against God and is a permanent form of the abyss (cf. Matt. 25:46; Rev. 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3).

**19:21** Those who received that mark of the beast (cf. Rev. 13:16; 14:9,11), the very ones who had persecuted the believers, are now killed by the word of Christ (as the sea beast will be, cf. 2 Thess. 2:8).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. List the different groups who praise God in Rev. 19:1-8 and the reasons for their praise.
2. Where does the concept of the marriage feast of the Lamb come from and what are its implications?
3. What does Rev. 19:10 imply about angels?
4. Explain the significance of Rev. 19:11-16 as they apply to Christ.
5. What battle is described in Rev. 19:17-21? How many battles are there in the End-time?

# REVELATION 20

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Thousand Years	Satan Bound 1000 Years	The Binding of Satan and the Reign of the Martyrs	The Thousand Years	The Reign of a Thousand Years
20:1-3	20:1-3 The Saints Reign with Christ 1000 Years	20:1-3	20:1-3	20:1-3
20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4-6
The Defeat of Satan	Satanic Rebellion Crushed	The Loosing of Satan and the Final Conflict	The Defeat of Satan	
20:7-10	20:7-10	20:7-10	20:7-10	20:7-10
The Judgment at the Great White Throne	The Great White Throne Judgment	The Final Judgment	The Final Judgment	The Last Judgment
20:11-15	20:11-15	20:11-15	20:11-15	20:11-12 20:13-15

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO REVELATION 20:1-15

A. Chapter 20 must be related theologically to Rev. 19 (the Second Coming) and Rev. 21-22 (the eternal kingdom). The interpretive question is whether the Second Coming precedes the millennial reign of Christ, if so then some form of pre-millennialism is inevitable (if this is to be interpreted as historical narrative). But what if Rev. 20-22 are a new unit that recapitulates Rev. 17-19 (cf. W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*)? This change would be similar to the recapitulation between the seals, trumpets, and bowls, then some form of idealism or amillennialism fits best.

B. Rev. 20 introduces several theological concepts not revealed in other parts of the Bible:

1. a two-stage resurrection
2. a limited temporal reign of martyrs
3. a Messianic earthly reign for 1000 years
4. an ineffectual reign of the Messiah (mankind rebels again at the instigation of Satan after a 1,000 year reign of Christ)
5. another battle with unbelievers after the Great White Throne judgment

C. Difficulties in interpretation exist because of

1. the theological distinctives of Rev. 20
2. the ambiguity in several key areas
  - a. Satan's binding, Rev. 20:2
  - b. number of groups in Rev. 20:4
  - c. who is involved in the first resurrection, Rev. 20:5
  - d. the who, where, and how, of this reign with Christ, Rev. 20:6e. where do "the nations" in Rev. 20:8 come from
  - f. meaning and location of "the beloved city," Rev. 20:9
  - g. who is involved in the White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15 and how it relates to Matt. 25:31ff
3. There is a great lack of agreement among godly, believing commentators, even those of the same millennial theory. One's millennial theory should not affect the reality of a physical, literal Second Coming which is referred to often in the NT.
4. some good quotes by people I trust
  - a. in his commentary, *Revelation*, George E. Ladd says "American Evangelicalism has placed an unwarranted emphasis on this doctrine of millennium. . . One thing is clear; he (Jesus) is not concerned to teach a temporal earthly kingdom before the eternal order in the Age to Come."
  - b. in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, A. T. Robertson says, "This wonderful book was written to comfort the saints in a time of great trial, not to create strife among them" (pp. 457-458).
  - c. in *Worthy is the Lamb*, Ray Summers says, "This chapter needs to be approached with great humility of spirit, a recognition of its difficulties, an avoidance of dogmatic statements, and respect for the honest interpretation of others. This chapter has been a bitter debating ground for Christians for many centuries" (p. 202).
  - d. in his commentary on *The Book of Revelation, New International Commentary Series*, Robert H. Mounce, says, "Judging from the amount of attention given by many writers to the first ten verses of chapter 20, one would judge it to be the single most important segment of the book of Revelation. The tendency of many interpreters at this point is to become apologists for a particular view of the millennium. Without denying the significance of this important passage, it should not be elevated above such basic themes as the return of Christ, the final judgment and removal of all wickedness, and the splendor of the eternal state. A careful reading of the millennial passage (Rev. 20:1-10) will show that it is perhaps limited to the resurrected martyrs alone, and that it contains no specific indication that their reign with Christ takes place on earth or that it necessarily follows the second advent" (p. 351).

D. The millennial reign is not the same as

1. the Messianic Age, or
2. the Kingdom of God (both #1 and #2 are eternal, cf. Dan. 7:14,27; Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:33; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 11:15; 22:5)

E. The concept of a 1,000 years of bliss with Christ may have come from the idea of 6,000 years of



history and then a Sabbath rest of prosperity from Genesis 1. It seems this (historical pre-millennialism) was part of some early Christian writings (cf. Epistle of Barnabas 15 and II Enoch 33).

F. This chapter is obviously inspired revelation and has a divine purpose. However, what is that purpose: (1) outlining end-time events or (2) giving spiritual insight into the spiritual struggle of every age?

Interpreters must be careful of pushing their own agenda and not John's. Curiosity, one-upmanship, or loyalty to a theological position or teacher has caused a legion of interpretations and bad attitudes. John's agenda/purpose is conveyed in his choice of genre and his choice of OT, not NT, imagery! Taking apocalyptic literature literally is not a sign of conservatism, but misguided enthusiasm! Why do modern interpreters try to make some of John's symbols literal and others figurative? They are all figurative (this does not mean they are not true)! John's end-time presentation is primarily an OT structure. He seems to purposely ignore Jesus' and Paul's eschatological teachings. The biblical writers, both OT and NT, do not reveal a systematic eschatology. They certainly present truth, but not in a logical, chronological, or systematic way! Let us affirm the central truths of the visions and not be dogmatic about the details.

G. This chapter has been made to bear theological weight out of proportion to its place in the overall structure and message of the book! This is not the major emphasis of the author! The millennium is a precursor to the eternal reign of God. Only Revelation chooses to mention this temporal Messianic reign. It appears in a genre that communicates truth by means of symbolic language. Personally, it is not the millennial reign that surprises me (in light of OT texts), but

1. the two-stage judgment
2. the mixing of resurrected saints and normal humans together in an earthly setting
3. the presence of rebellion after a lengthy Messianic reign

Will Christ's personal reign be ineffectual in bringing mankind unto righteousness even with the absence of Satan? Or is this a symbolic way to clearly show the extent and debauchery of human kind?

H. God help us all in light of Rev. 22:18-19! We are all affected by our sin nature, our age, our experience, and our teachers!

## HELPFUL AUTHORS

- A. Alan Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 12
- B. George Ladd, *Revelation of John*
- C. Leon Morris, "The Revelation of St. John," *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 20
- D. Robert Mounce, "The Book of Revelation," *The New International Commentary*
- E. Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb*
- F. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*
- G. D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 20:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup>And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup>and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

**20:1 "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss"** This is similar to the angel who had the key to the abyss in Rev. 9:1-2,11. It is interesting that Satan is bound by an unnamed angel.

▣ **"the key of the abyss"** We have seen two "keys" in Revelation. Jesus has the keys to Death and Hades in Rev. 1:18 and the unnamed angel has the key to the abyss in Rev. 9:1. The term "key" is metaphorical for "authority over."

The term "abyss" is the Greek word for "depth" with an alpha privative (the bottomless pit) and has been discussed in Rev. 9:1. It seems to be the prison of demonic spirits. However, this cannot be an absolute interpretation because of Paul's use of it in Rom. 10:7. It may be synonymous with "Tartarus" as the place of confinement for all evil spirits (cf. Luke 8:31; Jude 1:6; 2 Pet. 2:4). In rabbinical Judaism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries it was understood to be the unrighteous part of Hades.

**20:2 "the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan"** These fourfold titles of the evil one, which were discussed in Rev. 12:9, are emphasized to define precisely who is being bound and who will later be thrown into the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 20:10). This links the Beginning (cf. Genesis 3) with the End (Revelation 20-22).

The term "dragon" may be

1. parallel to "serpent." In the OT the Hebrew term *tannin* can refer to
  - a. land snake (cf. Exod. 7:9,10,12; Deut. 32:33; and possibly Ps. 91:13)
  - b. sea snake (cf. Gen. 1:21; Ps. 148:7)
2. parallel to the mythical sea monster, Leviathan (cf. Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13-14; Isa. 27:1), which is used to describe one of God's creatures (cf. Job 41; Ps. 104:24-26), or as a symbol of evil (like Rahab, cf. Isa. 51:9)
3. used symbolically of the leaders of Israel's enemies
  - a. Egypt (cf. Ps. 87:4; Rahab; Ezek. 29:3)
  - b. Babylon (cf. Jer. 51:34)
4. used in Mesopotamian mythology as the chaos monster (cf. Introduction to Revelation 12 #B and specifically in Rev. 12:3)

The King James Version translates both *tannin* and *tannim* (howlers or jackals, cf. Job 30:29; Ps. 44:19; Isa. 13:22; 34:13; 35:7; 43:20; Jer. 9:11; 10:22; 49:33; 51:37; Ezek. 29:3 and Mic. 1:8) as "dragons," but they are not related terms. Jackals is the plural of *tan*.

▣ **"bound him for a thousand years"** Humans have always felt that the corporate condemnation resulting from Adam and Eve's choices is unfair. It may be that this removal of evil and temptation provides a setting theologically similar to the Garden of Eden. Not only will mankind be spared temptation from Satan, they will enjoy the presence of the Glorified Messiah for an extended period. The tragedy is that mankind will again rebel against God's reign in Christ (cf. Rev. 20:7-9)!

The OT concept of the two Jewish ages was a way of depicting the conflict between good and evil (limited dualism). The Jews pictured this cosmic conflict as being resolved in an end-time battle (cf. Psalm 2). John uses this imagery to help the persecuted Christians of his day and every day. In a book of such obvious symbolism, and a revelation so isolated and unrepeated as the 1000 year reign, why would anyone want to interpret this literally? The answer lies in the interpreter's presuppositions, not in exegesis. It is not a matter of believing the Bible; it is a matter of proper, consistent interpretation of apocalyptic literature. Believers' desire for more information about the end-time has driven them (1) to turn this book into a chronological presentation of the Second Coming and (2) to force the details to fit into their own history, culture, and interpretative, theological grid. If this is taken literally, only the Christians who lived and died during this period will reign with Christ (cf. Rev. 20:4-5)!

**20:3 "and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him"** There are five verbs related to the binding of Satan by an unnamed angel: (1) "he laid hold of"; (2) "bound him"; (3) "cast him"; (4) "shut it"; and (5) "sealed it." All of these are aorist active indicatives. This implies a complete removal of Satan's influence. This may be an allusion to Isa. 24:22.

■ **"so that he would not deceive the nations any longer"** Deceit has always been the purpose of the evil one and his agents (cf. Rev. 12:9 13:11-14; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8). Because he knew that his time was short (cf. Rev. 12:12), he was trying to lead as many as possible of God's beloved creation, men and women, away from Him into rebellion and unbelief. He also desires worship, as can be seen in the temptation of Jesus in Matt. 4:9 and 13:4.

A very pertinent question is, to whom does "the nations" refer? The unbelieving nations were previously destroyed in Rev. 17:2; 18:3 and 19:18-21. Some have said that it refers to the same nations, but it is the remnant of them, not their defeated army. Others have said that it is different nations who were not involved in the anti-God, anti-Christ conspiracy. The symbolism of "the nations" is very difficult (see notes at Rev. 2:26 and 10:11) because they are seen again in Rev. 22:2, even after the destruction of Satan and all unbelievers.

It is possible that Rev. 19:11-21 (i.e., Rev. 17-19) is recapitulated in Rev. 20:1-10 (i.e., Rev. 20-22). This may solve the question of the presence of "the nations" after the complete and final judgment of chapter 19. "The nations" usually refers to wicked, godless peoples (see note at Rev. 2:26 and 10:11 and article by Dave Mathewson, "A Re-examination of the Millennium in Rev. 20:1-6: Consummation and Recapitulation," JETS, vol. 44 #2, June 2001, pp. 237-251). The finding of Satan in Rev. 20:1-10 would be analogous to Luke 10:17-20 (Satan cast from heaven); Matt. 12:26-29 (Satan's kingdom defeated by Jesus' exorcisms); Col. 2:10,15 (disarmed the rulers and authorities). Revelation 20:1-10 would refer to Christ's victory at His first coming and the results abide until just before His second coming (amillennialism).

If this recapitulation is true then it shows how John is influenced by the single end-time battle motif of Ezekiel 38-39 (and also Psalm 2). John has taken this OT confrontation with godless nations in Asia Minor and universalized it into the eschatological battle between God's people and the people influenced by Satan and unbelief.

■ **"until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time"** There has been much discussion about why Satan "must" (*dei*) be loosed a little while. Some see it as God showing the justice of His condemnation of rebellious humans; others see it as possibly one more chance of redemption as in Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11.

It is also possible to see Satan's binding as symbolic of evil's final defeat using Jewish apocalyptic images from I Enoch 10:4-6,11-13, where Azazel (the desert demon of Lev. 16:8,10,26) is imprisoned by an angel so that he cannot lead people astray. The imprisonment was a way of holding evil angels until judgment day in Isa. 24:21-22; 2 Pet. 2:4; and Jude 1:6.

It is also possible that his release triggers the end-time, once-and-for-all confrontation between God, Messiah, Spirit, and their followers vs. Satan, the sea beast, land beast, and their followers. Creation will be purged of evil. History has become the battleground, history will be the scene of the final confrontation. The OT motif is from Psalm 2 and Ezekiel 38-39. This same end-time judgment is seen in Rev. 19:19-21. If this is true then Rev. 17-19 and 20 parallel and cover the same period from Christ's first coming to His second coming.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 20:4-6**

**<sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

**20:4 "Then I saw thrones"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:9. Numerous thrones are mentioned in

Revelation: (1) God's throne (cf. Rev. 5:1,1,17; 6:16; 7:10,15; 19:4; 21:5); (2) Satan's throne (cf. Rev. 2:13); and (3) the beast's throne (cf. Rev. 13:2; 16:10). It is a metaphor of authority and power.

■ **"and they sat on them"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:22. The question is, to whom does "they" refer? In Daniel it could be the angelic host or the saints. There has been much discussion among commentators about how many groups are mentioned in this verse.

1. some see three groups (those on the thrones, martyred Christians, and other Christians who did not worship the beast)
2. some see two groups
3. some see one group.

If it is one group, it refers to the Christian martyrs. However, there is no other Scriptural parallel to a limited reign of the martyrs. The Bible promises a reign to all saints (cf. Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 22:5; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29-30; 2 Tim. 2:12). See Special Topic at Rev. 5:10.

Others base their view of two groups on the little phrase in the latter part of Rev. 20:4, "who refuse to worship the wild beast." They see this as a second group of Christians, all believers who died a natural death but who refused to worship the beast. In light of the Second Coming in Rev. 19 and the great White Throne judgment of Rev. 20:11, this may be the best interpretation. If this interpretation is true, then the great White Throne judgment of vv.11ff refers only to the lost and is not a direct parallel to Matt. 25:31ff.

<b>NASB</b>	<b>"and judgment was given to them"</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>"and judgment was committed to them"</b>
<b>NRSV</b>	<b>"were given authority to judge"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"were given the power to judge"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"was conferred the power to give judgment"</b>

This Greek phrase can refer to either (1) their reigning with Christ (cf. Rev. 2:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:2, see Special Topic at Rev. 5:10) or (2) their receiving justice (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; Dan. 7:22).

■ **"the souls of those who had been beheaded"** Some interpret this as disembodied spirits (cf. Rev. 6:9). The term "beheaded" refers to the double-edged axe which was used for capital punishment in the Roman Republic (cf. Rom. 13:4 and Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 14:9:4). This refers to Christian martyrs.

■ **"and those who had not worshiped the beast"** If the above phrase refers to martyrs, then this phrase refers to others who died during this period of time (cf. Rev. 13:15). Now if this is a picture of the period between Christ's two comings, then it refers to all believers. If it is just this end-time period, then only that generation.

■ **"had not received the mark"** See note at Rev. 13:16-17. The mark is parallel to "who had not worshiped the beast or his image."

■ **"they came to life"** This term (*zōē*) often refers to physical resurrection (cf. Matt. 9:18; John 4:25; Acts 1:3, 9-11; Rom.14:9; Rev. 1:18; 2:8; 13:14). Interpreters cannot interpret one use of the term in Rev. 20:4 as spiritual resurrection and the second use in Rev. 20:5 as physical resurrection. Do the martyrs who reign with Christ have resurrection bodies or physical bodies which decay? If they have resurrection bodies, then what about "the nations"?

■ **"and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"** The concept of Jesus reigning is mentioned in Rev. 12:5; 19:5 and seems to be alluded to in Ps. 2:8-9; the saints' reigning with Christ is mentioned in Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:4,6 and 22:5. Is the reigning millennial or eternal (cf. Dan. 7:14,18,27 and Rev. 22:5)? Is the reigning earthly (cf. Rev. 5:10) in a Palestinian context or a universal context? See Special Topic on Reigning in the Kingdom of God at Rev. 5:10. See chart of the different millennial views in Appendix Five.

If the 1,000 years is symbolic of the church age (incarnation to *Parousia*), then this 1,000 years (10x10x10 – Hebrew superlative form of the number for completeness) refers to eternity.

However, this scenario does not fit Rev. 20:5-6 very well. This is a good example of how one interpretive approach answers some texts well, but not all. These different interpretive schemes developed as different interpreters emphasized different texts and read the whole NT through certain chosen "key" texts. There is fluidity here, ambiguity here, mystery here. Let's not compound the problem with exclusivism and dogmatism!

**20:5** The NRSV and the TEV translations make Rev. 20:5 a parenthesis. Who is involved in this first resurrection will determine who is involved in the general judgment of Rev. 20:11ff. Here are the options for "the rest of the dead."

1. the lost (cf. Rev. 20:6; Dan. 12:2)
2. Christians from previous periods (cf. Rev. 20:6; 2 Tim. 2:12)
3. Christians from this period, but who died natural deaths (cf. Rev. 20:4c)

■ **"the first resurrection"** Throughout the NT there has been an emphasis on the resurrection of the dead (cf. John 5:28-29; Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:52; Phil. 3:3; 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). However, there is no parallel in the Bible for two separate resurrections for believers, unless it is an allusion to the dual resurrection of Dan. 12:2 (the lost and saved), although George Ladd sees John 5:29 and 1 Cor. 15:24-25 as possible parallels. All theological systems, even those which believe in a literal one thousand year reign, have major interpretive problems with this split resurrection. Are raptured Christians (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 4:11 or 11:12) involved in the thousand year reign; are OT believers involved in the thousand year reign? Does this include OT martyrs, or only those who were martyred during the end-time tribulation?

■ **"they will be priests of God and of Christ"** This is an allusion to Exod. 19:5-6. This terminology, referring to Israel as God's instrument of Gentile revelation and redemption, has in the NT been widened to include all the church (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5,9 and Rev. 1:6; 5:10). In the letter to the church of Philadelphia, an allusion is made to the saints in relation to a temple (cf. Rev. 3:12). The metaphor has changed from servants of God on behalf of this world to intimate fellowship with God.

**20:6** This verse adds to the interpretive problem. Why would any believer be subject to the second death, which is a metaphor for hell (cf. Rev. 20:6)? Are only the martyrs priests to God or are all saints (cf. Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 2 Pet. 2,5,9)? Will only first century martyrs reign or will OT martyrs be included, will the martyrs in every age be included or will all Christians who remained faithful be included?

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 20:7-10**

**<sup>7</sup>When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. <sup>9</sup>And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup>And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

**20:7 "Satan will be released from his prison"** Ezekiel 36-39 is the background to this context. In Ezekiel God's people rest securely in an eschatological setting (Judah or Jerusalem or the Promised Land), but are still attacked by evil nations (Gog and Magog). In rabbinical Judaism these two enemies came to be used to describe all of the enemies of the Messiah and the people of God. Originally, Gog was a man from the land of Magog, but in this chapter, the terms have been personified into twin enemies. John always reworks his OT allusions to fit his first century readers.

**20:8 "and will come out to deceive"** It is amazing that mankind can be led into rebellion after a 1,000 reign of Christ! Were these nations "unbelievers" or "initially believers?" Is Christ's presence and reign not able to effect permanent change in human society?

■ **"Gog and Magog"** This is an allusion to the continuing rebellion of the unbelieving nations. After Israel is restored to the promised land (cf. Ezekiel 37), based on God's actions (cf. Ezekiel 36), she will still have problems with the nations who will again invade her ("Gog in the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal," Ezek. 38:2). These stand for leaders' names or regional names of invading armies; Ezek. 38:5-6,13 make it an international army. Chapters 38-39 of Ezekiel have an end-time setting (cf. Ezek. 38:8,10,14,16,18; 39:11). These chapters have been the source of much of John's OT end-time allusions. Things will get worse (birth pains of the new age) before they get better (new Jerusalem).

Notice how John has taken OT texts but reworked them in light of first century Greco-Roman culture. Gog, Magog, and Babylon are not enemies from Mesopotamia or Turkey, but Rome.

■ **"the nations which are in the four corners of the earth"** This is obviously a universal deception and rebellion (cf. Rev. 7:1). The number "four" had symbolic significance representing the whole world.

■ **"like the sands of the seashore"** This phrase was originally used of the seed of Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 32:12 and Heb. 11:12). This may be another example of evil mimicking the terms which describe God's people. However, because of the first phrase of Rev. 20:9, this seems to be just another definition to denote a very large army.

**20:9** Does this verse refer to a literal battle on the plains of Megiddo as an end-time army moves toward the Palestinian city of Jerusalem? There are many allusions to this scenario in the OT (cf. Psalm 2; Ezekiel 38-39; Dan. 9:24-27; Zech. 13-14). However, Jerusalem is many miles from Megiddo.

In Revelation "the city" is usually (1) human society organized and functioning apart from God, personified as Babylon and (2) historically referring to Rome in John's day (cf. Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:2,10,16,18,19,21). However, the city of Jerusalem is possibly referred to in Rev. 11:8 and here.

The NT authors in general, and John in particular, have taken OT imagery and universalized it to relate to all mankind. The issue in Revelation is not Jews versus Gentiles, but believer versus unbeliever. This then is the same end-time battle as 6:15-16; 11:18; 16:12,14,16; 19:19 (parallelism).

■ **"and fire came down from heaven and devoured them"** This is an allusion to Ezek. 38:22 and 39:6. The victory is God's!

**20:10 "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone"** This is where the beast and the false prophet were cast in Rev. 19:20. This is where Death and Hades will be cast in Rev. 20:14 and where all who have not trusted Christ will be cast in Rev. 20:15. It is synonymous with *Gehenna* (hell) and represents eternal separation from fellowship with God and His Christ (cf. Mark 9:43,48).

■ **"and they will be tortured day and night forever and ever"** This is very similar to Rev. 14:10-11 and 19:5. The concept of a permanent separation is alluded to in Matt. 25:46 where the same term (*aiōnios*), used for heaven, is used for hell.

Most of God's judgments had redemptive purposes; that is true of the OT and the NT. Hell has no known redemptive purpose. It fulfills God's promise to restore justice and righteousness. Hell is the isolation of evil from God's good creation. As horrible as hell is for mankind, it is worse for God. By allowing His highest creation, mankind, to have a choice (one aspect of the image of God in man), God knew that a significant percentage would choose self and sin. Hell is an open, bleeding sore in the heart of God that will never be healed. Hell is a tragic mystery of the paradox of the eternal love and the justice of God!

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 20:11-15**

**<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and**

heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of *them* according to their deeds. <sup>14</sup>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**20:11 "Then I saw a great white throne"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:9. The great white throne seems to be a parallel to Matt. 25:31-46, but if this is only the judgment of the lost, it cannot be parallel to Matthew 25 because there the sheep (saved) and the goats (lost) are addressed together.

■ **"and Him who sat upon it"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:9. In the NT God has made Christ the Judge (cf. John 5:22,27; 9:39; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1 and 1 Pet. 4:5). However, in some passages, Christ said that He did not come to judge (cf. John 3:17-21; 12:47-48). Christ did not come to judge, but to save, however, the fact that humans reject Him brings judgment on themselves. So, who sits on this throne? Is it Jesus? This is possible because of Matt. 25:31-46 and particularly John 5:22 and 2 Cor. 5:10, however, most of the time in the NT and especially in the book of the Revelation, God the Father is the One who is seated on the throne (cf. Rom. 14:10; Rev. 5:1,7,13; 6:16; 7:10,15; 19:4 and 21:5).

■ **"from whose presence earth and heaven fled away"** Some see this as the removal of the curse which was put on physical creation when Adam and Eve rebelled and fell (cf. Gen. 3:17-19 and Rom. 8:19-22). Others see this as a metaphor for the complete destruction of the current physical order as described in 2 Pet. 3:10,12 (cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21).

This is OT language signifying: (1) the coming of God to His creation, cf. Ps. 114:3-6; Isa. 13:10; 24:19-20,23; Joel 2:10,30-31; 3:15; Zech. 14:6) or (2) God does not need His two eternal witnesses anymore, cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15. He reigns!

Heaven in this context does not refer to God's throne, but to the atmosphere above the earth as in Gen. 1:1.

**20:12 "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne"** The exact makeup of this large group is uncertain and is usually based on one's presupposition, as are most interpretations of the details of the visions in the book of the Revelation.

The phrase "the great and small" can refer to (1) believers (cf. Ps. 115:13; Rev. 11:18; 19:5) or (2) unbelievers (cf. Rev. 13:16; 19:18). In this context it is parallel to "sheep and goats" of Matt. 25:31-46 or "those in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth" of Phil. 2:10-11.

■ **"and books were opened"** This is an allusion to Dan. 7:10. There are two books mentioned: the book of deeds or remembrances and the book of life (cf. Rev. 3:5; and 13:8). The book of life is described in Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27. The book of deeds or remembrances is described in Ps. 56:8; 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16 and Rev. 20:12-13. These are metaphors for God's memory. God will deal fairly with His creation; humans are responsible for their actions and motives and are accountable to God (cf. Gal. 6:7). There is only one judgment.

■ **"and the dead were judged from the things written in the books, according to their deeds"** Judgment is based on mankind's lifestyle choices (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). We reap what we sow (cf. Gal. 6:7). The theological truth that all humans are judged by their works can be seen in Jer. 17:10; Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:13. For a full list of references see note at Rev. 2:23.

**20:13 "the sea. . . and death. . . and Hades gave up the dead which were in them"** This does not

refer to the fact that the dead are kept in three different places; the parallel metaphors assert that all of the dead stood before God (cf. Phil. 2:10-11).

**20:14 "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire"** These were referred to earlier in Rev. 6:8. Death, mankind's great enemy (cf. Heb. 2:14-15), has been defeated and removed (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26,54-55; 2 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 1:18; 21:4).

- **"the second death"** The Bible speaks of three stages of death:
  1. spiritual death, cf. Genesis 3; Isa. 59:2; Rom. 5:12-21; 7:10-11; Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13; James 1:15
  2. physical death, cf. Genesis 5
  3. eternal death called "the second death" in Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8, which refers to Hell

**20:15 "if anyone's name"** This sentence is a first class conditional which assumes that there will be those who are not written in the book of life (a metaphor for those who have not trusted Christ).

- **"the book of life"** See note at Rev. 13:8.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why do so many godly, Bible-believing commentators disagree on the interpretation of this chapter?
2. If this book is written in symbolic language (apocalyptic genre), why do so many people take this chapter so literally and historically?
3. Why is Satan bound for a little while? Where do the nations come from in Rev. 20:3 and 8?
4. How many groups are involved in Rev. 20:4 and why is this significant?
5. Why is it so surprising to find a two-stage resurrection in this chapter?
6. How do resurrected saints co-exist with physical nations?
7. Who is involved in the great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15?



# REVELATION 21-22

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS <sup>4</sup>	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The New Heaven and the New Earth	All Things Made New	Vision of the New Jerusalem	The New Heaven and the New Earth	The Heavenly Jerusalem
		(21:1-22:5)		
21:1-4	21:1-8	21:1-4	21:1-4	21:1-4
21:5-8		21:5-8	21:5-8	21:5-8
The New Jerusalem	The New Jerusalem	The Measuring of the City	The New Jerusalem	The Messianic Jerusalem
21:9-14	21:9-21	21:9-14	21:9-21	21:9-14
21:15-21	The Glory of the New Jerusalem	21:15-21		21:15-22:2
		The River and the Tree of Life		
21:22-22:5	21:22	21:22-22:5	21:22-22:3a	
	The River of Life			
	22:1-5		22:3b-5	22:3-5
The Coming of Christ	The Time is Near	Epilogue	The Coming of Jesus	
22:6-7	22:6-11	22:6	22:6	22:6-7
		22:7	22:7	
22:8-11	Jesus Testifies to the Churches	22:8-9	22:8-11	22:8-9
		22:10-11		22:10-15
22:12-13	22:12-17	22:12-13	22:12-13	
22:14-15		22:14-15	22:14-15	Epilogue
22:16-17		22:16-17	22:16	22:16
			22:17a	22:17
			22:17b	
			22:17c	
	A Warning		Conclusion	
22:18-19	22:18-19	22:18-19	22:18-19	22:18-19
	I Am Coming Quickly			

22:20	22:20-21	22:20	22:20	22:20
		22:20b	22:20b	22:20b
22:21		22:21	22:21	22:21

## READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. Revelation 20-22 form the seventh literary unit. Revelation 21-22 conclude the actions of God in human history and initiate the eternal kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:13-14,27; 1 Cor. 15:27-28). Revelation 22:6-21 is the conclusion to the entire book.

B. Almost every element in these two chapters is an allusion to (1) Genesis 1-3; (2) Psalm 110; or (3) intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature.

C. There has been much discussion about the unusual elements in this last section.

1. mention of "the nations" – Rev. 21:14; 22:2
2. mention of "The kings of the earth" – Rev. 21:24,26
3. mention of the "unclean outside the city" – Rev. 21:27; 22:15

There seem to be several possible reasons for including these elements:

1. John is alluding to OT prophecies. Like the parables in the Gospels, interpreters are not meant to literally interpret the details, but identify the major emphases.
2. John's purpose is to show the ultimate distinctions between the saved and the lost.
3. The "nations" mentioned in this section are used in a general ethnic sense like "the people of God" in Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 21:14 and 22:5.
4. Because of these elements some have seen the saved Jews inside the city and the saved Gentiles outside the city. But, because of Galatians 3:29 and Ephesians 2:11-3:13, this simply cannot be a viable theological option.
5. I think there is a recapitulation between Rev. 17-19 and Rev. 20-22. This explains the recurrent themes throughout this section.

D. There is one more series of the "seven" found in these two chapters. These are the things that are no more

1. The sea – Rev. 21:1
2. Death – Rev. 21:4
3. Mourning – Rev. 21:4
4. Weeping – Rev. 21:4
5. Pain – Rev. 21:4

- 6. Night – Rev. 21:25
- 7. The curse – Rev. 22:3

E. As the judgments associated with the Second Coming of Christ are depicted in dramatic fashion in three visions (seals, trumpets, and bowls), possibly heaven is depicted in dramatic fashion in three OT metaphors:

- 1. The Tabernacle, Rev. 21:1-8
  - 2. New Jerusalem, Rev. 21:9-26
  - 3. The Garden of Eden, Rev. 22:1-5
- This may also be true of the Prologue (Rev. 1:1-8), which emphasizes
- 1. The immediacy of Christ's return
  - 2. The faithfulness of God's words
  - 3. The needed holiness of God's people

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 21:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, <sup>4</sup> and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

**21:1 "Then I saw"** There is a span of some period of time, how much time depends on your interpretation of "the thousand years" of chapter 20.

■ **"a new heaven and a new earth"** This Greek term for "new," *kainos*, emphasizes quality, not chronological time (cf. Rev. 2:17; 3:12; 5:9; 14:3; 21:1,2,5). This was an OT theme, a recreated earth (cf. Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17; 66:22; see also Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Pet. 3:10,12). All believers are citizens of this new Kingdom (cf. Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:19; Heb. 12:23) and share this new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:24). A parallel theological concept would be the "city of God not made with human hands" of Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14.

The new creation will be like the initial creation. Heaven may be a restored Garden of Eden. God, mankind, the animals, and all natural creation will fellowship and rejoice again! The Bible begins with God, mankind, and the animals in perfect fellowship in a garden (cf. Genesis 1-2). The Bible ends with God and mankind in a garden setting (cf. Revelation 21-22) and by prophetic implication, the animals (cf. Isa. 11:6-8; 65:25). Believers are not going to heaven; the new Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven (cf. Rev. 21:2) and coming to a recreated and cleansed earth. God and mankind are together again (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 8:8,10; Rev. 21:3).

■ **"for the first heaven and the first earth passed away"** There will be a restored creation (cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; Col. 1:20), no longer affected by sin (cf. II Baruch 37:6; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 20:11).

■ **"and there is no longer *any* sea"** There have been several interpretations of this phrase (see note at Rev. 4:6):

- 1. because the sea is mentioned in Rev. 4:6 as a way of speaking of the holiness of God which separates Him from sinful mankind, some have seen its exclusion here as the restoration of perfect fellowship between God and humanity
- 2. because in Rev. 20:13 the sea seemed to be one of the three holding places of the dead, it is a

- way of saying that all of the dead have been assigned to one of two eternal destinies
3. because the first beast in Rev. 13:1 comes out of the sea and there is an allusion to the sea as referring to evil people in Isa. 57:20, it is possibly the wicked that are no more
  4. because Rev. 17:15 is a quote from Isa. 17:12-13 where the waters stand for people, many assert that it refers to the wicked nations, like Psalm 2. I like #1 best.

**21:2 "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem"** Jerusalem in Palestine is called "the holy city" in Isa. 52:1 (cf. Isa. 48:2; 64:10; Dan. 9:24; Neh. 11:1). This new Jerusalem is first mentioned in Rev. 3:12 and alluded to in Heb. 11:10; 12:22; and 13:14. This shows how John took OT prophecies, terms, titles, and promises and applied them to the new people of God. This city is not the old covenant Jerusalem in Palestine as some millennialists have assumed, but the new covenant heavenly Jerusalem.

■ **"coming down out of heaven"** There are not two descendings, one in Rev. 21:2 and another in Rev. 21:10. Apocalyptic language is very fluid and should not be structured chronologically, logically, or literally.

■ **"made ready as a bride adorned for her husband"** This is an allusion to Isa. 61:10 (cf. Rev. 19:7). In these last chapters several metaphors are used to describe the people of God: (1) a bride (cf. Rev. 19:7; 21:2); (2) a wedding guest (cf. Rev. 19:9); and (3) a city (cf. Rev. 21:22,9; 22:2).

The OT metaphor of YHWH (cf. especially Hosea 1-3) as husband and Israel as bride is the background of the image of the Church as the bride of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:21-31).

**21:3 ""Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men""** This Greek phrase repeats the OT promises of God dwelling with men in three different ways:

1. it is an allusion to the tabernacle, a symbol of YHWH's presence
2. "He shall dwell among them" is what the term "Immanuel" of Isa. 7:14 (cf. John 1:14) meant
3. "they shall be His people" is covenant terminology; now all believing people (cf. John 10:16) are God's chosen people (cf. Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:23,27).

**21:4 "and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes"** This is an allusion to Isa. 25:8 (cf. Matt. 5:4; 7:17). The new age will be a time of joy, peace, wholeness, and praise!

■ **"and there will no longer be any death"** This last enemy (cf. Rev. 20:14) will be destroyed (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26). Believers will have their new bodies like Christ's resurrected body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50-57; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thess. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:2).

■ **"there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain"** This is an allusion to Isa. 65:19 and also reflects Isa. 35:10.

■ **"the first things have passed away"** The first created order was affected by the Fall (cf. Gen. 3; 6:5,1-12,13), but a new order will be unaffected by sin (cf. Heb. 12:27-28).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 21:5-8**

**<sup>5</sup>And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." <sup>6</sup>Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. <sup>7</sup>He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. <sup>8</sup>But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."**

**21:5 "And He who sits on the throne said"** God speaks several times in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:8 and probably 16:1,17). There seems to be a purposeful ambiguity as to who sits on the throne, YHWH or

Messiah (cf. Rev. 22:3). See fuller note at Rev. 20:11. As the first creation was brought into being by God's (i.e., Father through the Son) spoken word (cf. Gen. 1:3,6,9,14,20,24; Ps. 33:6,9), so also will His new creation.

■ **"I am making all things new"** This is the promise of Isaiah 60-66. This refers to the new age of the Spirit, the age of the Messiah, the age of righteousness, which Jesus inaugurated at His first coming and will consummate at His second coming. This is a metaphor for the certainty of God's will becoming a reality (cf. Rev. 1:19; 14:13; 17:17; 19:9).

■ **"these words are faithful and true"** This phrase was used to describe (1) Jesus, cf. Rev. 1:5; 3:7,14; 19:11; (2) Jesus' followers, cf. Rev. 17:14; and (3) God's word cf. Rev. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6. Often God is described as "righteous and true" (cf. Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). The Hebrew thought behind this Greek phrase would imply trustworthiness.

**21:6 "It is done"** This is a perfect active indicative. This could relate to the certainty of God's promises regarding both wrath for unbelievers and deliverance for believers (cf. Rev. 6:11; 10:7; 16:17), or the immanence of God's promises (cf. Rev. 1:1,3; 3:11; 10:6; 12:12; 22:7,10).

■ **"I am the Alpha and the Omega"** This is used of God in Isa. 44:6 and Rev. 1:8; however, it is extremely significant that this phrase, although a title for the Father, is also used for the Messiah in Rev. 1:17 and 22:13. It is another example of the NT authors applying titles for God to the Son.

There are several inclusive types of phrases which describe God's eternal, unique existence:

1. "the first and the last," cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13
2. "beginning and the end," cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:13; and KJV 1:8
3. "who is and who was and who is to come," cf. Rev. 1:4,8; 4:8

All of these are related to God's covenant name, YHWH, which is the causative form of the Hebrew verb "to be" (cf. Exod. 3:14; Isa. 43:10,13; 46:41; Ps. 90:2; 93:2).

■ **"I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost"** The OT allusion is to Isaiah 55. The invitation is for everyone and it is absolutely free (cf. Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Eph. 2:8)! What a tremendous invitation from God Himself of the availability of forgiveness. Mankind's redemption has always been central in the heart and mind of God (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 14:6-7; 16:9,11; 22:17).

In the OT springs of water are often associated with God providing for the spiritual needs of mankind (cf. Ps. 36:9; Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; also John 4:10).

**21:7 "He who overcomes"** This is a present active participle, which is a continuing reference to the doctrine of perseverance amidst a time of terrible persecution. This phrase occurs throughout the letters to the seven churches (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:3,5,12,21), which link the opening chapters of the Revelation to the conclusion. See Special Topic on Perseverance at Rev. 2:2.

■ **"will inherit these things"** The reward of inheritance in Rev. 21:7 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4,5; Rom. 8:17) and the warnings in Rev. 21:8 are against the backdrop of potential apostasy in an age of persecution. The series of wicked apostates (cf. Rev. 21:8) is somewhat similar to the one found in 1 Cor. 6:9-10.

■ **"and I will be his God and he will be My son"** These are covenant phrases (cf. Rev. 21:3) which are so common in the OT (cf. Exod. 6:7; 29:45,46; Lev. 26:11-12; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26-27; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 33:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:28; Hos. 2:23; Zech. 8:8; 13:9) and are also used in the NT (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16,18).

The concept of covenant is probably the unifying theme of the Bible. Mankind has been alienated from God (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-18,23). Mankind cannot find God. God reaches out for us; God is pursuing us! His offer of reunion is one of covenant. He initiates (cf. Jer. 31:3; John 6:44,65); He sets the agenda, but mankind must respond in specified ways. These ways have varied in content (Adam/Eve, forbidden tree;

Noah, a boat; Abraham, a land, a son; Moses, a law code), but the form of acceptance, faith in the faithfulness of God, remains the same (cf. Romans 4). The Old Covenant had requirements; so does the New (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21). Mankind must respond both initially and continually in faith, repentance, obedience, service, worship, and perseverance.

See [SPECIAL TOPIC: THE SON OF GOD](#) at Rev. 2:18.

**21:8** It is unusual to find this series of sins when judgment has already occurred and the wicked have supposedly been removed (by the victory of Jesus at the Second Coming, cf. Rev. 19:5-21 and the White Throne, cf. 20:11-15). This is not to say that some believers have not committed these sins but that their lives are not characterized by these sins (cf. 1 John 3:6,9). This seems to be a literary technique to show the eternal difference between the saved and the lost or an aspect of apocalyptic drama (repeated for emphasis).

▣ **"the lake that burns with fire. . .the second death"** Obviously the lake of fire is synonymous with the second death or our concept of Hell, which Jesus called *Gehenna* (a Greek term which does not appear in Revelation). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: Where Are the Dead?](#) at Rev. 1:18.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 21:9-14**

**<sup>9</sup>Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."  
<sup>10</sup>And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. <sup>12</sup>It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. <sup>13</sup>There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup>And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

**21:9 "one of the seven angels"** This is the exact description of the angel in Rev. 15:1,6-8; 16:1; and 17:1 who poured out the seven bowls. There is a tradition in rabbinical Judaism that there are seven Angels of the Presence who serve God. Here, there is one angel for each plague.

**21:10 "And he carried me away in the Spirit"** This is a literary technique to show the different visions (cf. Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

▣ **"to a great and high mountain"** Many believe that this is in direct antithesis to the great whore who was on the plain. However, John alludes to many OT passages, so here he may be referring to the mysterious northern mountain where God lives (cf. Ezek. 40:2; Isa. 2:2; 14:13; Mic. 4:1; I Enoch 18:8; 25:3). It is even possible that it alludes to Satan's temptation of Jesus in Matt. 4:8.

▣ **"and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven"** This is heavenly Jerusalem, a metaphor of God's presence (cf. Rev. 21:2). The earthly sinful Jerusalem was discussed in Rev. 11:1-13. The capital city of David has become universalized into the end-time abode of all of God's people (cf. John 14:2-3).

**21:11 "Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper"** The city (cf. Rev. 21:11-27) is described in very beautiful, physical, and moral terms. Like all of the book of Revelation, this chapter is symbolic. Humans' sinful, finite minds simply cannot comprehend the ultimate joy and glory of the presence of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). Literal jewels and a fantastic ancient city may be good metaphors, but they are not ultimate reality! Heaven is really both a person (Jesus), and a place (for fellowship with the

Triune God).

**21:12 "with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels"** This is an allusion to Ezek. 48:31-34. The number "twelve" occurs again and again in the remainder of this chapter and the first few verses of chapter 22. It is the biblical numerical symbol of organization (twelve months, twelve tribes, or twelve apostles) or of God's people. See Special Topic: the Number Twelve at Rev. 7:4.

■ **"and names were written on them, which are *the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel*"** The list of the twelve tribes in Rev. 7:5-8 is slightly altered to show their symbolic nature. Here, it is very important to note that the OT people of God, described as gates in Rev. 21:12, are united with the NT people of God, described as foundation stones, in Rev. 21:14. There has always been only one people of God, but this mystery was not clearly revealed until the gospel (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13).

**21:14 "the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb"** All of these metaphors allude to Ezekiel's end-time temple (cf. Ezekiel 40-48).

Many commentators have asserted that this verse shows that the author cannot have been John the Apostle. However, Paul uses a similar phrase in Eph. 2:20.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 21:15-21**

**<sup>15</sup>The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. <sup>16</sup>The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup>And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, *according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.* <sup>18</sup>The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup>The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; <sup>20</sup>the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. <sup>21</sup>And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.**

**21:15 "The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city"** Measuring was used earlier to show God's protection and care (cf. Rev. 11:1-2; Jer. 31:38-40; Zech. 2:1-5). The end-time prophecy of Ezekiel 40 also involves measuring.

**21:16 "The city is laid out as a square"** This may be an allusion to the Holy of Holies (cf. 1 Kgs. 6:19-20), which was also a perfect cube.

The reason that there is no temple (cf. Rev. 21:22) is because God Himself will be the temple. This may be John's way of showing that OT prophecies like Ezekiel 40-48 are symbolic or have been fulfilled in a different way.

■ **"fifteen hundred miles"** Literally this is "twelve thousand stadia—one hundred and forty-four cubits." These are multiples of twelve; they do not refer to a literal city, but perfect measurements showing that God is providing the unique atmosphere for permanent joy and fellowship between Himself and His people (cf. John 14:2-3) in a perfect cube symbol like the OT "Holy of Holies."

**21:18-20 "The material of the wall was"** This series of stones may be identified with

1. the stones on the ephod of the High Priest (cf. Exod. 28:17-20), however, the order and names are different. This was not unusual because the names of ancient stones changed from country to country and century to century.

2. the jeweled city of Isa. 54:11-17
3. the splendor of the king of Tyre (or Satan) conveyed in royal (or heavenly) jewels in Ezek. 28:12-13
4. the Zodiac, but presented in reverse order (Philo and Josephus)

**21:21 "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl"** This is symbolic. It goes back to the rabbinical traditions of the Talmud, "the *Sanhedrin*" 100a, which states that the end-time city gates would be made out of a single stone 45 feet tall.

■ **"And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass"** This is symbolic. We must realize that God's city is not simply human opulence, but symbolizes the inestimable value and purity of God's presence.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 21:22-27**

**<sup>22</sup>I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup>And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup>The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup>In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; <sup>26</sup>and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; <sup>27</sup> and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

**21:22 "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"** This is highly unusual when compared with the numerous passages in Revelation where a heavenly temple is depicted (cf. Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:1,2,9,19; 14:15,17; 15:5,6,8; 16:1,17). This same concept of a temple in heaven is revealed in the book of Hebrews (cf. Rev. 8:2-5; 9:11,23-24.)

■ **"the Lord God the Almighty"** Here again are the three most used OT titles for God (YHWH, *Elohim* and *El Shaddai*) used in combination (cf. Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; see Special Topic: Names for Deity at Rev. 1:8) to show the majesty of Him who sits on the throne. Notice His close connection with the Lamb of Revelation 5. They reign together and there is only one throne (cf. Rev. 22:1,3).

**21:23 "the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb"** The glory of the Father and Son is all the illumination that is needed (cf. Ps. 36:9; Isa. 24:23; 60:19-20; Zech. 14:6-7 and also Rev. 22:5). This is possibly a way of emphatically rejecting astral worship.

**21:24 "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it"** It is very difficult to understand why "the nations" are still mentioned in this post-White Throne section of Revelation. It may simply be an OT allusion to Ps. 72:10-11; Isa. 49:23; 60:3,15,16. It is not literal, but literary! It represents all the peoples from all the tribes and nations who make up the people of God.

**21:25 "In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed"** This is an allusion to Isa. 60:11 or Zech. 14:6-7. The concept of darkness in the Bible is often a metaphor for evil (cf. Matt. 6:23; 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Light and dark were especially important symbolic theological contrasts for John (cf. John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35-36,46; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-11). The gates never close symbolizing openness, availability, no fear of attack.

**21:27 "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying"** This is an allusion to Isa. 52:1; Ezek. 44:9; Zech. 14:21 which seems to be a literary technique showing the ultimate difference between God's people and those of the evil one (cf. Rev. 21:24). The new age is characterized in the lighter, open city, a city of complete righteousness. There is no evil present!



- **"written in the Lamb's book of life"** This metaphorical phrase "the book of life" is also found in Rev. 20:12-15, where two books are mentioned:
  1. the book of life, which is made up of the names of God's people (cf. Exod. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27)
  2. the book of deeds or remembrances which records both wicked and righteous deeds (cf. Ps. 56:8, 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16)
 These are metaphorical of God's perfect memory.

## REVELATION 22

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, <sup>2</sup>in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds* of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; <sup>4</sup>they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.**

**22:1 "Then he showed me a river of the water of life"** There should be no chapter division here. The concept of a river flowing from the presence of God is an allusion to the OT (cf. Ps. 46:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8). Water is a common metaphor referring to God abundantly supplying the spiritual needs of His people (cf. Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; John 4:10-15; Rev. 7:17; 21:6). Only John uses the term life (*zoē*) to refer to resurrection life.

- **"clear as crystal"** This speaks of the purity of God's heavenly city (cf. Rev. 4:6).
- **"coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb"** There is only one throne (cf. Rev. 21:22). This is anthropomorphic language from ancient eastern royal court imagery. God is an eternal spirit; He does not sit on a physical throne. It is a metaphor of His sovereign rule.

**22:2 "On either side of the river was the tree of life"** This same tree is alluded to in Rev. 2:7. This whole vision is from Ezek. 47:1-12 (here, Rev. 22:12). There are many references in Jewish apocalyptic literature to the tree of life found in Gen. 2:9; 3:22 (cf. Enoch 25:2ff; IV Esdras 7:53; 8:52; II Enoch 8:3). That which Adam forfeited from God (fellowship, knowledge, eternal life), God now freely gives to redeemed mankind (cf. Phil. 2:6).

- **"bearing twelve *kinds* of fruit"** See [SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NUMBER TWELVE](#) at Rev. 7:4.
- **"and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"** This is highly unusual because there should be nothing left to cure! However, this may simply be a quote from Ezek. 47:12; possibly the recurrent theological theme is that God wants all ("the nations") to be saved (cf. Isa. 2:3-4; 45:22-25; 60:3; 66:18-19; Zech. 2:11; 8:20-23).

**22:3 "There shall no longer be any curse"** This is an allusion to Gen. 3:17 and Zech. 14:11. The new age has come and the curse of the OT (cf. Eph. 2:15-16; Col. 2:14) has been removed by Christ's death (cf. Rom. 8:18,25; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:13,16). In Revelation the crystal sea of Rev. 4:6 symbolizes God's transcendent holiness. Fallen mankind could not approach God, but now the sea is removed (cf. Rev. 21:1).

It is possible that the term represents the Hebrew *charam*, meaning destroyed or totally destroyed (cf.

Zech. 14:11). If this is the OT allusion, then this verse refers to the security of the new Jerusalem and would be similar to the promises of 1 Pet. 1:4-5.

▣ Notice the unusual grammatical features of this phrase. There is one throne, but two on it (i.e., God and the Lamb). However, the servants serve "Him" (singular). This involves the mystery of monotheism and incarnation. One God, but also a divine Messiah (and a personal Holy Spirit).

**22:4 "they will see His face"** In the OT to see God meant death. Moses was not allowed to see God's face (cf. Exod. 33:20). Seeing God or dwelling with God are rewards to those who are pure (cf. Ps. 11:7; 16:11; 17:15; 140:13; Matt. 5:8). The original intimacy intended in Eden has been fully restored (cf. Ps. 42:1-2)!

▣ **"and His name will be on their foreheads"** As Satan marked his followers (cf. Rev. 13:1-17; 14:9; 20:4), God marked His (cf. Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). It was a symbol of ownership and security. See note at Rev. 7:2.

**22:5 "there shall no longer be any night"** (cf. Rev. 21:23-25; Isa. 60:19-20; Zech. 14:7)

▣ **"and they will reign forever and ever"** Who rules with Christ during the millennial kingdom? Rev. 20:4-5 suggests only Christians who lived during the end-time persecution, but Rev. 2:26 and 5:10 imply that all saints will rule with Christ on the earth. There is no clear differentiation in the Bible between the eternal reign (cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:14,18; Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:33; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 11:15) and the millennial reign. It is hermeneutically inappropriate to derive a major doctrine from an apocalyptic passage. This verse implies an eternal reign.

The imagery of God's people experiencing an evil invader, who is totally destroyed by God, is taken from Ezekiel 37-39. John never intended this to be interpreted literally! It is an abuse of authorial intent to turn apocalyptic imagery into historical literalness! Our love for the Bible and our curiosity about the future have caused the modern western church to interpret prophecy and apocalyptic literature in strange and strained ways! See Special Topic: Reigning in the Kingdom of God at Rev. 5:10.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:6**

**<sup>6</sup>And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.**

**22:6 "he said to me"** This refers to the angels who had the seven bowls of judgment (cf. Rev. 21:9; 22:1,8,9,10).

▣ **"these words are faithful and true"** This phrase is used to describe

1. Jesus (cf. Rev. 1:5; 3:7,14; 19:11)
2. Jesus' followers (cf. Rev. 17:14)
3. God's word (cf. Rev. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6)

Often God is described as "righteous and true" (cf. Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). The Hebrew behind this phrase implies total trustworthiness.

▣ **"The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets"** This is possibly:

1. an allusion to Rev. 19:10
2. a reference to the inspiration of the OT (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)
3. a reference to the inspiration of the NT (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15-16)
4. a reference to the gospel preachers of John's day
5. a reference to John's book (visions)

The original Greek texts did not have capitalization. Often the translators or interpreters must decide whether "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. This text refers to the human spirit (cf. 1 Cor.

14:32; Heb. 12:9).

■ **"sent His angel"** This is an allusion to Rev. 1:1. These closing verses are very similar in their motifs to chapter 1. The traditional personal letter format used in Rev. 1 is used again in Rev. 22.

■ **"the things which must soon take place"** There is a series of allusions to the imminence of the Lord's coming (cf. Rev. 1:1,3; 3:11; Rev. 22:6 [twice], Rev. 22:7, 10, 12, and 20). The two-thousand-year delay thus far is somewhat difficult for believers to understand (the delay is revealed in 2 Thessalonians), but it must be seen that every generation of Christians has the hope of the coming of the Lord in their day. There is a real tension in the NT between the any-moment return of the Lord and some things that must occur first. Believers are to remain faithful and active!

Here is a brief quote on this subject from my commentary on Matthew.

"There is theological paradoxical tension between

1. the any moment return (cf. Matt. 24:27,44) and the fact that some events in history must occur
2. the Kingdom as future and the Kingdom as present.

The NT states that some events will occur before the Second Coming.

1. the Gospel preached to the whole world (cf. Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10)
2. the great apostasy (cf. Matt. 24:10-13,21; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1ff; 2 Thess. 2:3)
3. the revelation of the "man of sin" (cf. Dan. 7:23-26; 9:24-27; 2 Thess. 2:3)
4. removal of the one who restrains (cf. 2 Thess. 2:6-7)
5. Jewish revival (cf. Zech. 12:10; Rom.11)"

Those who believe that there is significant parallelism among the seven literary units of the book also assert that each one of them represents the period between the first and second comings of Christ from different perspectives (e.g., William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*). If this is true then the texts that refer to the imminent coming of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:3; 3:11; 22:7,10,12,20) refer to the initiation of these prophecies after the death and resurrection of Christ. The eschatological ball is rolling!

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:7**

**<sup>7</sup>"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."**

**22:7 "I am coming quickly"** Apparently the angel is quoting Jesus (cf. Rev. 22:12-15). This is stated specifically by Jesus in Rev. 22:16. Exactly who speaks in Rev. 22:17 and Rev. 22:18-19 is uncertain, but Jesus speaks again in Rev. 22:20 and John in Rev. 22:21. See Special Topic: Soon Return at Rev. 1:3.

■ **"Blessed is he who"** This is another of the seven blessings for believers found throughout the book (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

■ **"prophecy"** This book is a prophecy and must be interpreted in the light of prophetic literature (cf. Rev. 22:9-10,18-19; 1:3; 10:11). This book is not historical narrative! Prophecy always has a conditional element. New Testament eschatological passages reflect OT prophetic insight that viewed the end-time through contemporary occurrences and faith responses. Many scholars believe the apocalyptic genre grew out of Jewish propheticism. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY](#) at Rev. 1:3.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup>I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."**

**22:8** This is a highly unusual verse. This is the exact problem that John had in Rev. 19:10. Apparently he

must have thought that this angel was deity.

**22:9 "those who heed the words of this book"** Christianity involves an initial decision of repentance, faith, and continuing repentance, faith, obedience, and perseverance! Revelation, written to persecuted Christians, emphasizes perseverance. The temptation for our culture today is not physical persecution, but "dry rot," apathy, practical atheism, materialism, shallow Christianity with all benefits and no responsibility!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup>And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. <sup>11</sup>Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy."**

**22:10 "Do not seal up"** This is exactly opposite of Isa. 8:16; Dan. 8:26 and 12:4,9. The time of prophetic fulfillment has arrived. God's warnings to unbelievers and encouragement to believers is now! The decisive decision is demanded now! The Kingdom is present.

■ **"The time is near"** See Special Topic: Soon Return at Rev. 1:3.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:12-13**

**<sup>12</sup>"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. <sup>13</sup>I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."**

**22:11-12 "to render to every man according to what he has done"** This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim.4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12). God will reward those who love Him and live for Him in the midst of this fallen world system (cf. 2:23; 20:12-13). Lives reveal the spiritual reality and vitality of inner faith (cf. Matthew 7). Humans are stewards of the gift of life and will give an account to God!

This is not to imply a "works-righteousness." Mankind is redeemed through the grace of God by means of Christ's death and resurrection and the Spirit's wooing! However, the evidence that one has met God is a changed and changing life of Christlikeness! One's priorities and allocation of resources reveal the heart!

**22:11** This is an allusion to Dan. 12:10.

**22:12 "I am coming quickly"** See Special Topic at Rev. 1:3.

**22:13** This verse is an allusion to the OT titles for YHWH found in Rev. 1:8 and 21:6, but here it refers to Christ. The transfer of these OT titles to Jesus was one way NT authors affirmed His deity. Verse 13 has three such OT titles or phrases which originally described the eternal God (cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), but now are used for Jesus (cf. Rev. 1:17; 2:8).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:14-15**

**<sup>14</sup>Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup>Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.**

**22:14 "Blessed"** This is the last of the seven blessings for believers found in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

▣ **"those who wash their robes"** This is a metaphor for trusting in the atonement of Christ (cf. Rev. 7:14). Believers are accepted because He was accepted (cf. Eph. 1:6). Believers live because He died. Believers have resurrection life because He lives!

There is a Greek manuscript variant in this phrase.

1. "wash their robes" is in MSS  $\kappa$  (fourth century) and A (fifth century), as well as the Vulgate. The UBS<sup>4</sup> gives it an "A" rating, meaning "certain."
2. "keep the commandments" is in 046, an uncial MS from the tenth century, minuscule MSS (1 and 94) from the twelfth century, and the Peshitta (Syrian) version.

▣ **"they may have the right to the tree of life; and may enter by the gates into the city"** These are two metaphors for eternal salvation through Christ. One goes back to Gen. 2:9; 3:22 (cf. Rev. 2:7; 22:2,14,19) and the other to Rev. 21:2,9-22:5.

**22:15 "Outside are"** This is very difficult to interpret unless it is a metaphor for the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 21:8).

▣ **"the dogs"** This is another strange allusion because there should be no evil people left at this point in the book. In Deut. 23:18 this term refers to male prostitutes of the Canaanite fertility cult. In other parts of the Old and New Testaments it refers to wicked people (cf. Ps. 22:16,20; Matt. 7:6; and Phil. 3:2). Let me quote Robert H. Mounce at this point from his commentary on Revelation in the New International Series:  
"The verse does not intend to teach that in the eternal state all manner of wicked men will be living just outside the heavenly city. It simply describes the future with the imagery of the present. The contrast is between the blessedness of the faithful and the fate of the wicked" (p. 394).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:16**

**16**"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

**22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches"** Notice that the term "you" is plural and the allusion to the seven churches of Rev. 2-3 is made very specific. The book begins and concludes with the genre of letter, while the visions in between are a combination of prophecy (the end viewed through the lens of the present) and apocalyptic (imaginative imagery).

▣ **"My angel"** Often the sender is God the Father (cf. Rev. 22:6, "His angel"). Here the sender is Jesus ("My angel"). The phrase is also found in Rev. 1:1, but the pronoun antecedent is ambiguous.

▣ **"the churches"** See Special Topic at Rev. 1:4.

▣ **"I am the root and the descendant of David"** There are many allusions to the Davidic line of the Messiah in the OT (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16 and Isa. 11:1,10) and in the NT (cf. Matt. 1:1; 9:17; 15:22; 21:9; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8 Rev. 5:5). Jesus is the fulfillment of all OT prophecies.

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: JESUS THE NAZARENE**

▣ **"the bright and morning star"** This is a Messianic title (cf. Numbers 24:17 or Matt. 2:2 or 2 Pet. 1:19). This may be a play on Isa. 14:12 where a similar phrase referred to Satan. In Revelation evil often is a parody of the Triune God.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:17**

**<sup>17</sup>The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.**

**22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'"** Although there are different interpretations of this passage it seems from the context that this must be a gospel invitation to everyone who senses a need and will respond to God's offer in Christ. This has continued to be the focus of the book of the Revelation, not only to encourage the saved but to convict and encourage the lost to respond to God's free offer in His Son. The four-fold use of "come" (all four refer to the lost and not to Christ's second coming); the recurrent use of "the one who"; and the tremendous good news that it is without cost (cf. Isaiah 55) should be an encouragement to everyone and anyone to respond! This seems to me to be a flashback to those who were living in John's day (and every day). This may explain the unusual elements (the presence of the lost after Judgment Day) in Revelation 19-22. There are several flashbacks to John's own day, which may be explained by parallelism among the seven literary units of Revelation. He wrote with his "beloved children" in Ephesus in mind (cf. I, II, and 3 John).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TRINITY**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:18-19**

**<sup>18</sup>I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.**

**22:18-19** These verses are obviously related to the first hearers of the message as well as all future readers/hearers of this book. It is a common literary practice of the OT to put severe warnings addressed to those who might be tempted to tamper with God's word (cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32). This was not meant to be taken literally, but it is a very strong Oriental overstatement of the seriousness of altering God's message. This does not refer to believing interpreters or scribes who pray earnestly and seek God's will, but according to Irenaeus in his *Contra-Heresies*, 30:12, it referred to false teachers who add, change, or delete the words of Scripture, which is the thrust of this passage. Remember that we cannot proof-text one verse to establish a doctrine which goes against other clear teachings of Scripture.

▣ **"if. . .if"** These are both third class conditional sentences which denote potential action.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:20**

**<sup>20</sup>He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

**22:20 "I am coming quickly"** The immediacy of the end, of God's coming in judgment are characteristics of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. This same theme is seen in Matt. 13:34-36; 24:43; 25:1-13; Luke 12:29; 1 Thess. 5:2,4; 2 Pet. 3:10. In light of a 2000 year delay this must be understood in an existential, not temporal fashion. He is coming! Live ready. See Special Topic at Rev. 1:3.

▣ **"Come, Lord Jesus"** This is the Aramaic phrase, *Maranatha* (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). It is possible to interpret this in several ways:

1. if *maranatha*, then it is "Our Lord has come"
2. *marana tha*, then it is "Our Lord, Come!"

Number 1 fits this context best. We learn from the *Didache* 10:6 that this was the liturgical closing to the Lord's Supper service in John's day.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: *MARANATHA*

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: REVELATION 22:21**

**<sup>21</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.**

**22:21** Notice that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" being with His people, is the concluding truth presented to an age of persecuted Christians and is the hope of every generation of Christians!

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Are believers going to heaven or is heaven returning to a cleansed earth?
2. How is Rev. 21:3 related to the term "Emmanuel"?
3. Why is there no temple in the new Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:22)?
4. Who are the people mentioned in Rev. 21:24?
5. How do believers "keep/heed" the words of this prophecy (cf. Rev. 22:7)?
6. If this is heaven who are the evil ones outside the city in Rev. 22:15?
7. Why is Rev. 22:17 so important?
8. Is Rev. 22:18-19 to be taken literally? Could a believer who misinterprets Revelation lose his/her salvation?
9. Three times in Rev. 22 it says "I am coming quickly (cf. Rev. 22:7,12,20). Why has it been over 2,000 years?



# BRIEF DEFINITIONS OF GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

Koine Greek, often called Hellenistic Greek, was the common language of the Mediterranean world beginning with Alexander the Great's (336-323 b.c..) conquest and lasting about eight hundred years (300 b.c.-a.d. 500). It was not just a simplified, classical Greek, but in many ways a newer form of Greek that became the second language of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean world.

The Greek of the New Testament was unique in some ways because its users, except Luke and the author of Hebrews, probably used Aramaic as their primary language. Therefore, their writing was influenced by the idioms and structural forms of Aramaic. Also, they read and quoted the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) which was also written in Koine Greek. But the Septuagint was also written by Jewish scholars whose mother tongue was not Greek.

This serves as a reminder that we cannot push the New Testament into a tight grammatical structure. It is unique and yet has much in common with (1) the Septuagint; (2) Jewish writings such as those of Josephus; and (3) the papyri found in Egypt. How then do we approach a grammatical analysis of the New Testament?

The grammatical features of Koine Greek and New Testament Koine Greek are fluid. In many ways it was a time of simplification of grammar. Context will be our major guide. Words only have meaning in a larger context, therefore, grammatical structure can only be understood in light of (1) a particular author's style; and (2) a particular context. No conclusive definitions of Greek forms and structures are possible.

Koine Greek was primarily a verbal language. Often the key to interpretation is the type and form of the verbals. In most main clauses the verb will occur first, showing its preeminence. In analyzing the Greek verb three pieces of information must be noted: (1) the basic emphasis of the tense, voice and mood (accidence or morphology); (2) the basic meaning of the particular verb (lexicography); and (3) the flow of the context (syntax).

## I. TENSE

A. Tense or aspect involves the relationship of the verbs to completed action or incomplete action. This is often called "perfective" and "imperfective."

1. Perfective tenses focus on the occurrence of an action. No further information is given except that something happened! Its start, continuation or culmination is not addressed.
2. Imperfective tenses focus on the continuing process of an action. It can be described in terms of linear action, durative action, progressive action, etc.

B. Tenses can be categorized by how the author sees the action as progressing

1. It occurred = aorist
2. It occurred and the results abide = perfect
3. It was occurring in the past and the results were abiding, but not now = pluperfect
4. It is occurring = present
5. It was occurring = imperfect
6. It will occur = future

A concrete example of how these tenses help in interpretation would be the term "save." It was used in several different tenses to show both its process and culmination:

1. aorist - "saved" (cf. Rom. 8:24)
2. perfect - "have been saved and the result continues" (cf. Eph. 2:5,8)
3. present - "being saved" (cf. I Cor. 1:18; 15:2)
4. future - "shall be saved" (cf. Rom. 5:9, 10; 10:9)

C. In focusing on verb tenses, interpreters look for the reason the original author chose to express



himself in a certain tense. The standard "no frills" tense was the aorist. It was the regular "unspecific," "unmarked," or "unflagged" verb form. It can be used in a wide variety of ways which the context must specify. It simply was stating that something occurred. The past time aspect is only intended in the indicative mood. If any other tense was used, something more specific was being emphasized. But what?

1. perfect tense. This speaks of a completed action with abiding results. In some ways it was a combination of the aorist and present tenses. Usually the focus is on the abiding results or the completion of an act (example: Eph. 2:5 & 8, "you have been and continue to be saved").
2. pluperfect tense. This was like the perfect except the abiding results have ceased. Example: John 18:16 "Peter was standing at the door outside."
3. present tense. This speaks of an incomplete or imperfect action. The focus is usually on the continuation of the event. Example: I John 3:6 & 9, "Everyone abiding in Him does not continue sinning." "Everyone having been begotten of God does not continue to commit sin."
4. imperfect tense. In this tense the relationship to the present tense is analogous to the relationship between the perfect and the pluperfect. The imperfect speaks of incomplete action that was occurring but has now ceased or the beginning of an action in the past. Example: Matt. 3:5, "then all Jerusalem were continuing to go out to him" or "then all Jerusalem began to go out to him."
5. future tense. This speaks of an action that was usually projected into a future time frame. It focused on the potential for an occurrence rather than an actual occurrence. It often speaks of the certainty of the event. Example: Matt. 5:4-9, "Blessed are . . . they will . . ."

## II. VOICE

- A. Voice describes the relationship between the action of the verb and its subject.
- B. Active voice was the normal, expected, unemphasized way to assert that the subject was performing the action of the verb.
- C. The passive voice means that the subject was receiving the action of the verb produced by an outside agent. The outside agent producing the action was indicated in the Greek NT by the following prepositions and cases:
  1. a personal direct agent by *hupo* with the ablative case (cf. Matt. 1:22; Acts 22:30).
  2. a personal intermediate agent by *dia* with the ablative case (cf. Matt. 1:22).
  3. an impersonal agent usually by *en* with the instrumental case.
  4. sometimes either a personal or impersonal agent by the instrumental case alone.
- D. The middle voice means that the subject produces the action of the verb and is also directly involved in the action of the verb. It is often called the voice of heightened personal interest. This construction emphasized the subject of the clause or sentence in some way. This construction is not found in English. It has a wide possibility of meanings and translations in Greek. Some examples of the form are:
  1. reflexive - the direct action of the subject on itself. Example: Matt. 27:5 "hanged himself."
  2. intensive - the subject produces the action for itself. Example: II Cor. 11:14 "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
  3. reciprocal - the interplay of two subjects. Example: Matt. 26:4 "they counseled with one another."

## III. MOOD (or "MODE")

- A. There are four moods in Koine Greek. They indicate the relation of the verb to reality, at least within the author's own mind. The moods are divided into two broad categories: that which indicated reality (indicative) and that which indicated potentiality (subjunctive, imperative and optative).
- B. The indicative mood was the normal mood for expressing action that had occurred or was occurring, at least in the author's mind. It was the only Greek mood that expressed a definite time, and even here this aspect was secondary.
- C. The subjunctive mood expressed probable future action. Something had not yet happened, but the

chances were likely that it would. It had much in common with the future indicative. The difference was that the subjunctive expresses some degree of doubt. In English this is often expressed by the terms "could," "would," "may," or "might."

- D. The optative mood expressed a wish which was theoretically possible. It was considered one step further from reality than the subjunctive. The optative expressed possibility under certain conditions. The optative was rare in the New Testament. Its most frequent usage is Paul's famous phrase, "May it never be" (KJV, "God forbid"), used fifteen times (cf. Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; I Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). Other examples are found in Luke 1:38, 20:16, Acts 8:20, and I Thess. 3:11.
- E. The imperative mood emphasized a command which was possible, but the emphasis was on the intent of the speaker. It asserted only volitional possibility and was conditioned on the choices of another. There was a special use of the imperative in prayers and 3rd person requests. These commands were found only in the present and aorist tenses in the NT.
- F. Some grammars categorize participles as another type of mood. They are very common in the Greek NT, usually defined as verbal adjectives. They are translated in conjunction with the main verb to which they relate. A wide variety was possible in translating participles. It is best to consult several English translations. *The Bible in Twenty Six Translations* published by Baker is a great help here.
- G. The aorist active indicative was the normal or "unmarked" way to record an occurrence. Any other tense, voice or mood had some specific interpretive significance that the original author wanted to communicate.

IV. For the person not familiar with Greek the following study aids will provide the needed information:

- A. Friberg, Barbara and Timothy. *Analytical Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- B. Marshall, Alfred. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- C. Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- D. Summers, Ray. *Essentials of New Testament Greek*. Nashville: Broadman, 1950.
- E. Academically accredited Koine Greek correspondence courses are available through Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, IL.

## V. NOUNS

- A. Syntactically, nouns are classified by case. Case was that inflected form of a noun that showed its relationship to the verb and other parts of the sentence. In Koine Greek many of the case functions were indicated by prepositions. Since the case form was able to identify several different relationships, the prepositions developed to give clearer separation to these possible functions.
- B. Greek cases are categorized in the following eight ways:
  1. The nominative case was used for naming and it usually was the subject of the sentence or clause. It was also used for predicate nouns and adjectives with the linking verbs "to be" or "become."
  2. The genitive case was used for description and usually assigned an attribute or quality to the word to which it was related. It answered the question, "What kind?" It was often expressed by the use of the English preposition "of."
  3. The ablative case used the same inflected form as the genitive, but it was used to describe separation. It usually denoted separation from a point in time, space, source, origin or degree. It was often expressed by the use of the English preposition "from."
  4. The dative case was used to describe personal interest. This could denote a positive or negative aspect. Often this was the indirect object. It was often expressed by the English preposition "to."
  5. The locative case was the same inflected form as the dative, but it described position or location in space, time or logical limits. It was often expressed by the English prepositions "in, on, at, among, during, by, upon, and beside."

6. The instrumental case was the same inflected form as the dative and locative cases. It expressed means or association. It was often expressed by the English prepositions, "by" or "with."
7. The accusative case was used to describe the conclusion of an action. It expressed limitation. Its main use was the direct object. It answered the question, "How far?" or "To what extent?"
8. The vocative case was used for direct address.

## VI. CONJUNCTIONS AND CONNECTORS

A. Greek is a very precise language because it has so many connectives. They connect thoughts (clauses, sentences, and paragraphs). They are so common that their absence (asyndeton) is often exegetically significant. As a matter of fact, these conjunctions and connectors show the direction of the author's thought. They often are crucial in determining what exactly he is trying to communicate.

B. Here is a list of some of the conjunctions and connectors and their meanings (this information has been gleaned mostly from H. E. Dana and Julius K. Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*).

### 1. Time connectors

- a. *epei, epeidē, hopote, hōs, hote, hotan* (subj.) - "when"
- b. *heōs* - "while"
- c. *hotan, epan* (subj.) - "whenever"
- d. *heōs, achri, mechri* (subj.) - "until"
- e. *priv* (infin.) - "before"
- f. *hōs* - "since," "when," "as"

### 2. Logical connectors

#### a. Purpose

- (1) *hina* (subj.), *hopōs* (subj.), *hōs* - "in order that," "that"
- (2) *hōste* (articular accusative infinitive) - "that"
- (3) *pros* (articular accusative infinitive) or *eis* (articular accusative infinitive) - "that"

#### b. Result (there is a close association between the grammatical forms of purpose and result)

- (1) *hōste* (infinitive, this is the most common) - "in order that," "thus"
- (2) *hiva* (subj.) - "so that"
- (3) *ara* - "so"

#### c. Causal or reason

- (1) *gar* (cause/effect or reason/conclusion) - "for," "because"
- (2) *dioti, hotiy* - "because"
- (3) *epei, epeidē, hōs* - "since"
- (4) *dia* (with accusative) and (with articular infin.) - "because"

#### d. Inferential

- (1) *ara, poinun, hōste* - "therefore"
- (2) *dio* (strongest inferential conjunction) - "on which account," "wherefore," "therefore"
- (3) *oun* - "therefore," "so," "then," "consequently"
- (4) *toinoun* - "accordingly"

#### e. Adversative or contrast

- (1) *alla* (strong adversative) - "but," "except"
- (2) *de* - "but," "however," "yet," "on the other hand"
- (3) *kai* - "but"
- (4) *mentoi, oun* - "however"
- (5) *plēn* - "never-the-less" (mostly in Luke)
- (6) *oun* - "however"

#### f. Comparison

- (1) *hōs, kathōs* (introduce comparative clauses)
- (2) *kata* (in compounds, *katho, kathoti, kathōsper, kathaper*)

- (3) *hosos* (in Hebrews)
- (4) *ē* - "than"
- g. Continuative or series
  - (1) *de* - "and," "now"
  - (2) *kai* - "and"
  - (3) *tei* - "and"
  - (4) *hina, oun* - "that"
  - (5) *oun* - "then" (in John)

### 3. Emphatic usages

- a. *alla* - "certainty," "yea," "in fact"
- b. *ara* - "indeed," "certainly," "really"
- c. *gar* - "but really," "certainly," "indeed"
- d. *de* - "indeed"
- e. *ean* - "even"
- f. *kai* - "even," "indeed," "really"
- g. *mentoi* - "indeed"
- h. *oun* - "really," "by all means"

## VII. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

- A. A conditional sentence is one that contains one or more conditional clauses. This grammatical structure aids interpretation because it provides the conditions, reasons or causes why the action of the main verb does or does not occur. There were four types of conditional sentences. They move from that which was assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his purpose to that which was only a wish.
- B. The first class conditional sentence expressed action or being which was assumed to be true from the writer's perspective or for his purposes even though it was expressed with an "if." In several contexts it could be translated "since" (cf. Matt. 4:3; Rom. 8:31). However, this does not mean to imply that all first classes are true to reality. Often they were used to make a point in an argument or to highlight a fallacy (cf. Matt. 12:27).
- C. The second class conditional sentence is often called "contrary to fact." It states something that was untrue to reality to make a point. Examples:
  - 1. "If He were really a prophet which He is not, He would know who and of what character the woman is who is clinging to Him, but He does not" (Luke 7:39)
  - 2. "If you really believed Moses, which you do not, you would believe me, which you do not" (John 5:46)
  - 3. "If I were still trying to be pleasing to men, which I am not, I would not be a slave of Christ at all, which I am" (Gal. 1:10)
- D. The third class speaks of possible future action. It often assumes the probability of that action. It usually implies a contingency. The action of the main verb is contingent on the action in the "if" clause. Examples from I John: 1:6-10; 2:4,6,9,15,20,21,24,29; 3:21; 4:20; 5:14,16.
- E. The fourth class is the farthest removed from possibility. It is rare in the NT. As a matter of fact, there is no complete fourth class conditional sentence in which both parts of the condition fit the definition. An example of a partial fourth class is the opening clause in I Pet. 3:14. An example of a partial fourth class in the concluding clause is Acts 8:31.

## VIII. PROHIBITIONS

- A. The present imperative with *mē* particle often (but not exclusively) has the emphasis of stopping an act already in process. Some examples: "stop storing up your riches on earth. . ." (Matt. 6:19); "stop worrying about your life. . ." (Matt. 6:25); "stop offering to sin the parts of your bodies as instruments of wrongdoing. . ." (Rom. 6:13); "you must stop offending the Holy Spirit of God. . ." (Eph. 4:30); and "stop getting drunk on wine. . ." (5:18).

- B. The aorist subjunctive with *mē* particle has the emphasis of "do not even begin or start an act." Some examples: "Do not even begin to suppose that. . ." (Matt. 5:17); "never start to worry. . ." (Matt. 6:31); "you must never be ashamed. . ." (II Tim. 1:8).
- C. The double negative with the subjunctive mood is a very emphatic negation. "Never, no never" or "not under any circumstance." Some examples: "he will never, no never experience death" (John 8:51); "I will never, no, never. . ." (I Cor. 8:13).

## IX. THE ARTICLE

- A. In Koine Greek the definite article "the" had a use similar to English. Its basic function was that of "a pointer," a way to draw attention to a word, name or phrase. The use varies from author to author in the New Testament. The definite article could also function
  - 1. as a contrasting device like a demonstrative pronoun;
  - 2. as a sign to refer to a previously introduced subject or person;
  - 3. as a way to identify the subject in a sentence with a linking verb. Examples: "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); "God is light" (I John 1:5); "God is love" (4:8,16).
- B. Koine Greek did not have an indefinite article like the English "a" or "an." The absence of the definite article could mean
  - 1. a focus on the characteristics or quality of something
  - 2. a focus on the category of something
- C. The NT authors varied widely as to how the article was employed.

## X. WAYS OF SHOWING EMPHASIS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

- A. The techniques for showing emphasis vary from author to author in the New Testament. The most consistent and formal writers were Luke and the author of Hebrews.
- B. We have stated earlier that the aorist active indicative was standard and unmarked for emphasis, but any other tense, voice, or mood had interpretive significance. This is not to imply that the aorist active indicative was not often used in a significant grammatical sense. (Example: Rom. 6:10 [twice]).
- C. Word order in Koine Greek
  - 1. Koine Greek was an inflected language which was not dependent, like English, on word order. Therefore, the author could vary the normal expected order to show
    - a. what the author wanted to emphasize to the reader
    - b. what the author thought would be surprising to the reader
    - c. what the author felt deeply about
  - 2. The normal word order in Greek is still an unsettled issue. However, the supposed normal order is:
    - a. for linking verbs
      - (1) verb
      - (2) subject
      - (3) complement
    - b. for transitive verbs
      - (1) verb
      - (2) subject
      - (3) object
      - (4) indirect object
      - (5) prepositional phrase
    - c. for noun phrases
      - (1) noun
      - (2) modifier
      - (3) prepositional phrase
  - 3. Word order can be an extremely important exegetical point. Examples:
    - a. "right hand they gave to me and Barnabas of fellowship." The phrase "right hand of

- fellowship" is split and fronted to show its significance (Gal. 2:9).
- b. "with Christ" was placed first. His death was central (Gal. 2:20).
  - c. "It was bit by bit and in many different ways" (Heb. 1:1) was placed first. It was how God revealed Himself that was being contrasted, not the fact of revelation.
- D. Usually some degree of emphasis was shown by
1. The repetition of the pronoun which was already present in the verb's inflected form. Example: "I, myself, will surely be with you. . ." (Matt. 28:20).
  2. The absence of an expected conjunction, or other connecting device between words, phrases, clauses or sentences. This is called an asyndeton ("not bound"). The connecting device was expected, so its absence would draw attention. Examples:
    - a. The Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3ff (emphasized the list)
    - b. John 14:1 (new topic)
    - c. Romans 9:1 (new section)
    - d. II Cor. 12:20 (emphasize the list)
  3. The repetition of words or phrases present in a given context. Examples: "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12 & 14). This phrase was used to show the work of each person of the Trinity.
  4. The use of an idiom or word (sound) play between terms
    - a. euphemisms - substitute words for taboo subjects, like "sleep" for death (John 11:11-14) or "feet" for male genitalia (Ruth 3:7-8; I Sam. 24:3).
    - b. circumlocutions - substitute words for God's name, like "Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2) or "a voice from heaven" (Matt. 3:17).
    - c. figures of speech
      - (1) impossible exaggerations (Matt. 3:9; 5:29-30; 19:24)
      - (2) mild over statements (Matt. 3:5; Acts 2:36)
      - (3) personifications (I Cor. 15:55)
      - (4) irony (Gal. 5:12)
      - (5) poetic passages (Phil. 2:6-11)
      - (6) sound plays between words
        - (a) "church"
          - (i) "church" (Eph. 3:21)
          - (ii) "calling" (Eph. 4:1,4)
          - (iii)"called" (Eph. 4:1,4)
        - (b) "free"
          - (i) "free woman" (Gal. 4:31)
          - (ii)"freedom" (Gal. 5:1)
          - (iii)"free" (Gal. 5:1)
    - d. idiomatic language - language which is usually cultural and language specific:
      - (1) figurative use of "food" (John 4:31-34)
      - (2) figurative use of "Temple" (John 2:19; Matt. 26:61)
      - (3) Hebrew idiom of compassion, "hate" (Gen. 29:31; Deut. 21:15; Luke 14:36; John 12:25; Rom. 9:13)
      - (4) "All" versus "many." Compare Isa. 53:6 ("all") with 53:11 & 12 ("many"). The terms are synonymous as Rom. 5:18 and 19 show.
  5. The use of a full linguistic phrase instead of a single word. Example: "The Lord Jesus Christ."
  6. The special use of *autos*
    - a. when with the article (attributive position) it was translated "same."
    - b. when without the article (predicate position) it was translated as an intensive reflexive pronoun-"himself," "herself," or "itself."
- E. The non-Greek reading Bible student can identify emphasis in several ways:
1. The use of an analytical lexicon and interlinear Greek/English text.
  2. The comparison of English translations, particularly from the differing theories of translations. Example: comparing a "word-for-word" translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV)

with a "dynamic equivalent" (Williams, NIV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, TEV). A good help here would be *The Bible in Twenty-Six Translations* published by Baker.

3. The use of *The Emphasized Bible* by Joseph Bryant Rotherham (Kregel, 1994).

4. The use of a very literal translation

a. *The American Standard Version* of 1901

b. *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible* by Robert Young (Guardian Press, 1976).

The study of grammar is tedious but necessary for proper interpretation. These brief definitions, comments and examples are meant to encourage and equip non-Greek reading persons to use the grammatical notes provided in this volume. Surely these definitions are oversimplified. They should not be used in a dogmatic, inflexible manner, but as stepping stones toward a greater understanding of New Testament syntax. Hopefully these definitions will also enable readers to understand the comments of other study aids such as technical commentaries on the New Testament.

We must be able to verify our interpretation based on items of information found in the texts of the Bible. Grammar is one of the most helpful of these items; other items would include historical setting, literary context, contemporary word usage, and parallel passages.

# TEXTUAL CRITICISM

This subject will be dealt with in such a way as to explain the textual notes found in this commentary. The following outline will be utilized

- I. The textual sources of our English Bible
  - A. Old Testament
  - B. New Testament
- II. Brief explanation of the problems and theories of "lower criticism" also called "textual criticism."
- III. Suggested sources for further reading

## I. The textual sources of our English Bible

### A. Old Testament

1. Masoretic text (MT) - The Hebrew consonantal text was set by Rabbi Aquiba in a.d. 100. The vowel points, accents, marginal notes, punctuation and apparatus points started being added in the sixth century a.d. and were finished in the ninth century a.d. It was done by a family of Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes. The textual form they used was the same as the one in the Mishnah, Talmud, Targums, Peshitta, and Vulgate.
2. Septuagint (LXX) - Tradition says the Septuagint was produced by 70 Jewish scholars in 70 days for the Alexandria library under the sponsorship of King Ptolemy II (285-246 b.c.) The translation was supposedly requested by a Jewish leader living in Alexandria. This tradition comes from "Letter of Aristeas." The LXX frequently was based on a differing Hebrew textual tradition from the text of Rabbi Aquiba (MT).
3. Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) - The Dead Sea Scrolls were written in the Roman b.c. period (200 b.c. to a.d. 70) by a sect of Jewish separatists called the "Essenes." The Hebrew manuscripts, found in several sites around the Dead Sea, show a somewhat different Hebrew textual family behind both the MT and the LXX.
4. Some specific examples of how the comparison of these texts have helped interpreters understand the Old Testament
  - a. The LXX has helped translators and scholars understand the MT
    - (1) the LXX of Isa. 52:14, "As many shall be amazed at him."
    - (2) the MT of Isa. 52:14, "Just as many were astonished over you."
    - (3) in Isa. 52:15 the pronoun distinction of the LXX is confirmed
      - (a) LXX, "so will many nations marvel at him"
      - (b) MT, "so he sprinkles many nations"
  - b. The DSS have helped translators and scholars understand the MT
    - (1) the DSS of Isa. 21:8, "then the seer cried, Upon a watchtower I stand. . ."
    - (2) the MT of Isa. 21:8, "and I cried a lion! My Lord, I always stand on the watch tower by day. . ."
  - c. Both the LXX and DSS have helped clarify Isa. 53:11
    - (1) LXX & DSS, "after the travail of his soul he will see light, he will be satisfied"
    - (2) MT, "he shall see. . .of the travail of his soul, He shall be satisfied"

### B. New Testament

1. Over 5,300 manuscripts of all or parts of the Greek New Testament are extant. About 85 are written on papyri and 268 are manuscripts written in all capital letters (uncials). Later, about the ninth century a.d., a running script (minuscule) was developed. The Greek manuscripts in written form number about 2,700. We also have about 2,100 copies of lists of Scripture texts used in worship that we call lectionaries.
2. About 85 Greek manuscripts containing parts of the New Testament written on papyrus are



housed in museums. Some are dated from the second century a.d., but most are from the third and fourth centuries a.d. None of these MSS contain the whole New Testament. Just because these are the oldest copies of the New Testament does not automatically mean they have fewer variants. Many of these were copied rapidly for a local use. Care was not exercised in the process. Therefore, they contain many variants.

3. Codex Sinaiticus, known by the Hebrew letter  $\aleph$  (*aleph*) or (01), found at St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai by Tischendorf. It dates from the fourth century a.d. and contains both the LXX of the OT and the Greek NT. It is of "the Alexandrian Text" type.
4. Codex Alexandrinus, known as "A" or (02), a fifth century Greek manuscript which was found in Alexandria, Egypt.
5. Codex Vaticanus, known as "B" or (03), found in the Vatican's library in Rome and dates from the middle of the fourth century a.d. It contains both LXX of the Old Testament and Greek New Testament. It is of "the Alexandrian Text" type.
6. Codex Ephraemi, known as "C" or (04), a fifth century Greek manuscript which was partially destroyed.
7. Codex Bezae, known as "D" or (05), a fifth or sixth century Greek manuscript. It is the chief representative of what is called "The Western Text." It contains many additions and was the main Greek witness for the King James translation.
8. The NT MSS can be grouped into three, possibly four, families that share certain characteristics.
  - a. Alexandrian text from Egypt
    - (1) P<sup>75</sup>, P<sup>66</sup> (about a.d. 200), which record the Gospels
    - (2) P<sup>46</sup> (about a.d. 225), which records Paul's letters
    - (3) P<sup>72</sup> (about a.d. 225-250), which records Peter and Jude
    - (4) Codex B, called Vaticanus (about a.d. 325), which includes the whole OT and NT
    - (5) Origen quotes from this text type
    - (6) other MSS which show this text type are  $\aleph$ , C, L, W, 33
  - b. Western text from North Africa
    - (1) quotes from North African church fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian, and the Old Latin translation
    - (2) quotes from Irenaeus
    - (3) quotes from Tatian and Old Syriac translation
    - (4) Codex D "Bezae" follow this text type
  - c. Eastern Byzantine text from Constantinople
    - (1) this text type is reflected in over 80% of the 5,300 MSS
    - (2) quoted by Antioch of Syria's church fathers, Cappadoceans, Chrysostom, and Therodoret
    - (3) Codex A, in the Gospels only
    - (4) Codex E (eighth century) for full NT
  - d. the fourth possible type is "Caesarean" from Palestine
    - (1) it is primarily seen only in Mark
    - (2) some witnesses to it are P<sup>45</sup> and W

## II. The problems and theories of "lower criticism" or "textual criticism."

### A. How the variants occurred

1. inadvertent or accidental (vast majority of occurrences)
  - a. slip of the eye in hand copying which reads the second instance of two similar words and thereby omits all of the words in between (homoioteleuton)
    - (1) slip of the eye in omitting a double letter word or phrase (haplography)
    - (2) slip of the mind in repeating a phrase or line of a Greek text (dittography)
  - b. slip of the ear in copying by oral dictation where a misspelling occurs (itacism). Often the

misspelling implies or spells a similar-sounding Greek word.

- c. the earliest Greek texts had no chapter or verse divisions, little or no punctuation and no division between words. It is possible to divide the letters in different places forming different words.

## 2. intentional

- a. changes were made to improve the grammatical form of the text copied
- b. changes were made to bring the text into conformity with other biblical texts (harmonization of parallels)
- c. changes were made by combining two or more variant readings into one long combined text (conflation)
- d. changes were made to correct a perceived problem in the text (cf. I Cor. 11:27 and I John 5:7-8)
- e. some additional information as to the historical setting or proper interpretation of the text was placed in the margin by one scribe but placed into the text by a second scribe (cf. John 5:4)

## B. The basic tenets of textual criticism (logical guidelines for determining the original reading of a text when variants exist)

1. the most awkward or grammatically unusual text is probably the original
2. the shortest text is probably the original
3. the older text is given more weight because of its historical proximity to the original, everything else being equal
4. MSS that are geographically diverse usually have the original reading
5. doctrinally weaker texts, especially those relating to major theological discussions of the period of manuscript changes, like the Trinity in I John 5:7-8, are to be preferred.
6. the text that can best explain the origin of the other variants
7. two quotes that help show the balance in these troubling variants

- a. J. Harold Greenlee's book, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p. 68:

"No Christian doctrine hangs upon a debatable text; and the student of the NT must beware of wanting his text to be more orthodox or doctrinally stronger than is the inspired original."

- b. W. A. Criswell told Greg Garrison of *The Birmingham News* that he (Criswell) doesn't believe every word in the Bible is inspired, "at least not every word that has been given to the modern public by centuries of translators." Criswell said: "I very much am a believer in the textual criticism. As such, I think, the last half of the 16th chapter of Mark is heresy: it's not inspired, it's just concocted. . . .When you compare those manuscripts way back yonder, there was no such thing as that conclusion of the Book of Mark. Somebody added it..."

The patriarch of the SBC inerrantists also claimed that "interpolation" is also evident in John 5, the account of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda. And he discusses the two different accounts of the suicide of Judas (cf. Matt. 27 and Acts 1): "It's just a different view of the suicide," Criswell said. "If it is in the Bible, there is an explanation for it. And the two accounts of the suicide of Judas are in the Bible." Criswell added, "Textual criticism is a wonderful science in itself. It is not ephemeral, it's not impertinent. It's dynamic and central..."

## III. Manuscript problems (textual criticism)

### A. Suggested sources for further reading

1. *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual*, by R.H. Harrison
2. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* by Bruce M. Metzger
3. *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, by J. H Greenlee

# GLOSSARY

**Adoptionism.** This was one of the early views of Jesus' relation to deity. It basically asserted that Jesus was a normal human in every way and was adopted in a special sense by God at his baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11) or at His resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). Jesus lived such an exemplary life that God, at some point, (baptism, resurrection) adopted Him as His "son" (cf. Rom. 1:4; Phi. 2:9). This was an early church and eighth century minority view. Instead of God becoming a man (the Incarnation) it reverses this and now man becomes God!

It is difficult to verbalize how Jesus, God the Son, pre-existent deity, was rewarded or extolled for an exemplary life. If He was already God, how could He be rewarded? If He had pre-existent divine glory how could He be honored more? Although it is hard for us to comprehend, the Father somehow honored Jesus in a special sense for His perfect fulfillment of the Father's will.

**Alexandrian School.** This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Alexandria, Egypt in the second century a.d. It uses the basic interpretive principles of Philo, who was a follower of Plato. It is often called the allegorical method. It held sway in the church until the time of the Reformation. Its most able proponents were Origen and Augustine. See Moises Silva, *Has The Church Misread The Bible?* (Academic, 1987)

**Alexandrinus.** This fifth-century Greek manuscript from Alexandria, Egypt includes the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and most of the New Testament. It is one of our major witnesses to the entire Greek New Testament (except parts of Matthew, John, and II Corinthians). When this manuscript, which is designated "A," and the manuscript designated "B" (Vaticanus) agree on a reading, it is considered to be original by most scholars in most instances.

**Allegory.** This is a type of Biblical interpretation which originally developed within Alexandrian Judaism. It was popularized by Philo of Alexandria. Its basic thrust is the desire to make the Scripture relevant to one's culture or philosophical system by ignoring the Bible's historical setting and/or literary context. It seeks a hidden or spiritual meaning behind every text of Scripture. It must be admitted that Jesus, in Matthew 13, and Paul, in Galatians 4, used allegory to communicate truth. This, however, was in the form of typology, not strictly allegory.

**Analytical lexicon.** This is a type of research tool which allows one to identify every Greek form in the New Testament. It is a compilation, in Greek alphabetical order, of forms and basic definitions. In combination with an interlinear translation, it allows non-Greek reading believers to analyze New Testament Greek grammatical and syntactic forms.

**Analogy of Scripture.** This is the phrase used to describe the view that all of the Bible is inspired by God and is, therefore, not contradictory but complementary. This presuppositional affirmation is the basis for the use of parallel passages in interpreting a biblical text.

**Ambiguity.** This refers to the uncertainty that results in a written document when there are two or more possible meanings or when two or more things are being referred to at the same time. It is possible that John uses purposeful ambiguity (double entendres).

**Anthropomorphic.** Meaning "having characteristics associated with human beings," this term is used to describe our religious language about God. It comes from the Greek term for mankind. It means that we speak about God as if He were a man. God is described in physical, sociological, and psychological terms which relate to human beings (cf. Gen. 3:8; I Kgs. 22:19-23). This, of course, is only an analogy. However, there are no categories or terms other than human ones for us to use.

Therefore, our knowledge of God, though true, is limited.

**Antiochian School.** This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Antioch, Syria in the third century a.d. as a reaction to the allegorical method of Alexandria, Egypt. Its basic thrust was to focus on the historical meaning of the Bible. It interpreted the Bible as normal, human literature. This school became involved in the controversy over whether Christ had two natures (Nestorianism) or one nature (fully God and fully man). It was labeled heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and relocated to Persia but the school had little significance. Its basic hermeneutical principles later became interpretive principles of the Classical Protestant Reformers (Luther and Calvin).

**Antithetical.** This is one of three descriptive terms used to denote the relationship between lines of Hebrew poetry. It relates to lines of poetry which are opposite in meaning (cf. Pro. 10:1, 15:1).

**Apocalyptic literature.** This was predominantly, possibly even uniquely, a Jewish genre. It was a cryptic type of writing used in times of invasion and occupation of the Jews by foreign world powers. It assumes that a personal, redemptive God created and controls world events, and that Israel is of special interest and care to Him. This literature promises ultimate victory through God's special effort.

It is highly symbolic and fanciful with many cryptic terms. It often expressed truth in colors, numbers, visions, dreams, angelic mediation, secret code words and often a sharp dualism between good and evil.

Some examples of this genre are (1) in the OT, Ezekiel (chapters 36-48), Daniel (chapters 7-12), Zechariah; and (2) in the NT, Matthew 24; Mark 13; II Thessalonians 2 and Revelation.

**Apologist (Apologetics).** This is from the Greek root for "legal defense." This is a specific discipline within theology which seeks to give evidence and rational arguments for the Christian faith.

**A priori.** This is basically synonymous with the term "presupposition." It involves reasoning from previously accepted definitions, principles or positions which are assumed to be true. It is that which is accepted without examination or analysis.

**Arianism.** Arius was a presbyter in the church at Alexandria Egypt in the third and early fourth century. He affirmed that Jesus was pre-existent but not divine (not of the same essence as the Father), possibly following Proverbs 8:22-31. He was challenged by the bishop of Alexandria, who started (a.d. 318) a controversy which lasted many years. Arianism became the official creed of the Eastern Church. The Council of Nicaea in a.d. 325 condemned Arius and asserted the full equality and deity of the Son.

**Aristotle.** He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece, a pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. His influence, even today, reaches into many areas of modern studies. This is because he emphasized knowledge through observation and classification. This is one of the tenets of the scientific method.

**Autographs.** This is the name given to the original writings of the Bible. These original, handwritten manuscripts have all been lost. Only copies of copies remain. This is the source of many of the textual variants in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and ancient versions.

**Bezae.** This is a Greek and Latin manuscript of the sixth century a.d. It is designated by "D." It contains the Gospels and Acts and some of the General Epistles. It is characterized by numerous scribal additions. It forms the basis for the "Textus Receptus," the major Greek manuscript tradition behind the King James Version.

**Bias.** This is the term used to describe a strong predisposition toward an object or point of view. It is the mindset in which impartiality is impossible regarding a particular object or point of view. It is a prejudiced position.

**Biblical Authority.** This term is used in a very specialized sense. It is defined as understanding what the original author said to his day and applying this truth to our day. Biblical authority is usually defined as viewing the Bible itself as our only authoritative guide. However, in light of current, improper interpretations, I have limited the concept to the Bible as interpreted by the tenets of the historical-grammatical method.

**Canon.** This is a term used to describe writings which are believed to be uniquely inspired. It is used regarding both the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

**Christocentric.** This is a term used to describe the centrality of Jesus. I use it in connection with the concept that Jesus is Lord of all the Bible. The Old Testament points toward Him and He is its fulfillment and goal (cf. Matt. 5:17-48).

**Commentary.** This is a specialized type of research book. It gives the general background of a Biblical book. It then tries to explain the meaning of each section of the book. Some focus on application, while others deal with the text in a more technical way. These books are helpful, but should be used after one has done his own preliminary study. The commentator's interpretations should never be accepted uncritically. Comparing several commentaries from different theological perspectives is usually helpful.

**Concordance.** This is a type of research tool for Bible study. It lists every occurrence of every word in the Old and New Testaments. It helps in several ways: (1) determining the Hebrew or Greek word which lies behind any particular English word; (2) comparing passages where the same Hebrew or Greek word was used; (3) showing where two different Hebrew or Greek terms are translated by the same English word; (4) showing the frequency of the use of certain words in certain books or authors; (5) helping one find a passage in the Bible (cf. Walter Clark's *Howto Use New Testament Greek Study Aids*, pp. 54-55).

**Dead Sea Scrolls.** This refers to a series of ancient texts written in Hebrew and Aramaic which were found near the Dead Sea in 1947. They were the religious libraries of sectarian Judaism of the first century. The pressure of Roman occupation and the zealot wars of the 60's caused them to conceal the scrolls in hermetically sealed pottery jars in caves or holes. They have helped us understand the historical setting of first century Palestine and have confirmed the Masoretic Text as being very accurate, at least as far back as the early b.c. era. They are designated by the abbreviation "DSS."

**Deductive.** This method of logic or reasoning moves from general principles to specific applications by means of reason. It is opposite from inductive reasoning, which reflects the scientific method by moving from observed specifics to general conclusions (theories).

**Dialectical.** This is the method of reasoning whereby that which seems contradictory or paradoxical is held together in a tension, seeking a unified answer which includes both sides of the paradox. Many biblical doctrines have dialectical pairs, predestination-free will; security-perseverance; faith-works; decision-discipleship; Christian freedom-Christian responsibility.

**Diaspora.** This is the technical Greek term used by Palestinian Jews to describe other Jews who live outside the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land.

**Dynamic equivalent.** This is a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from "word to word" correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word, to a "paraphrase" where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is "the dynamic equivalent" which attempts to take the original text seriously, but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart's *Howto Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35 and in Robert Bratcher's Introduction to the TEV.

**Eclectic.** This term is used in connection with textual criticism. It refers to the practice of choosing readings from different Greek manuscripts in order to arrive at a text which is supposed to be close to the original autographs. It rejects the view that any one family of Greek manuscripts captures the originals.

**Eisegesis.** This is the opposite of exegesis. If exegesis is a "leading out" of the original author's intent, this term implies a "leading in" of a foreign idea or opinion.

**Etymology.** This is an aspect of word study that tries to ascertain the original meaning of a word. From this root meaning, specialized usages are more easily identified. In interpretation, etymology is not the main focus, rather the contemporary meaning and usage of a word.

**Exegesis.** This is the technical term for the practice of interpreting a specific passage. It means "to lead out" (of the text) implying that our purpose is to understand the original author's intent in light of historical setting, literary context, syntax and contemporary word meaning.

**Genre.** This is a French term that denotes different types of literature. The thrust of the term is the division of literary forms into categories which share common characteristics: historical narrative, poetry, proverb, apocalyptic and legislation.

**Gnosticism.** Most of our knowledge of this heresy comes from the Gnostic writings of the second century. However, the incipient ideas were present in the first century (and before).

Some stated tenets of Valentian and Cerinthian Gnosticism of the second century are: (1) matter and spirit were co-eternal (an ontological dualism). Matter is evil, spirit is good. God, who is spirit, cannot be directly involved with molding evil matter; (2) there are emanations (*eons* or angelic levels) between God and matter. The last or lowest one was YHWH of the OT, who formed the universe (*kosmos*); (3) Jesus was an emanation like YHWH but higher on the scale, closer to the true God. Some put Him as the highest but still less than God and certainly not incarnate Deity (cf. John 1:14). Since matter is evil, Jesus could not have a human body and still be Divine. He was a spiritual phantom (cf. I John 1:1-3; 4:1-6); and (4) salvation was obtained through faith in Jesus plus special knowledge, which is only known by special persons. Knowledge (passwords) was needed to pass through heavenly spheres. Jewish legalism was also required to reach God.

The Gnostic false teachers advocated two opposite ethical systems: (1) for some, lifestyle was totally unrelated to salvation. For them, salvation and spirituality were encapsulated into secret knowledge (passwords) through the angelic spheres (*eons*); or (2) for others, lifestyle was crucial to salvation. They emphasized an ascetic lifestyle as evidence of true spirituality.

**Hermeneutics.** This is the technical term for the principles which guide exegesis. It is both a set of specific guidelines and an art/gift. Biblical, or sacred, hermeneutics is usually divided into two categories: general principles and special principles. These relate to the different types of literature found in the Bible. Each different type (genre) has its own unique guidelines but also shares some common assumptions and procedures of interpretation.

**Higher Criticism.** This is the procedure of biblical interpretation which focuses on the historical setting and literary structure of a particular biblical book.

**Idiom.** This word is used for the phrases found in different cultures which have specialized meaning not connected to the usual meaning of the individual terms. Some modern examples are: "that was awfully good," or "you just kill me." The Bible also contains these types of phrases.

**Illumination.** This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for

mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

**Inductive.** This is a method of logic or reasoning which moves from the particulars to the whole. It is the empirical method of modern science. This is basically the approach of Aristotle.

**Interlinear.** This is a type of research tool which allows those who do not read a biblical language to be able to analyze its meaning and structure. It places the English translation on a word for word level immediately under the original biblical language. This tool, combined with an "analytical lexicon," will give the forms and basic definitions of Hebrew and Greek.

**Inspiration.** This is the concept that God has spoken to mankind by guiding the biblical authors to accurately and clearly record His revelation. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure

**Language of description.** This is used in connection with the idioms in which the Old Testament is written. It speaks of our world in terms of the way things appear to the five senses. It is not a scientific description, nor was it meant to be.

**Legalism.** This attitude is characterized by an over-emphasis on rules or ritual. It tends to rely on the human performance of regulations as a means of acceptance by God. It tends to depreciate relationship and elevates performance, both of which are important aspects of the covenantal relationship between a holy God and sinful humanity.

**Literal.** This is another name for the textually-focused and historical method of hermeneutics from Antioch. It means that interpretation involves the normal and obvious meaning of human language, although it still recognizes the presence of figurative language.

**Literary genre.** This refers to the distinct forms that human communication can take, such as poetry or historical narrative. Each type of literature has its own special hermeneutical procedures in addition to the general principles for all written literature.

**Literary unit.** This refers to the major thought divisions of a biblical book. It can be made up of a few verses, paragraphs or chapters. It is a self-contained unit with a central subject.

**Lower criticism.** See "textual criticism."

**Manuscript.** This term relates to the different copies of the Greek New Testament. Usually they are divided into the different types by (1) material on which they are written (papyrus, leather), or (2) the form of the writing itself (all capitals or running script). It is abbreviated by "MS" (singular) or "MSS" (plural).

**Masoretic Text.** This refers to the ninth century a.d. Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament produced by generations of Jewish scholars which contain vowel points and other textual notes. It forms the basic text for our English Old Testament. Its text has been historically confirmed by the Hebrew MSS, especially Isaiah, known from the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is abbreviated by "MT."

**Metonymy.** This is a figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used to represent something else associated with it. As an example, "the kettle is boiling" actually means "the water within the kettle is boiling."

**Muratorian Fragments.** This is a list of the canonical books of the New Testament. It was written in Rome before a.d. 200. It gives the same twenty-seven books as the Protestant NT. This clearly shows the local churches in different parts of the Roman Empire had "practically" set the canon before the major

church councils of the fourth century.

**Natural revelation.** This is one category of God's self-disclosure to man. It involves the natural order (Rom. 1:19-20) and the moral consciousness (Rom. 2:14-15). It is spoken of in Ps. 19:1-6 and Rom. 1-2. It is distinct from special revelation, which is God's specific self-disclosure in the Bible and supremely in Jesus of Nazareth.

This theological category is being re-emphasized by the "old earth" movement among Christian scientists (e.g. the writings of Hugh Ross). They use this category to assert that all truth is God's truth. Nature is an open door to knowledge about God; it is different from special revelation (the Bible). It allows modern science the freedom to research the natural order. In my opinion it is a wonderful new opportunity to witness to the modern scientific western world.

**Nestorianism.** Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century. He was trained in Antioch of Syria and affirmed that Jesus had two natures, one fully human and one fully divine. This view deviated from the orthodox one nature view of Alexandria. Nestorius' main concern was the title "mother of God," given to Mary. Nestorius was opposed by Cyril of Alexandria and, by implication, his own Antiochian training. Antioch was the headquarters of the historical-grammatical-textual approach to biblical interpretation, while Alexandria was the headquarters of the four-fold (allegorical) school of interpretation. Nestorius was ultimately removed from office and exiled.

**Original author.** This refers to the actual authors/writers of Scripture.

**Papyri.** This is a type of writing material from Egypt. It is made from river reeds. It is the material upon which our oldest copies of the Greek New Testament are written.

**Parallel passages.** They are part of the concept that all of the Bible is God-given and, therefore, is its own best interpreter and balancer of paradoxical truths. This is also helpful when one is attempting to interpret an unclear or ambiguous passage. They also help one find the clearest passage on a given subject as well as all other Scriptural aspects of a given subject.

**Paraphrase.** This is the name of a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from "word to word" correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word to a "paraphrase" where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is "the dynamic equivalent" which attempts to take serious the original text, but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart's *Howto Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35.

**Paragraph.** This is the basic interpretive literary unit in prose. It contains one central thought and its development. If we stay with its major thrust we will not major on minors or miss the original author's intent.

**Parochialism.** This relates to biases which are locked into a local theological/cultural setting. It does not recognize the transcultural nature of biblical truth or its application.

**Paradox.** This refers to those truths which seem to be contradictory, yet both are true, although in tension with each other. They frame truth by presenting it from opposite sides. Much biblical truth is presented in paradoxical (or dialectical) pairs. Biblical truths are not isolated stars, but are constellations made up of the pattern of stars.

**Plato.** He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece. His philosophy greatly influenced the early church through the scholars of Alexandria, Egypt, and later, Augustine. He posited that everything on earth was illusionary and a mere copy of a spiritual archetype. Theologians later equated Plato's "forms/ideas" with the spiritual realm.



**Presupposition.** This refers to our preconceived understanding of a matter. Often we form opinions or judgments about issues before we approach the Scriptures themselves. This predisposition is also known as a bias, an *a priori* position, an assumption or a preunderstanding.

**Proof-texting.** This is the practice of interpreting Scripture by quoting a verse without regard for its immediate context or larger context in its literary unit. This removes the verses from the original author's intent and usually involves the attempt to prove a personal opinion while asserting biblical authority.

**Rabbinical Judaism.** This stage of the life of the Jewish people began in Babylonian Exile (586-538 b.c.). As the influence of the Priests and the Temple was removed, local synagogues became the focus of Jewish life. These local centers of Jewish culture, fellowship, worship and Bible study became the focus of the national religious life. In Jesus' day this "religion of the scribes" was parallel to that of the priests. At the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, the scribal form, dominated by the Pharisees, controlled the direction of Jewish religious life. It is characterized by a practical, legalistic interpretation of the Torah as explained in the oral tradition (Talmud).

**Revelation.** This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

**Semantic field.** This refers to the total range of meanings associated with a word. It is basically the different connotations a word has in different contexts.

**Septuagint.** This is the name given to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Tradition says that it was written in seventy days by seventy Jewish scholars for the library of Alexandria, Egypt. The traditional date is around 250 **b.c.** (in reality it possibly took over one hundred years to complete). This translation is significant because (1) it gives us an ancient text to compare with the Masoretic Hebrew text; (2) it shows us the state of Jewish interpretation in the third and second century b.c.; (3) it gives us the Jewish Messianic understanding before the rejection of Jesus. Its abbreviation is "LXX."

**Sinaiticus.** This is a Greek manuscript of the fourth century a.d. It was found by the German scholar, Tischendorf, at St. Catherine's monastery on Jebel Musa, the traditional site of Mt. Sinai. This manuscript is designated by the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet called "*aleph*" [א]. It contains both the Old and the entire New Testaments. It is one of our most ancient uncial MSS.

**Spiritualizing.** This term is synonymous with allegorizing in the sense that it removes the historical and literary context of a passage and interprets it on the basis of other criteria.

**Synonymous.** This refers to terms with exact or very similar meanings (although in reality no two words have a complete semantic overlap). They are so closely related that they can replace each other in a sentence without loss of meaning. It is also used to designate one of the three forms of Hebrew poetic parallelism. In this sense it refers to two lines of poetry that express the same truth (cf. Ps. 103:3).

**Syntax.** This is a Greek term which refers to the structure of a sentence. It relates to the ways parts of a sentence are put together to make a complete thought.

**Synthetical.** This is one of the three terms that relates to types of Hebrew poetry. This term speaks of lines of poetry which build on one another in a cumulative sense, sometimes called "climatic" (cf. Ps. 19:7-9).

**Systematic theology.** This is a stage of interpretation which tries to relate the truths of the Bible in a unified and rational manner. It is a logical, rather than mere historical, presentation of Christian

theology by categories (God, man, sin, salvation, etc.).

**Talmud.** This is the title for the codification of the Jewish Oral Tradition. The Jews believe it was given orally by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In reality it appears to be the collective wisdom of the Jewish teachers through the years. There are two different written versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian and the shorter, unfinished Palestinian.

**Textual criticism.** This is the study of the manuscripts of the Bible. Textual criticism is necessary because no originals exist and the copies differ from each other. It attempts to explain the variations and arrive (as close as possible) to the original wording of the autographs of the Old and New Testaments. It is often called "lower criticism."

**Textus Receptus.** This designation developed into Elzevir's edition of the Greek NT in 1633 a.d. Basically it is a form of the Greek NT that was produced from a few late Greek manuscripts and Latin versions of Erasmus (1510-1535), Stephanus (1546-1559) and Elzevir (1624-1678). In *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 27, A. T. Robertson says "the Byzantine text is practically the Textus Receptus." The Byzantine text is the least valuable of the three families of early Greek manuscripts (Western, Alexandrian and Byzantine). It contains the accumulation errors of centuries of hand-copied texts. However, A.T. Robertson also says "the Textus Receptus has preserved for us a substantially accurate text" (p. 21). This Greek manuscript tradition (especially Erasmus' third edition of 1522) forms the basis of the King James Version of a.d. 1611.

**Torah.** This is the Hebrew term for "teaching." It came to be the official title for the writings of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). It is, for the Jews, the most authoritative division of the Hebrew canon.

**Typological.** This is a specialized type of interpretation. Usually it involves New Testament truth found in Old Testament passages by means of an analogical symbol. This category of hermeneutics was a major element of the Alexandrian method. Because of the abuse of this type of interpretation, one should limit its use to specific examples recorded in the New Testament.

**Vaticanus.** This is the Greek manuscript of the fourth century a.d. It was found in the Vatican's library. It originally contained all the Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament. However, some parts were lost (Genesis, Psalms, Hebrews, the Pastorals, Philemon and Revelation). It is a very helpful manuscript in determining the original wording of the autographs. It is designated by a capital "B."

**Vulgate.** This is the name of Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible. It became the basic or "common" translation for the Roman Catholic Church. It was done in the a.d. 380's.

**Wisdom literature.** This was a genre of literature common in the ancient near east (and modern world). It basically was an attempt to instruct a new generation on guidelines for successful living through poetry, proverb, or essay. It was addressed more to the individual than to corporate society. It did not use allusions to history but was based on life experiences and observation. In the Bible, Job through Song of Songs assumed the presence and worship of YHWH, but this religious world view is not explicit in every human experience every time.

As a genre it stated general truths. However, this genre cannot be used in every specific situation. These are general statements that do not always apply to every individual situation.

These sages dared to ask the hard questions of life. Often they challenged traditional religious views (Job and Ecclesiastes). They form a balance and tension to the easy answers about life's tragedies.

**World picture and worldview.** These are companion terms. They are both philosophical concepts related to creation. The term "world picture" refers to "the how" of creation while "worldview" relates to "the Who." These terms are relevant to the interpretation that Genesis 1-2 deals primarily with the

Who, not the how, of creation.

**YHWH.** This is the Covenant name for God in the Old Testament. It is defined in Exod. 3:14. It is the causative form of the Hebrew term "to be." The Jews were afraid to pronounce the name, lest they take it in vain; therefore, they substituted the Hebrew term *Adonai*, "lord." This is how this covenant name is translated in English.

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# DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

I do not particularly care for statements of faith or creeds. I prefer to affirm the Bible itself. However, I realize that a statement of faith will provide those who are unfamiliar with me a way to evaluate my doctrinal perspective. In our day of so much theological error and deception, the following brief summary of my theology is offered.

1. The Bible, both the Old and New Testament, is the inspired, infallible, authoritative, eternal Word of God. It is the self-revelation of God recorded by men under supernatural leadership. It is our only source of clear truth about God and His purposes. It is also the only source of faith and practice for His church.
2. There is only one eternal, creator, redeemer God. He is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. He has revealed Himself as loving and caring although He is also fair and just. He has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit, truly separate and yet the same in essence.
3. God is actively in control of His world. There is both an eternal plan for His creation that is unalterable and an individually focused one that allows human free will. Nothing happens without God's knowledge and permission, yet He allows individual choices both among angels and humans. Jesus is the Father's Elect Man and all are potentially elect in Him. God's foreknowledge of events does not reduce humans to a determined pre-written script. All of us are responsible for our thoughts and deeds.
4. Mankind, though created in God's image and free from sin, chose to rebel against God. Although tempted by a supernatural agent, Adam and Eve were responsible for their willful self-centeredness. Their rebellion has affected humanity and creation. We are all in need of God's mercy and grace both for our corporate condition in Adam and our individual volitional rebellion.
5. God has provided a means of forgiveness and restoration for fallen humanity. Jesus Christ, God's unique son, became a man, lived a sinless life and by means of his substitutionary death, paid the penalty for mankind's sin. He is the only way to restoration and fellowship with God. There is no other means of salvation except through faith in His finished work.
6. Each of us must personally receive God's offer of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus. This is accomplished by means of volitional trust in God's promises through Jesus and a willful turning from known sin.
7. All of us are fully forgiven and restored based upon our trust in Christ and repentance from sin. However, the evidence for this new relationship is seen in a changed, and changing, life. The goal of God for humanity is not only heaven someday, but Christlikeness now. Those who are truly redeemed, though occasionally sinning, will continue in faith and repentance throughout their lives.
8. The Holy Spirit is "the other Jesus." He is present in the world to lead the lost to Christ and develop Christlikeness in the saved. The gifts of the Spirit are given at salvation. They are the life and ministry of Jesus divided among His body, the Church. The gifts which are basically the attitudes and motives of Jesus need to be motivated by the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit is active in our day as He was in the biblical times.
9. The Father has made the resurrected Jesus Christ the Judge of all things. He will return to earth to judge all mankind. Those who have trusted Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will receive their eternal glorified bodies at His return. They will be with Him forever. However, those who have refused to respond to God's truth will be separated eternally from the joys of fellowship with the Triune God. They will be condemned along with the Devil and his angels.

This is surely not complete or thorough but I hope it will give you the theological flavor of my heart. I like the statement:

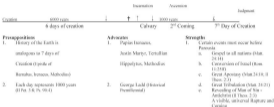
"In essentials—unity, In peripherals—freedom, In all things—love.

## VIEWS OF THE SECOND COMING

### INTRODUCTION

- A. This subject has caused great arguments.
- B. The time is not certain, the return is not certain, but the event is sure!
- C. Where did you get what you believe?
- D. What is the purpose of the Second Coming?
- E. Does the Bible teach a systematic eschatology?
- F. Why is one day so interested in the Second Coming?
- G. All theories concerning the physical return of Jesus are conservative views.

### EARLY CHURCH PREMILLENNIAL (Historical Premillennial)



### AMILLENNIAL (realized or inaugurated millennium)



### POSTMILLENNIAL (millennium now)



**Prerequisites**

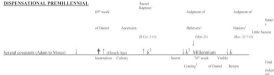
1. Man's affairs will bring in the Kingdoms (II Pet. 3:12; Matt. 6:10)
2. Things are getting better and better

**Advocates**

1. Jonathan Edwards
2. A. H. Strong
3. W. T. Cannon
4. Most 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scholars

**Strengths**

1. Takes Second Coming Seriously
2. Man has a part in God's plan
3. Optimistic about contemporary culture

**DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIAL**

(Dan. 12:13-15)

<sup>1</sup> There are 3 views of this Secret Coming:

- 1) Pre-tribulationist
- 2) Mid-tribulationist
- 3) Post-tribulationist

<sup>2</sup> Judgment of Believers (II Cor. 5:10)<sup>3</sup> Judgment of Nations (Matt. 25)**Prerequisites**

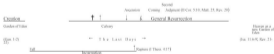
1. The Bible is divided into seven distinct dispensations
2. Literal fulfillment of every OT prophecy to Israel
3. Church and Israel totally separate. The Church is God's Plan II when the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah
4. The Church will be secretly captured, before the Tribulation. The book of Revelation, after chapter 5, is Jewish.
5. NT interpreted in light of OT prophecy

**Advocates**

1. John Darby (Physiogn (brother))
2. Clarence Larkin
3. D. L. Moody
4. C. I. Scofield (Scofield Bible)
5. Dallas Seminary (Prentiss, Hoyt, Stalwood)
6. W. A. Criswell (Houston Baptist)
7. Hal Lindsey
8. Tim LaHaye
9. Bible Churches (Dallas Seminary)

**Strengths**

1. Takes Bible prophecy seriously, especially Daniel
2. Any-amount return (Matt. 24:40-42)

**BOBS TESTATIVE OPINION** (Historical Premillennial/Post-Tribulationist/Nonmillennial)

There is a few corners of Eden

**Prerequisites**

1. One Plan (Gen. 1:1)
2. Unity of the people of God (Rom. 1:28-29:4; Gal. 3:26; 6:16)
3. Apocalyptic nature of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation (Hebrew genre)
4. OT saw one coming (Two Ages, one visible coming)
5. One visible coming (Matt. 24:27)

**Biological Tendencies**

1. between OT Covenant prophetic models and New Covenant specific models
2. between the Bible's resurrection (esp. God for all) and the abolition of Israel
3. between the conditional aspect of biblical covenants and promises ("if...then") and the unconditional fulfillment of God to fulfill mankind's redemption
4. between New Testament literary genres and modern western literary models.
5. between the Kingdom of God as present, yet future

One Rapture? (Thos. 4:13-18)  
One Resurrection  
One Judgment (Dan. 7:1, 10)  
The Eternal Kingdom

#### Conclusion

1. John Calvin said of the book of Revelation, "Only God knows what this means."
2. There is no approved or majority opinion on the Second Coming.
3. Every generation of believers forces the Bible into its own historical and cultural settings.
4. There is no systematic eschatology in the NT, but truth is revealed for us to "be ready" and "be active."
5. Only conservatives fight over this issue.
6. It is every generation of believers' hope, encouragement, and motivation to expect the Second Coming in their lifetime (psal. 135:17).

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# Revelation

*It scares me just a little  
this mystifying revelation.  
but then again it peaks my curiosity  
and stirs my imagination.  
but I've learned I must be careful  
how I view the message there,  
making sure I'm not dogmatic  
and exegeting it with care.  
I know the language is symbolic  
so I can't be wild and free  
with my interpretation  
and ignore the ambiguity.  
the genre is important  
I must remember that,  
never thinking that my answers  
are the only answers that are pat.  
but I hope that I can hear the words  
the Father has to say,  
look for Christ to come again,  
show others He's the Truth, the Life, the Way.  
and then that I'll remember as I struggle daily  
in my earthly role,  
that God will win,  
He reigns supreme,  
He is in control*

Pat Bergeron 7/21/1999