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Robert G. Witty, October 6, 1906 - June 20, 2007 - Known as the father of theological distance education, Dr. Witty helped pioneer one of Christendom's most important educational forces. Dr. Witty served with Master's from its founding, providing invaluable guidance, instructional and teaching resources as well as serving as a mentor and spiritual leader to the president of Master's. His presence will be missed but for a short season, after which we shall all be gathered into the house of our Father.

THE REVELATION EXPLAINED *SIMPLY*

***CHAPTER ONE* The Gift of the Unveiling**

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

These words begin the book of Revelation. Many Christians hold this book to be most precious. Some, even Christians, avoid it entirely. Those who hold it most precious believe a promise of blessing made to both reader and hearer: Those who avoid the book of Revelation do so because they claim that they cannot fathom its meaning.

Let us now join in an attempt to explain what the REVELATION teaches simply so that anyone can understand its message.

So, let's begin with the question, "Who wrote the book of Revelation?"

Of course, you are correct in saying that GOD, the Holy Spirit, is the author but He did use a Christian man named John. What a wonderful person! God used John to write the Gospel of John, 1st John, 2nd John, and 3rd John as well as the book of REVELATION.

John, the young son of Zebedee, a wealthy fisherman, left his father's trade to become a fervent member of the Twelve. Because of the youth's fiery loyalty Jesus called him and his brother James, "Sons of Thunder." Though John's early ambition for prominence received his Master's rebuke, Jesus entrusted the care of His mother Mary to John at Calvary. In the Acts record John continues a close association with Simon Peter. His later years were spent in a fruitful Ephesus ministry. There he wrote the Gospel of John and gathered many disciples. During the reign of Domitian (51- 96 AD) he was exiled to Patmos for a time. During this exile the Holy Spirit inspired him to write the book of Revelation. In his old age he became known as the Apostle of God's love..

As the human author of Revelation, John humbly describes himself as *your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ* (1:9). What a transformation from the youthful Son of Thunder!

In the same verse John declares that he was exiled because of his faithful witness and preaching *for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*. The Revelation began on the Lord's Day or Sunday when he, though on a bleak island, was worshipping in the Spirit.

The first chapter of Revelation also answers the question: what is the purpose or message of this inspired book?

God leaves no possible doubt concerning the purpose or message of Revelation. The very first verse announces that the book will reveal or unveil Jesus Christ, that the unveiling is a special gift from the Father to Jesus so that he could inform his servants. God wanted the servants of Jesus to know and understand Christian destiny. The message in Revelation was so important that *God sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John*.

The word *signified* alerts the reader that "signs" or symbols as well as words will be used to communicate the message. These "signs" or symbols should not confuse the reader but rather should clarify the message. John lays emphasis upon the value of the Revelation record as *the word of God...the testimony of Jesus Christ...and of all things that he saw*. No other Bible book promises this special blessing upon reading and hearing: *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand, 1:3*.

Both in the fourth verse and in the eleventh verse John emphasizes that *seven churches which are in Asia* are the first designated recipients of the contents of the Revelation. In writing to and about these spiritual bodies, John moves from a general apostolic Trinitarian blessing into an affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ. John's *Grace be unto you, and peace* emphasizes the sources as the Father, *him which is, and which was, and which is to come* or the Great I AM, as the Holy Spirit, *the seven Spirits which are before the throne*, and as the Son, *Jesus Christ*.

The first unveiling, the Redeemer, God come in the flesh. When John writes of his risen Lord he begins by unveiling Jesus' identity and mission in his earthly ministry, saying, *Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first*

begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. John then writes of Jesus' gracious redemptive mission for mankind, saying, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.* What a gracious summary of the Redeemer's identity and mission. No wonder John breaks forth with praise: *to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

It is easy to believe that John is simply repeating the words of the angel when he promises a future unveiling, *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so. Amen.* Then Jesus breaks into the revelation to declare: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

With this majestic prelude, John records his instruction to write what he sees in a book and send it to the seven designated churches. What John writes will divide into three parts and these parts form the best outline for understanding the book of Revelation. The angel instructed John, *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter 1:19.*

What, then are the things that *thou has seen*? They include the vision of the candlesticks, the vision of the Son of man, the vision of the seven stars, the explanation of the meaning of the candlesticks and of the stars. It is encouraging to the student to know that from the first of the book the angel is careful to explain the meaning of the "signs".

Remembering that the "candlesticks" are the churches, isn't it significant that John first saw the churches? Isn't it God's plan for the church to be visible first and then for the Christ to be seen? Christ, in and visible through His church is God's ordained priority method. And if Christ is not in the midst of the Church, then how will the world behold Him. John was given the vision in proper order *I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man... 1:12,13.* Christ is the life and the glory of the church. If He is absent, the church is ICHABOD.

The second unveiling, the Christ, the Head of the Church.

When the angel lifted the second veil, John fell prostrate before the glory of the Friend on whose breast he had leaned in earthly comradeship. John's initial vision of the identity and mission of the glorified Jesus Christ completely overpowered the apostle. John confessed, *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.* Compare this reaction with the warm comradeship in their former relationship and the unique and awesome majesty of the glorified Jesus receives a realistic emphasis.

Jesus responded to his prostrate servant with characteristic tenderness mingled with majesty, saying, *Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.* Two liberating truths crowd in and demand immediate expression: one, Jesus exults in His own personal eternal life; two, Jesus claims victory over death and hell.

John's initial vision of the glorified Jesus Christ defies word description and reveals the necessity for "signs" or symbols that gather meaning from earlier Biblical revelation. "Son of man" signifies Jesus' continuing relationship to humanity. Jesus' priestly garment and golden girdle indicate both High Priest and King of kings, both intercession and authority. Whiteness of hair and head symbolizes both total purity and complete wisdom; his eyes symbolize knowledge without limits; his feet symbolize righteous

judgment; his voice symbolizes infinite power; his shining countenance speaks of his deity; his mouth declares power to speak absolute truth; his right hand affirms complete control over his Church. Though words and symbols alike fall short of the glory and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, they begin the unveiling of his personal majesty, wisdom, and authority in his present earthly ministry through the Church.

Because Revelation is to be an unveiling of Jesus rather than a cloaking the first chapter ends with an explanation of two symbols. This explanation sets the tone of the Revelation: its meaning is given to be understood. *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches 1:20.*

Take heart, therefore, as you read and prayerfully study this book. The Holy Spirit will lead you into truth even as Jesus promised. Chapter 1 is division one. The time lapse for that division, though not stated, must have been short: time for John to receive and write down what God revealed.

CHAPTER TWO

Chapters 2 and 3 form division 2 of the book of *Revelation*. This second division details the second part of our outline, “the things that are”. In fact, this division is the Church Age, “the things that are” includes the time period from Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, to the Rapture, the transformation of the Church., a time known only to the Father. Therefore, this division of the book has already covered two thousand years.

In the first symbol of the united candlesticks or lampstands, John sees the centrality of Jesus in the “oneness in diversity” of the church. In the continuing vision, John sees the unveiling of Jesus in his relationships to the seven-fold diversity of the candlesticks. The first vision unveiled Jesus’ abiding presence in indescribable majesty in the midst of the “oneness” of the church; the second series of visions unveils Jesus’ sovereign presence as the Head of the Church to praise, censure, and guide each diverse branch of that “oneness”. When combined, the two visions unveil Christ Jesus’ relationship with His Church as His one Body and His relationships with His Church in many diversities, corporate and individual, presently specific and historically periodical.

In sum, Jesus Christ is the unchanging God of glory and majesty in the midst of His “perfected” Body and Jesus Christ is the sovereign Head of the “being sanctified” Body both corporate and individual, both local and universal, both specific and historically periodic. Each of the chosen seven churches, therefore, unveils an additional aspect of Christ in His relationship with a local Body of Christ congregation, in His relationship with an individual member of the Body of Christ, in His relationship with any period in the history of the Body of Christ. Each of the chosen seven churches unveils a Christ relationship with the spiritual condition of the whole or of a segment of the Body of Christ.

Many Bible scholars seek to interpret each of the seven letters to specific churches on the basis of non-Biblical knowledge which they have gained from academic

study of secular study. This procedure raises questions: one, does the Holy Spirit reveal the essential meaning of the Scripture only to the scholar? two, does the Holy Spirit reveal the essential meaning of the Scripture to the reader who knows only the biblical revelation? three, is the limited interpretation based only on what the Bible reveals more or less accurate to the Holy Spirit's purpose in each revelation?

EPHESUS:

To the angel of the Church of Ephesus

Aspects of the Writer: *he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand,
Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*

Christ is unveiled as the One who retains a personal possession of all seven of the "angels" in the safety of His strength. Each belongs to Christ as much as the other. The position of one is the position of all. Only a greater than Christ could disturb the ownership.

Christ "walks around" in the midst of all of the churches. No one is headquarters more than another. His view of each church comes from within the fellowship rather than from without. He never leaves His property. He stays "on the property". His view is internal rather than peripheral, personal rather than merely organizational.

While Jesus holds the "angels" in His possession and surety, He never determines the status of the church on the basis of a report but only by personal acquaintance.

On the basis of indisputable personal evaluation, Christ lists ten aspects of the church of Ephesus that show faithfulness:

1. *I know thy works,*
2. *and thy labor,*
3. *and thy patience,*
4. *and how thou canst not bear them that are evil;*
5. *and hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not,*
6. *and hast found them liars;*
7. *and hast borne,*
8. *and hast patience,*
9. *and for my name's sake hast labored,*
10. *and hast not fainted.*

By being there in his walking Jesus has personal knowledge of what the church had accomplished, the price they had paid, the opposition they had encountered, the endurance they had shown, and the spirit in which they had continued. Indeed here was an exceptional church. Jesus had personal knowledge of its troubles and triumphs.

- 1 indicates that they had achieved results.
- 2 and 9 indicate that results had come only by labor.
- 7 indicates that burdens had been carried.
- 3 and 8 refer to the endurance they had displayed in the service.
- 9 indicates a proper motivation for their labor.
- 10 indicates that before the finish they had not quit.
- 4 indicates their reaction to evil even when disguised as good.
- 5 and 6 demonstrates their determination to unmask evil in fair justice.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

If there was ever a revelation of the expectation of Jesus concerning His church,

this rebuke reveals the divine standard. The standard of God is perfection. For this reason the member of the Body of Christ must always remember that the best and most completely obedient stand by Grace not by merit.

What is it, therefore, that makes our works pleasing to God? Not the perfection of our results or the exertion of our efforts but rather the warmth and sincerity of our love. Jesus placed the intense and continued work of the Ephesian church in the balance and showed the church the importance he gave to their love. Wonderful as the labor and accomplishment of their energy, Jesus was more concerned about their love than their labor.

Theologians have disagreed about the meaning of verse six because of inability to identify the Nicolaitans. Isn't the real interpretation simply that the church hated what Jesus hated? Thereby the principle becomes more important than a limited definition. Removing a church from its place as a "candlestick" does not contradict the doctrine of the eternal salvation of the believer but this warning strongly emphasizes the fact that a church may lose its testimony and its service to glorify and shine for the Lord.

How glorious is the promise to the "overcomer" who heeds what our Lord says to the church and, therefore, to those who make up its membership.

SMYRNA

In this message our Lord speaks on the basis of His eternal being, His sacrificial death, and His triumphant resurrection life. He is the great I AM.

Consider again how complete is Christ's knowledge of the status and activity of each church. Our Lord knows the institution because He knows the members. He lists works, tribulation, and poverty (but rich) condition of the church. He knows the blasphemy of the hypocrites of Satan. He foresees suffering and its cause, limits and purpose. He promises the ultimate escape from judgment.

"Open ears" should hear and rejoice in these truths:

1. Good works may be attended with tribulation and outward poverty.
2. Outward poverty may cloak inward riches.
3. Spiritual claims never hide blasphemous hypocrisy from God.
4. The true and faithful do not escape suffering, trial, and tribulation.
5. The devil may cause suffering and tribulation but only within God's limits.

6. Endurance of Satan's suffering receives God's special crown

7. To overcome is always the privilege of the faithful.

What a letter of comfort derived from the sovereignty of the Son of Almighty God, the Head of the Church.

PERGAMOS

The Son of God's message to this church emphasized the power of the Word, the sword of the Lord. Such had been the focus of John's description of Jesus in the Gospel. All who read this message should understand that the Church is called to submit to the authority of the Bible.

As always, Jesus asserts His personal knowledge of the church and the state of its members. Here He compliments their works in the light of their hostile environment. The church ministers in the very seat of Satan. What a revelation to know that the Adversary

makes his headquarters in physical localities. Clearly this city is not Satan's permanent seat of authority. Jesus praises both their service and their fidelity in this place of satanic violence against Christians as exemplified in the martyr Antipas.

Ardent service and courageous fidelity do not excuse the presence of two anti-Christ doctrines: the doctrine of Balaam that taught compromise with idolatry and immoral living; the doctrine of the Nicolaitians which Jesus hated. Nothing can compensate for allowing without opposition what destroys God's people and defies God's truth.

To escape the discipline of God required repentance for past failure and swift compliance to Christ's standards and requirements.

What a promise of reward to the overcomer! Special food and spiritual nutrition from God and personalized and private affirmation from the Lord Himself will bless the obedient.

THYATIRA

Jesus presents Himself to this church "angel" with emphasis upon His unique and penetrating insight, spiritual authority, and power to make true judgment.

Thyatira receives commendation for increasing or multiplying works. Evidently the church was strong on "doing the job" in increasing quantity. Nor were the church's works lacking in proper "love" motivation nor in "service" spirit nor in "faith" direction nor in patient "endurance". In fact, Jesus promises to reward individually those who serve in this helpful way. What a reward because it extends beyond the present into international and powerful service. This church demonstrates the high value that Jesus places upon a spiritual service to human need in the spirit of love and patience.

Thyatira receives an unmistakable warning that doing good and doing it in the right spirit fails to meet God's standard when mingled with immorality, false doctrine, and spiritual compromise. Obedient service cannot compensate for lack of worship, purity of life, and rebellion. While God blesses the sincerity of the service of some, he condemns the lack of rebuke for the presence of false doctrine and immoral living. The zealous servant not only must serve but also purge the Body of the Church of that which contradicts the standards of the Word.

Jesus promises the "morning star" of His reign to the overcomer and gives a promise of His coming power that will shatter the evil and subject the nations to His unbending standards of righteousness.

The message to Thyatira shouts that God rewards service, requires obedience, gives hope, and in His time will rule the nations.

CHAPTER THREE

SARDIS

The salutation to Sardis contradicts the common statement of many people concerning the church. The church does not belong to the pastor: the church is not "Rev. Jones' church". The pastor and the church properly belong to the Lord Jesus. The church does not belong to the denomination. The church properly belongs to the Lord. The Lord Jesus properly possesses both the pastor and the church. The real estate

that people call the church has human “ownership” but the true church including the pastor belong to the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church.

Sardis existed in a precarious state. Evidently in its external appearance Sardis was alive and serving. The external Sardis only covered works that were flawed and life that was in appearance only. The real light of their “lamp” barely flickered with the weak residue of past reality. Was it that the lamp was polished but the oil supply of the Holy Spirit was well nigh exhausted? The warning to be watchful (I would think to examine themselves for reality) and to strengthen that which remained of reality would indicate this condition.

The command of the Lord Jesus is specific: watch, remember, hold fast, and repent. Careful self-examination, specific memory of true teaching, strong fidelity to the truth, and godly repentance were strong but necessary acts of obedience and desire for renewal. This church was basically living on its past reputation but with little present vitality.

Though the spiritual condition of Sardis was lamentable, Jesus paid special recognition to the few faithful ones. Their Lord proclaimed their worthiness to walk with Him in purity. They were not only undefiled by formal unreality and a “spiritual facade” but they were righteous with the beauty of their Lord. How gracious that our Lord sees the church as individual persons who are members rather than a general congregation.

What a stern and terrible warning Jesus gave most of the church: the threat of unwanted judgment and that without warning.

For faithfulness in the midst of laxity and for purity in the midst of defilement, Jesus promises a final destiny of purity, of unshakeable destiny and of recognition before the Father and His angels. What greater honor for standing true to their Lord in the midst of the popularity of unfaithfulness.

PHILADELPHIA

As in each letter Jesus presents His message to this church on the basis of a specific emphasis drawn from His portrait revealed in the beginning of the unveiling. Jesus is holy, true, holding the key of David, and possessing a used sovereign power to open or close access or opportunity. What a Savior! What a Lord!

In sharp contrast to the power of their omnipotent Lord is the feeble church at Philadelphia. Does this remind the Bible student of Paul’s experience with the “thorn in the flesh”? Note the careful commendation Jesus gives. Jesus knows their works, rejoices in their fidelity to His word and the honor paid to His name. The door of access to service and of opportunity which Jesus has opened to this weak but loyal church defies any human attempt to close. What a comfort that our service opportunities are God’s gift rather than our achievement! What an inspiration to know that divine enabling transcends circumstances and opposition.

In addition to God-given and protected opportunity, their omnipotent and sovereign Lord promises both exposure of Satan’s false disciples and public acknowledgment of the church’s position in the love of their Lord. Jesus promises that He will vindicate the testimony of those who are true to Him.

When a dire hour of temptation comes to test the “earth dwellers”, Jesus promises protection and escape for those who have kept the word of his patience. Many feel that this refers not only to a contemporary tribulation but to the pre-tribulation rapture of the

church.

In the first epistle of John it is stated that those who hold the doctrine of the Lord's return will purify their lives. Here the Lord admonishes the church against carelessness and urges them to faithfulness in the light of Christ's unannounced time of return.

The reward to this feeble church for continued faithfulness has strengthened those who are tempted to falter through the centuries: a permanent place in the temple of God, a personal inscription of God's name as God's very own, a personal inscription of citizenship in the city of God, a personal signature of God Himself. What a glorious assurance of eternal life and security!

LAODICEANS

How tragic that a church should exist for which the Christ had no single word of commendation. What a contrast between the Amen, who said "yes" to God's will even to the agony of the Cross and the members of the church of Laodiceans. The "faithful and true witness" finds only unfaithful pretenders. The "beginning of the creation of God" which makes "new creature" out of the "seed of Adam" stands outside the door of the Body that bears His name. Yet, even there the Christ indicates His willingness to forgive and restore and enter into fellowship with the repentant pretenders.

The lukewarm condition of the church toward both sin and salvation showed the impossibility God's acceptance of a casual attitude toward the Cross-. The salvation which was purchased with the passionate suffering in the Savior cannot be mere commonplace to the disciple. Such casual works as these were nauseous to the One who had suffered.

To the unconcern that Jesus abhorred was added the self-deceit of hypocrisy. The had confused material prosperity with spiritual well being to the extent of self-deception. The uncompromising Christ promises the discipline of a loving Master calling for repentance to replace complacency.

Few verses of Scripture have been used to show Christ's continuing and gracious love more than His request for an "open door" and His promise of fellowship to the truly repentant.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

But let all remember that as Mr. Hunt's painting shows, the latch is on the inside. The human must respond in faith to receive this life-changing grace.

How wonderful that the promise to the overcomer offers a fellowship that is both lofty as His own people and eternal in His kingdom. What grace could be more amazing!

With these penetrating letters God closes the book of the earthly history of the Church, the Body of Christ.

The vision of "the things that are" now ends with a trumpet call!

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

MEDITATION and ILLUMINATION

As I meditated upon these first three chapters, God opened my mind to see what I had failed to see for many years.

While it is true that the Old Testament, as in Daniel for example, reveals the movement of Gentile and worldwide civilizations, the focus of the Bible is upon the nation of Israel. God is working His plan through His people.

When God's attention moves to the Gospels, the focus of our heavenly Father is not on the famous Roman Empire but on the ministry of His Son. When Jesus ascends, God's focal point is on the ministry of the infant Church, Christ's Body.

With this insight I understood the book of *REVELATION* with a new understanding.

The first chapter unveils the *things that John saw*, the initial revelation of the book. John has been chosen to see and record a chapter in the eternal life of Jesus that reveals in specific order His coming glorification and the final outcome of God's plan for Earth. When understood, this unveiling of the work of Christ brings comfort to God's people.

First, John saw that by the earthly ministry of the Son of God, the Triune God was creating a kingdom of royal priesthood out of the fallen Adamic race. God's original purpose for the salvation of mankind was to be accomplished to the glory of its Redeemer.

Then, John saw the spiritual instrument, the Church and the indwelling Holy Spirit, whose continuing ministry God was to use in an age of redeeming grace. He saw the Church as Christ's Body, God's Lamp-stand, and praise God, John saw in the midst of the Church, the glorious presence of the Jesus, the sovereign Savior. John saw that God's present focus centered not in what the world would call great and powerful but in the ministry of the Son of God by means of the Church. The record of the seven churches shows that the power is in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The churches are the instruments or the channels.

What the Church IS and how the Church SERVES becomes the focal point of God's work in the *things that are*, the present age. Following this age of gracious opportunity God's sovereign power will fulfill all His promises and prophecies in *the things that will be*. Nothing will left unfulfilled! The future is certain! God is sovereign! The last chapter has been written!

Though other churches were active in John's generation, these seven churches depicted seven spiritual conditions that were present in all church history. Because people compose the churches, so the seven churches depict not only institutions in general but also individual members of the institutions. Many believe that they also depict seven different periods (all are approximate and may slightly vary with the Bible scholar) in the church age somewhat as follows:

Ephesus - First Century

Smyrna - 100 -300, A.D.

Pergamos - 300 - 500, A.D.

Thyatira - 500 -1500, A.D.

Sardis - 1500 - 1700 , A.D.

Philadelphia 1700 - 1900 , A.D.

Laodicea 1900 - Rapture of the Church.

To the Christian the exact time accuracy of these periods has less importance than two facts: one, the church age had a beginning; two, the church age will have a termination. Time is not an endless cycle or linear sequence. Time moves according to the plan of God to a glorious climax of triumph for Christ and His Church. Just as the members of the Church have received Jesus as Savior and Lord, so Jesus will come again to receive the members of His Church to share His revealed glory.

I want to emphasize that the “things that are” period had a definite beginning and also has a definite, though unknown to man, ending. This fact is contrary to the thinking of the present culture. What modern man is determined to believe (and a study of the past will convince that this concept is common to every period of human history) is the constancy of time. Unbelieving mankind wants to believe that “all things continue as they were” so that there is no real interruption of human experience. The Bible clearly contradicts this belief. As a result Chapter 3 ends the Church age and introduces a radical change in God’s dealing with the Church and with unregenerate mankind.

To repeat and summarize:

1. Division One (Chapter One) of the book, “what John saw” was completed in a few hours or at most in a few days.

2. Division Two (Chapters 2 and 3) of the book, “the things that are” began at Pentecost, has now continued for 2000 years and will be completed with the Rapture, a date known only to God.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Call and the Vision

After this, I looked, and, behold. . .

With these words John obviously begins a new division: *the things that are to be hereafter*. I repeat: The first division, Chapter One, lasted a short time; the second division has lasted two thousand years.

The “Church age” has past. John does not again write about the “Church” until chapter nineteen. What a challenge to members of the Body of Christ to complete the “ministry of the word of reconciliation” while we can! The day will come when the door to “the acceptable time” will be shut.

A door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither. . .

God inspired the Apostle Paul to reveal a promise of this glorious future of an unknown date: *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 .*

John was going to be a witness to the judgments that the world will endure after the Church is ruptured to glory. But, praise God, before the judgments fall, the Christians are to answer the Call to “come up”. What a triumph for the “dead in Christ” to be made whole! What a triumph for those who remain alive on earth to be translated into glory without tasting of death!

What had happened in the “church age” had taken place on Earth; now John is to behold what takes place in heaven as the source for God’s sovereign judgments before their execution on Earth.

John, in an “in the spirit” state, is now beholding the sovereign source of judgment: *and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat upon the throne.*

As John had first seen the glorified Christ in the midst of the church here on Earth, so now John is to behold the sovereign Majesty exalted upon His throne in the

heavenlies.

Think of it: *ONE SAT UPON THE THRONE*. In the next verse John attempts to describe the glory of deity in terms of precious stones flashing with light. And to describe the seven Spirits of God, the Spirit of Almighty God, John must resort to the flash of lightning, the rumble and roar of thunder, the communication of voices. He is experiencing Omnipotence in worship, in judgment and in communication. But how can the majesty of God Almighty be put into words?

And John sees how that our gracious God keeps His promise of a shared reign as he looks upon the four and twenty elders who sit upon surrounding thrones, who wear crowns of gold as shared sovereignty, and who fall before the Majesty of Almighty God in grateful worship. Who could these elders better represent than the glorified saints of the Old and the New Testaments?

Some have labored to identify the four living creatures by name when we are told both their description and their office as beings created for the purpose of continual worship of the Worthy One. Whether cherubim or seraphim or special creature their being and office defies verbal description. One attribute of deity is exalted above all others: holiness. And consider the timeless descriptive affirmation of the I AM nature of the Almighty, "the One who was, and is, and is to come."

All that the Holy Spirit has ever previously revealed to this soldier of the Cross who has been used to convey to the church so much of the New Testament is now climaxed by the revelation of God's unmatched sovereignty.

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

When John saw Christ in the midst of the churches, he saw Christ's glory, authority, and love for His church. Now John is beholding the reality of the Creator and Sustainer. While this Sovereign loves those He has redeemed, the revelation confirms that all creation and providence is for the pleasure of the Almighty.

Now that God has revealed Himself in heaven, John has seen the celestial glory of the Almighty. Heaven's song of praise contradicts every aspect of the modern self-exaltation of humanity and materialistic science: *Thou art worth, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou has created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

To spend time by speculating about the identity of the elders and the living creatures can be to miss the main lesson of this heavenly vision. What God is revealing is the glory and majesty of the heavenlies, the very throne room of the Almighty in which the majesty of God is apparent and is worshiped. A myriad of questions arise because of human curiosity. Some students of the Bible find satisfaction as they compare Scripture with Scripture but the true message in this chapter is not hidden. The true message is the indescribable glory of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Worthy Lamb

Chapter five continues the vision of the sovereign majesty of Almighty God. Attention is riveted on a book in the right hand of Majesty on high. The book is sealed both

externally and internally.

A strong angel voices the question that reverberates through the heavens, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals?"

A search is implied, though not stated, but it is fruitless. The result seems hopeless because "no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look therein."

This fruitless search caused John to weep much. Evidently the inability to find one able to perform this task caused great concern even in heaven.

Why was heaven concerned about this book? Why did John declare that he wept much over the failure?

To answer these questions let us consider two facts and draw a reasonable and almost inescapable conclusion.

It is a fact that as John saw the seals opened, he beheld forces and effects that have molded human history that must be judged and terminated before God's eternal purpose of mankind can be consummated.

It is also a fact that when the last seal was opened and the last trumpet was prepared to be blown, that a mighty angel announces to heaven and earth that God will now and without further delay finalize the eternal mystery of His sovereign purpose for the destiny of earth and mankind.

Do not these two facts justify the two conclusions:

1. The sealed book indicates that mankind has lived in a time when judgment was delayed so that the door of salvation could remain open (*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9)
2. Opening the sealed book indicates that mankind has come to the time when the door of salvation will close and the final judgment will suffer no more delay so that God's eternal purpose will be consummated.

John wept because failure to open the seals meant that the will of God for earthly future was beyond the capacity of man or celestial being to accomplish. Opening the book was necessary to complete God's purpose and plan for human redemption.

As man's redemption had exceeded human works so now failure to open the seals meant the work of judgment was beyond the power of man or angel or devil to execute. John wept.

"Weep not," one of the elders said to John. "Behold . . . " What the elder would proclaim to John was again to exalt Jesus, the Savior and Lord who had been in the midst of the seven churches.

Jesus had declared while on earth, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." John 5:22.

Now because Jesus' Self-emptying ministry had culminated in the sacrifice of Calvary and the triumph of the Resurrection and had continued in the ministry of the Body, the Church, John sees that Jesus has prevailed to open the sealed book and to complete the mystery of God in judgment.

The book of "the things that will come hereafter" will be opened!

The prophecies and promises of the Word of God will be fulfilled!

The mystery of God will be fulfilled!

The future is not only sure but is revealed and John “will look” upon it and by the teaching of the revelation through John, the humblest Christian will know that God’s promised destiny for His people will be consummated.

The Bible doesn’t say so, but surely John wiped the tears away. And it is revealed to us that we, as believers who live in an unbelieving world, can be sure that what God has promised God will perform.

John pictures this moment of triumph, saying, “And I beheld , , , “ Hold your breath. Get ready to sing. Look! Gaze! Glory!

“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.”

What a picture! He who had provided redemption by His death and resurrection, He who had been seen in the midst of the seven churches, now with the seven horns of perfect power, now with the perfect Holy Spirit, now in the midst of omnipotence, now in the midst of the righteous of the ages, now in the midst of the worshipful creatures, He who has prevailed now stands forth.

The Lamb takes the book!

And all heaven breaks forth in worship and praise. What an incredible choir of worship and praise. They sing, they speak, they worship!

The dimensions of earth dissolve with the union of past prayers and future praise in the chorus of worship. Elders, celestial creatures, uncounted millions of angels, earthly creatures of all kinds join in worship to God on the throne and to the Lamb and to the Holy Spirit. Golden harps, vials of the incense of prayers, singing, speaking, worshiping, crying “AMEN”, falling down in worship, praise, and affirmation of worthiness and power. What do these two chapters mean? What message do they bring to the followers of the Lamb?

First, they mean to me that the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, possesses the holy worthiness of being and immeasurable deity power to control both heaven and earth.

Second, they bring the joyous message that in spite of the present earthly confusion and the unseen spiritual conflict, every Christian will be a part of the future guaranteed victory celebration.

Having envisioned the adequacy and glory of the Godhead, the coming chapters will reveal a look at the events in the divine plan, the completion of the mystery of God, that is finally executed with the opening of the seven seals. Jesus is unveiled as the sovereign Opener of the seals, the fourth unveiling.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON CHAPTERS 4 and 5

My study in the book of Revelation has impressed me with some general observations that I would like to separate from the specific chapters both for content and for emphasis.

First, recall that 1:19 divides the book into three parts: what John saw, the things that are, and the things which shall be hereafter. Have we considered the implicit teaching of this simple statement?

1. Doesn’t this statement teach that both the present and the future are in the certain jurisdiction of the sovereign God? The revelation contained in this book allows no uncertainty in the outcome or the events leading to the final objective. The prophecy

leaves no margin for doubt about God's sovereignty.

2. Doesn't this statement teach that God's control of Earthly events contradicts the basic concept of non-Biblical philosophy? Non-Biblical philosophy teaches that history unfolds in a uniform and continuing pattern. As Simon Peter declared the unbelieving scoffer believes that all things continue as in the beginning. The Bible teaches here and everywhere that God's dealing with Earth and mankind progresses according to the divine plan. For example, we live in the so-called "Church age". This age began at Pentecost. There will be an ending at the Rapture. This scenario declares to the unsaved, "Believe while there is time." This scenario says to the Christian, "Evangelize while there is time." Study Hebrews 3:7-19. The book of Revelation reveals that the divine plan makes it certain.

3. Doesn't the book of Revelation thereby emphasize the complete sovereignty of God and thus glorify Jesus Christ and give comfort to the believer?

4. In short, the sovereign God will fulfill His complete will whether fully or partially revealed to our present knowledge.

Secondly, doesn't the book of Revelation limit the knowledge that God communicates even to the believer?

The book of Revelation reveals enough specific information about events and personalities to reveal the final outcome of Earthly history and divine purpose but not enough to satisfy human curiosity about all the details.

To grasp the meaning of what is revealed in the text and symbols of this prophecy requires only prayerful reading but by comparing this scripture with other scriptures the student may gain additional knowledge of God's revelation.

For example, consider the identity of the four living creatures. Some commentators compare these creatures with the seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-8) or with the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:4-22) or with other creatures on the basis of their features. Some commentators gain additional understanding of the time schedule in the book of Revelation by a comparison to the revelation in the book of Daniel.

In some cases the meaning of some revelations may be fully unveiled only in the future. Speculation that goes beyond what the Bible unfolds will usually lead to error rather than new truth. For example, the specific identity of the Anti-Christ may await the removal of the Hinderer (2 Thessalonians 2:7). The specific identity of the weird locusts may be revealed only when they invade the Earth. The student must be careful not to lose the message of the text by attempting to add personal speculation to unrevealed details.

CHAPTER SIX

The Lamb Opens the Seals

Having seen the heavenly glory of God and witnessed the worship of the Almighty, having seen the worthiness of the Lamb (Jesus) to launch and control the future, John now begins to see a projection of the "things that shall be hereafter." God now begins to reveal His own sovereignty, the true nature of Satan's earthly power, and the judgments by which Jesus will begin His reign as Lord of lords and King of kings. Though the events of the third division may, according to Daniel 9, require seven years, the focus

of the book of Revelation centers on the last half or three and one half years.

One of the living creatures commands in a voice of authority for John to see the unfolding of the earthly events from a heavenly perspective. John weeps no more for John knows that God controls the events.

The opening of the seven seals provides John with insight into a panoramic view of God's final judgment and its earthly effects.

The Lamb opened the first seal. John saw the initial revelation with understanding. John saw the horse and its rider. Whether the rider was old or young, strong or weak, large or small is not revealed. The horse, not the rider, was white. Whether true or false the rider of the first revelation had the appearance of righteousness and truth.

The rider upon the horse had important features. He had a bow which gave the appearance of power but lacked the arrow to produce the effectiveness of the claim.

The crown he received indicates accomplishment rather than true royal heritage or character. Conquering is in process but reaches a terminus of finality.

Bible scholars see with understanding that this first revelation represents Satan's anti-Christ movement. Note the marks of identity. Anti-Christ not only opposes the true Christ but claims to offer a better substitute for Christ. The horse, not the rider, is white.

Anti-Christ has the claim of power but lacks the substance of arrows or of reality.

Satan's horseman will conquer multitudes by his false claim of righteousness, he will receive the crown of the acclaim of millions but will come to final defeat. The horsemen that follow will show that he has power only to kill and to deceive. Satan's conquering ride across the earth's inhabitants now moves to termination.

John vision focuses not on the extent of the earthly work of Satan that began in Eden but on the culminating judgment against the Adversary.

The Lamb opened the second seal.

The second living creature calls John to see and understand for he perceives not only the characteristics but the result of Satan's deception. One cannot escape the insight that the carnage of the second red horse and its horseman is the result of the deception of the first rider. Specifically, Satanic error produces human destructiveness. Satanic error promises happiness but removes peace and foment conflict. The killing tragedy is massive for the sword that men wield under Satan's power is great and deadly.

Jesus and His influence has never produced a war. No war or killing has ever occurred on Earth that Satan's influence has not caused. Now war will come to its final climax and final conclusion.

The Lamb opens the third seal.

At the command of the third living creature John behold a black horse whose rider holds a pair of scales in his hand. John not only sees but now hears a voice of explanation, saying, *A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see you hurt not the oil and the wine.*

The color of the horse, the scales in the rider's hands, the words of explanation combine to indicate a condition of selective scarcity. The necessities of life, the grain, becomes so scarce that a day's food for one person requires the pay for a day's labor. This pictures scarcity in famine and of rationed necessities. On the other hand, the luxuries are plentiful for those capable of buying them.

At this point an obvious truth should be stated. The appearance of these horsemen at

the breaking of the seals does not mean that they have had no prior existence. Error and Satanic falsity extend to Adam and Eve. War and bloodshed go back to Cain. War follows error and war follows war. The horsemen did not begin to ride with the breaking of the seals. The horseman did not cease to ride with the immediate revelation. What John saw spanned history but was revealed as coming to final termination with the judgment of God in this three and one half years.

What, then, is the meaning of the unveiling to John?

The revelation pictured by the opening of the seals indicates that after the church is raptured out of the world and the tribulation begins all these destructive forces will come thundering to their final consummation. Error will ride to a new but brief triumph under the Antichrist. War will reach its final intensity to destroy and famine will starve as never before in human history.

As Satan's power climaxes so will the destructive results uncover the falsity of his claims and the righteousness of God's final judgment.

The Lamb opens the fourth seal.

John now beholds the climactic horror that will ride with incredible destructive power through the influence of Satan's error and power. Thank God the redeemed will not be present but will have been caught up in the Rapture to the Judgment Seat of Christ. How graphic is the description of the culminating horror and destruction resulting from Satan's deceptive dominion. The horse is pale or ghastly, drained of the evidence of life. The rider is named Death (Thanatos). Because Hell (Hades) followed after Him, the picture is of hopeless and eternal death.

Students of the Bible will recall that the Paradise section of Hades was transferred to heaven when Jesus ascended. Only the place of torment remained. So the climactic result of Satan's earthly power and reign is eternally hopeless Death and hell.

John is beginning to see the final chapter for Satan's power.. John is beginning to see that the power of the Lamb of God is the power of the Lion of Judah. John is beginning to see in graphic reality that the power of "the roaring lion" is only the power to steal and to kill and to destroy. John is beginning to see the final chapter of the mystery of God's redemptive plan.

The fifth seal is opened without announcement from the living creatures.

John sees an entirely different result of what the power of Satan will work during the horrible reign of evil. Although the Body of Christ, the true Church, has been raptured, among those who remain will be a multitude who will see their mistake and will suffer martyrdom rather than submit to the Beast. Their time of rapture has not come but knowing that God will bring them to glory, they ask about the time of God's final victory celebration and their triumph.

The fact that God tells them to wait proves again that God has a timetable for His redemptive plan.

Though these failed to heed the Gospel during the church age, they are awarded robes of white which indicate that the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to them. More will be revealed to John about these as the revelation continues.

This insight emphasizes, however, that God allows the forces of Satan to persecute the believer even unto death but it is a death of victory and release rather than of defeat.

The fifth seal unveils a truth that must have caused John both a tear of sympathy and a shout of glory to God.

The opening of the fifth seal also raises a question that receives an answer that every Christian needs to remember. Even in the Old Testament the Psalmist wondered at the prosperity of the evil man and the seeming lack of the judgment of God upon injustice. Here the martyred dead cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It is natural for the persecuted to wonder why God does not avenge their suffering at the hand of man and devil. God has promised. Why the delay? The answer, of course, is that God works according to His program rather than according to human desire. But a long look at the history of the world proves that God will always keep His promise.

The Lamb opened the sixth seal.

All through the Bible there is a teaching that many seem to miss: the reign of evil men and evil spirits affects both the physical creation and the affairs of business and government. All through the Old Testament the prophets declared that earthly storms and quakes were divine judgments. Paul tells us that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now." After the opening of this sixth seal these judgments begin to come to a recognizable climax. Both the celestial and the earthly elements of nature reveal God's power and judgment. As the events unfold through the book of Revelation, the awesome events surpass the imaginations of science fiction. Here is only the beginning but that beginning is frightening. Most important it brings terror to that sinners at the realization that the long announced and rejected message of divine judgment is at hand. Like the scoffers in the time of Noah, man is powerless to stand against the sovereign action of Almighty God.

Here again is the terrible truth that what man believes to be stable and unchangeable becomes the object of the destructive judgment of God. There is no refuge. There is no place to hide from the judgment of God. Within forty-two months God will consummate His divine purpose.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Vision of the Seal of God

Before the book of Revelation unveils the final terrors of the judgment of the holy God and before the book unveils the final power of Satan upon earth, God gives John a picture of the ability of God to protect, to use, and to reward His own. In short, Chapter Seven describes a protective interlude in God's final judgment.

The entire Bible record emphasizes that God's mercy always called people to repentance before final judgment. In the New Testament Simon Peter is moved to explain that God's desire to save delays final judgment (2 Peter 3:9).

The first three verses refer to the destructive winds of judgment that are ordered to delay their power to hurt to the earth and its inhabitants. These "winds" are under the control of angels and will affect the whole earth. Verse two specifies that the delay waits for the planting of "the seal of the living God" upon a selected body of Israel. The "seal" always indicates protected property that is precious and made secure. In this case, the seal protects "slaves (not hired servants) of God" who are selected for a special cause. The sealed are selected, are slaves with a special purpose, are possessed, are identified, are protected and secured. Moreover, the wonderful truth of the seal emphasizes that God's seal protects and preserves in the midst of all the

terrors of divine judgment. Just as Noah in the Ark, just as the Hebrew children in the furnace, just as Daniel among the lions, just so the “sealed” are safe.

Verse three teaches that the timing of judgment depends upon the sovereign will of God. Tragic consequences may follow evil causes but the direct judgment of God awaits His decision.

Who are the ones that are sealed?

First, all are members of one of the tribes of Israel. Not one is Gentile. All of the twelve tribes are represented except Dan. Manasseh, Joseph’s son takes the portion of the tribe of Dan. Some feel that Genesis 49:17 foreshadows Dan’s omission. However, here the Bible specifies no cause.

Second, Though it may be reasonable to suppose that these sealed servants will be world evangelists, it is significant that God specifies no task to this Jewish multitude at this insight. The emphasis rests on God’s ability to select and protect in the most unfavorable of circumstances and in God’s ability to unleash or to delay judgment at his sovereign will.

Third, the relationship which these sealed servants hold to the Lamb indicates that, though Jewish by race, they have come to believe and rejoice in the belief that Jesus is their Messiah. Perhaps students should accept the interpretation that as Enoch typifies the raptured church that escaped the Flood so Noah whom God preserved during the Flood may typify these who are sealed.

John’s attention fastens on another group.

In number this second group is great. No human would be able to number them but evidently John’s vision was able to encompass them with specific knowledge that included important details. The diversity that John observed in this multitude included nationality, kinship, people groups, and language variations. These people stand before the throne and the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes indicating righteousness. In their hands are palms indicating victory. Only after a period of worship is John asked to identify them.

When John turns the question of identity back to the elder, one of them explains the identity of this unique multitude.

Beginning with verse fourteen we read the elder’s explanation to John. While the multitude have emerged in victory from a period of “great tribulation”, their righteousness is not native but the result of the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb.

In verse ten and immediately after John’s vision of the multitude there is an outbreak of worship by the multitude, the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures to “our God” for His work of salvation.

In addition to salvation this multitude is awarded a special relationship with God. Verses fifteen through seventeen, the remainder of the record of the vision, enumerates these specific rewards: their position, their service, their relationship with deity, their sustenance, their leading, their comfort. They had suffered much tribulation, their reward was great blessing.

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat.

But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. 7:14-17.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Seventh Seal

The winds of God's judgment, held back for the sealing of the special Jewish servants of God, begin to blow cosmic devastation with the opening of the seventh and final seal of the book in the hands of the Lamb. So awesome are the culminating events that must follow that all heaven sits in holy silence for the space of a half hour. The glory of the sovereign God in salvation brought vocal worship and prostration. The unveiling of the seventh seal in revealing God's sovereign judgmental conclusion brings the awe of worshipful silence.

Verse two indicates that final judgment moves at an ordered progression marked by the sounding of trumpets in the sequence of seven the number of completion. The sounding of a trumpet has had significance in God's dealing with his people since the time of Moses.

Verses three to six reveal an important relationship between God's sovereignty and the prayers of God's servants. Think of the censer as joining the incense of the prayers of God's people with the incense of God's covenant promises. The smoke of the incense comes directly to the presence of God. United with the fire from the altar, the very presence of sovereign decision, the angel casts it upon the earth. That which has caused awesome silence in heaven becomes judgmental reality upon earth. Earthly manifestations of cosmic thunder and lightning attend the beginning of the judgment of God divided by the seven trumpet sequence.

The first four judgments fall upon nature rather than upon man. Study the fourth chapter of Amos to see how God uses judgments upon nature to warn man of coming personal judgments if repentant obedience does not replace rebellion.

The first trumpet sounds judgment upon the plant life of rebellious earth. What appeared as hail and fire mingled with blood was cast on the planet and produced the fiery destruction of a third of all trees and grasses. Think of the significance of such devastation to every earthly activity!

Without interruption three other trumpets sound destructive judgments upon natural and cosmic portions of the physical universe. Following the second trumpet a flaming mountain sized meteor falls into the sea destroying a third part of marine life and a third part of all shipping. While this judgment was directed to nature, great numbers of people must have died with the destruction of the ships and tidal waves. Such destruction caused a third part of the sea to become blood.

The third trumpet marked a widespread meteoric impurity polluting a third of the earthly water sources. This bitter pollution of fresh water was called Wormwood and resulted in the death of multitudes who drank the bitter result of the polluted water.

The fourth trumpet sound marked the effect of God's judgment upon the sun and the moon. How science will explain this catastrophe is beyond present knowledge. Some catastrophe to the third part of the sun will cause an unexplainable darkness (perhaps a massive sun-spot) upon a third of the sun and moon resulting upon an earthly darkness for eight hours of every day.

God culminates this portion of His judgment that fallen upon the physical and cosmic part of our universe with a warning of coming judgments upon mankind.

GOD'S PROVISION

The winds cannot blow
God's judgments to show
Until God has sealed
Those He has revealed
As those He owns
For whose sins He atones

First come the believing Jew
Then believing Gentile too.
God has opened the Door
The only way to heaven's shore.
That only way is Jesus
Who gladly will receive us.

His blood will cleanse from sins
In Him new life begins.
He calls us by His love
To share His home above.
Come, now His child to be
Through all eternity.

CHAPTER NINE ***The Three Woes***

Though the next three judgments are announced by a trumpet sounding, they are called "woes" perhaps because of their intensity and their terrible nature. Or it is possible that they are called "woes" because they directly affect humans rather than the material earth on which humans live. The record (8:13) warns that the three woes are to fall upon the "inhabiters of the earth". In fact, it is evident that each of the judgments that climax the revelation may be rightly termed progressive in terror.

Undoubtedly, the "bottomless pit" opened by the "star" from heaven at the sounding of the fifth angel connects with other New Testament Scriptures.

Compare Luke 16:26 and Jude 6.

When the pit is opened, hot smoke pours out to darken the sunlight and the earth's atmosphere. No geographical limit is indicated for the hellish smoke or for the extent of the plague. The effect is unprecedented in human history.

Out of the smoke from the pit come what John calls “locusts”. This name is not explained for the creatures are unlike any locusts man has encountered. First, they do not eat what is normal to locusts. Verse four prohibits their diet from what locusts eat. The infestation horror lasts for a five-month period according to verse five. The locusts’ appearance strikes terror and is unlike any known creature. While size is not specified, these creatures resemble horses in armor, man-like faces with gold-like crowns and streaming woman-like hair. Carnivorous teeth add to the horror of their faces and the sound of their movement is like the noise of horse-driven chariots. Climaxing this horror are their scorpion like tails that inflict incredible and lasting pain. Removing the possibility that the so-called locusts are some kind of giant insects is the fact that they have intelligence to obey a king who is either the devil or one of the devil’s leaders. Intelligent choice also indicates their demonic nature for the Scriptures limit their victims to those who are not sealed by God.

Upon the unsealed and rebellious humans these demon locusts have the power to inflict a pain that lasts for five months and is so intense that men seek to die but are unable to kill themselves or their companions during the intense affliction.

Truly the fifth trumpet announces a “woe” unknown to human history. The “woe” is literally hell on earth. What happens to these hellish “locusts” after their five-month infestation is not explained in this revelation.

The sixth angel sounds the second “woe” with the sixth trumpet. Where the first “woe” brought only agony, the second brings death to a third of the world’s population. Even at the present population, this would mean the death of more than 2 billion. No major city or even country-side would have the ability to bury its dead. Plagues would join the universal smell of death.

The judgment begins with a heavenly order to release an existing oriental force of 200,000,000 destroyers. Who are these destroyers and what is their objective other than killing is not explained. They come from beyond the Euphrates river. They are equipped with “horses” that are unlike any horses that earth has produced. Some Bible scholars have attempted to identify the “horses” with some modern war machine. Though technology is constantly progressing in power to destroy, these speculations are only guesses. John’s vision of horse and rider exceeds anything that now exists on earth in ability to inspire terror and to inflict death. They killed by what John saw as fire and smoke and brimstone.

So complete was the rebellion of the earth-dwellers that judgments brought no repentance. Mankind continued to worship anything but God and devoted themselves to the sins from which man has never escaped: violence, substance abuse, sex, and robbery. Seven seals and six trumpets have announced unprecedented judgment upon mankind.

God is revealing that suffering cannot produce a character change. Hell cannot prepare for heaven. Calvary is necessary. Man comes to the Father only through Jesus.

CHAPTER TEN

No More Time, the Little Book, the Unfinished Task

As there was an interlude after the opening of the sixth seal, so there is an interlude after the sounding of the sixth trumpet (10:1 - 11:14).

Where the first interlude glorified God in His majesty and worship in heaven, this interlude reveals that God has not left himself without a witness in earth's time of final judgment.

First John saw a mighty angel come down from heaven. What is revealed about this angel is Christ-like in every aspect. The angel is clothed with a cloud, encircled by a rainbow. From the sun-like radiance of his face to the feet like pillars of fire of his feet, this angel resembles deity. His voice is powerful as is the voice of a lion rather than a lamb. His stature is tremendous for he stands on the earth and the sea. If not the Christ, he is very Christ-like.

What this mighty angel declares is emphasized as of great moment by the thunder of reply. John is about to write but a voice from heaven prohibits and commands him to seal the angel's message. Though asserted by the messenger from the presence of God, the message remains unrevealed to mankind.

But a revelation of supreme significance is revealed!

In verses five and six the angel, swearing by the fidelity of the Creator of all things, declares delay is ended. Simon Peter had explained God's delay in final judgment as compassion for the lost (2 Peter 3:9). Delay now ceases with the sound of the seventh trumpet. God's sovereign redemptive purpose for earth and mankind will now be revealed and consummated.

Verse seven explains that God's sovereign purpose, a gradually revealed series of mysteries revealed by the prophets, is now coming to completion. In the Bible a "mystery" refers not to a revelation that is difficult for man to discover but rather to a revelation that is impossible for man to discover. God's mysteries require Holy Spirit revelation and illumination for man to understand. Twenty-seven New Testament references point to these divine secrets. Jesus has declared that he is the Alpha and the Omega. In the Hebrew alphabet there are twenty-two letters with an additional five forms for final letters.

Five mysteries are plural form words:

Matthew 13:11.

Luke 8:10,

1 Corinthians 4:1; 13:2; 14:2.

Twenty-two mysteries are singular form words:

Mark 4:11

Romans 11:25; 16:25

1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:51

Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 3:4; 3:9; 5:32; 6:19

Colossians 1:26; 1:27; 2:2; 4:3

2 Thessalonians 2:7

1 Timothy 3:9; 3:36

Revelation 1:20; 10:7; 17:13; 17:7

The Genesis record reveals that God had an eternal purpose for the glory of his name and the redemption of mankind. This purpose is known as the mystery of God. Through the centuries God has inspired prophets to reveal insights into this mystery in the Bible

record. To some God has granted special illumination to understand that portion of a mystery that he has revealed. What John heard was the declaration that no further delay would prevent the complete fulfillment of the sovereign purpose of Almighty God. What a revelation! What a promise! The unrevealed fullness of the divine purpose will now be fully revealed and completed.

Verse two revealed that in the hand of the mighty angel was a little book, an open book. The context would indicate that the little book is the Word of God. John obeys the command to take the book and eat its contents. The effect to John is sweetness in the eating but is bitter in the ensuing results. John hears that his ministry is unfinished. John will not remain in exile on the island. John must finish his task of prophecy according to the will of his Master. The servant will obey the Sovereign!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

God's Two Temple Witnesses

This chapter raises several problems for the vision concerns earth rather than heaven. Both Jews and Gentiles are mentioned but the church is not, which is consistent with the fact that the beginning of chapter four is the Rapture. The locality is undoubtedly the actual city of Jerusalem, though it is called Sodom and Egypt, for the eighth verse specifies it is where our Lord was crucified.

In the Jerusalem of that specific period is a "temple of God" that is yet to be built. Nevertheless, in spite of conflict over the proper location, the Temple Institute, a Jewish group in the restored Old City, is now making vessels for use in worship when the Jewish Temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem. The temple John measured is evidently an actual building with an altar and worshipers as stated in verse one. Verse two declares the existence of an outer court designated for the ungodly Gentiles who will continue to tread down the holy city of Jerusalem for forty-two months.

The period of forty-two months is a significant time period in the Bible. Daniel speaks of it as "a time, times, and a half" (Daniel 7:15). The identical period is designated as "a thousand two hundred and three score days" in verse three. It is the time period mentioned about the dragon's persecution of the woman who brought forth the man-child in 12:13. The same period is also the measure of the blasphemy and reign of the beast from the sea (13:7). Such a specific time limit for all these events gives the strongest evidence of the sovereign rule of Almighty God to establish time limits in his administration. This time period is the focus of the events recorded in Revelation concerning God's final judgment and the great Tribulation. The student of Revelation must realize that this is the time period for the events recorded from Chapter 4 to 19.

John was given the command to take the rod that was given him and measure only the specified area of the temple and the altar. The purpose of this measurement is not stated.

Two witnesses appear without specific identification that satisfies curiosity but with specified powers and mission. First, there are two witnesses which is the number of needed corroboration. Their mission is prophecy. Their entire identity relates to olive trees and candlesticks before the God of earth. Some have identified them with Moses

or Enoch or Elijah. As the book of Revelation gives no identity, human attempts have value only as human guesses. The emphasis should be placed on what the two witnesses do. They will minister for the critical period of a thousand two hundred and three score days.

Though their power is great because fire proceeds from their mouths and devours their enemies in fiery death, their attire is humble sackcloth. According to verse six, they combine the powers God gave to Moses and Elijah in stopping rain, in turning water into blood, and in producing plagues. Naturally they are hated because mankind is in rebellion under the reign of Satan's puppet "beast".

The content of their prophecy is not revealed but the record does identify them as God's witnesses so that it is inescapable to infer that in the world's day of judgment God provides a dual witness to a rebellious people.

Human power and opposition against these witnesses fail to do more than magnify hatred against the witnesses. As this is the hour of Satan's final power, a wild beast (tharion) from the bottomless pit comes to destroy them. This beast has no further identification but could refer to the king of the locusts, Apollyon, or to some other demonic and hellish being.

Verses eight to ten explain that the citizens of the city (Jerusalem) express their hatred of the two witnesses by preventing any disposition of the dead bodies. Corpses of the two witness lie in the street where they fell while the people celebrate by making merry and exchanging gifts. Evidently a visual picture of the dead bodies is projected to a world wide audience. The celebration continues for three and a half days.

The celebration halts after three and a half days when a voice from heaven strikes fear to the celebrants. A voice from heaven cries, "Come up hither." The spirit of life from God enlivens the prostrate corpses. The two witnesses arise and ascend into heaven in plain sight.

As they ascend, a violent earthquake demolishes a tenth part of the city, killing seven thousand men, striking such terror to the remaining population that they ascribe glory to God as the power causing what has occurred. No repentance is indicated.

The second woe is complete and the third woe approaches with the sounding of the final trumpet.

The seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet.

As the opening of the seventh seal includes the sounding of the seven trumpets, so the sounding of the seventh trumpet will include the outpouring of the seven vials and all the events that are to have no further delay in completing the mysteries of God.

The initial effect of the sounding of the seventh trumpet unveils important visions in heaven and in earth.

First, because there is to be no further delay in the completion of the mysteries of God, great voices in heaven proclaim the triumphant conquest over of the kingdoms of the world by the eternal kingdom of our Lord. The final events in the completion of God's eternal purpose have begun.

The four and twenty elders fall in worship and adoration to the Almighty God for His sovereign action in establishing His reign.

Where heaven rejoices in God's reign, the earthly nations express anger that the time for judgment and execution of the will of God has fallen upon them in irresistible power.

Verse nineteen has special significance for it reveals that in the heavenly temple God

shows that all the events take place in accord with his revealed covenant or promise. God's righteous judgment manifests his sovereign power to destroy evil and establish his righteous purpose.

The next chapters will describe the characters and events in God's plan.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

Chapter twelve opens and continues with signs, "great" signs. First is the sign of the woman. On the basis of her sun clothing, her moon footstool, and her crown of twelve stars, this female sign represents Israel, the nation to whom Jehovah is the husband.

Verse two tells of her painful pregnancy and verse five her delivery of a man child who is destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron. This prophecy identifies the man child as Jesus Christ. His kingdom is future because He is caught up to God, even to the throne of God.

Verse three describes the second sign: a great red dragon, which could be none other than Satan. His earthly dominion is detailed by his seven heads and ten horns (See also chapter 17 for additional explanation). Satan's rebellion in heaven succeeded in drawing the allegiance of a third of the stars (angels) in heaven. These fallen angels were cast into the Earth. Satan's strategy is to attempt to devour the new-born man child but the child is caught up into heaven, the woman flees to a refuge prepared by God for a period of a thousand two hundred and three score days, which is the completion of the tribulation. As the man child was caught up to heaven, the dragon continues his war against the other seed of the woman who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Satan and his angels are now active in the Earth.

Verse eleven lists the basis of the victory of the earthly brethren over the dragon: first, by the blood of the Lamb; second, by the word of their testimony; third, by their faithfulness because they loved not their lives to the death. Salvation, therefore, depends upon what Jesus did for us in his death, upon our having a personal relationship to Jesus and his sacrifice, upon this relationship being so real that we are willing to suffer for it.

Verses thirteen through seventeen detail Satan's persecution of the woman. Jewish history is a tragic record of this persecution. God's rescue tactics manifest a refuge and even earthly miracles. However, verse seventeen specifies the protection is focused on the Messianic believers.

The sign that John saw gave him a view of a historical panorama: the birth of the "seed of woman" through the Jewish nation; the ascension of Jesus from an earthly ministry to a heavenly state; the protection Israel receives from Satan's persecution through a long history; the expulsion of Satan and his angels from the highest heaven to earth; the war by Satan against the inhabitants of the earth; the victory through the blood of Christ and the faith of the believer; the limit of the time that Satan is allowed to persecute to the time, times, and half a time which end the tribulation.

What John saw gave him a panoramic view of human history that fulfills

the Edenic prophecy of the war between the “seed of the serpent” and the “seed of the woman”. The message of this chapter focuses upon an understanding of redemptive history and the assurance of God’s sovereignty.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Dominant Beasts

During this time of “no further delay”, during these forty two months of tribulation, Satan unmask two men, beastly men, who are to rise to brief but terrible earthly power.

John is standing on the sand and looking out upon the sea which represents to him the sea of humanity. As he looks he sees a “beast” come out of the waters.

What a strange creature! Verse 18 identifies the “beast” as a man with an identifying number, 666. The number has an ancient identity with evil (Read Daniel 2 and 3) but no specific name identity. (Speculation has tagged many persons with the number but without any Biblical confirmation). The exact identity will remain unknown until the removal of the Hinderer. (Read 2 Thessalonians 2).

In John’s vision the character and nature of this “beast” combines the speed of the leopard with the bear’s power to crush and the lion’s power to roar and rend. Verse two asserts that for the first time in human history, the Devil dragon gives one human person his throne or place of rulership, his “action power” and his “authority power”. The first verse with its reference to “heads” and “horns” and “crowns” indicates that the “beast” exerts political rule over a limited number of nations and peoples (The beast’s power area appears to center in the territory of the first Roman empire and to radiate with global influence). John makes no attempt to make a more specific identification of specific nations except that all are given to blasphemy. In recent history the name and geography of nations has suffered such radical change that scholarly attempts to identify modern national entities meet great difficulty. John makes special emphasis upon the supernatural restoration to life of a slain “head” or specific human leader that produces world-wide wonder. As a result of his power and miracle work and blasphemy, the people give abject worship both to the beast and to the dragon. Verse four tells how the world cries in worship, “Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”

In verse five John emphasizes the beast’s “mouth”: speaking great things, speaking blasphemies, and continuing for the “forty and two months” period. This time period receives strong and repeated emphasis in this section of the revelation. God puts a final period or time limit on the power of evil. Verse six specifies the objects of the beast’s blasphemy: God, God’s name, God’s tabernacle, God’s heaven dwellers. Verse seven specifies that beyond mere words, this evil “beast” wars against all of the new “tribulation period” saints, overcomes them, and exerts his evil power over all kindreds, tongues, and nations. In spite of his evil words and actions all earth dwellers on the earth,- except those were written in the book of life of the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world,- shall worship this evil ruler.

Beginning with verse eleven John sees a second “beast”. In fact, this is a third “beast”. The first came out of the bottomless pit (11:7) for a specific “woe”. This source would,

with the action ascribed to him, strongly argue for a demon leader. The beast from the sea and the beast from the earth are human.

If there is a distinction between coming out of the sea and coming out of the earth, the difference is not explained. Daniel uses the same two descriptions to refer to peoples (Daniel 7:3 and 17). As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit compose the holy Trinity, is it not true that these two human “beasts” combine with the dragon to form the satanic trinity. The second beast assumes a “lamb-like” identity and works his evil power in the area of worship of the first .

This chapter also explains the basis for the worship so long sought by Satan and achieved through the “beast” hierarchy. Backing this satanic worship was military power (v.4), miracle religious power (vv. 12-15). Identity power (vv.15,16), economic power (v.17). For this reason the influence of the “beasts” extends over the entire planet (v.7). Never lose sight of the fact, however, that this power was not achieved against the will of God but was granted to show the truth that Satan has only the power “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”(John 10:10). Never lose sight of the fact that a time limit of “forty and two months” has been established by the sovereign power of Almighty God. This chapter demonstrates the falsity of Satan’s claim to give human freedom and fullness by showing his power is only to destroy.

Verses sixteen to eighteen reveal the eternal penalty God has laid upon those who subject themselves to Anti-Christ by receiving the mark, name, or number of the “beast kingdom” and remind the reader that in spite of the “beasts” claims to deity, the two beasts are only men raised to temporary power and glory by Satan.

In 1 John 4: 1-3 the Apostle emphasizes the present work of the anti-christ as ongoing. In fact the “white horse” and its rider has operated since the time of Eve. Revelation reveals the personal identity of the one who is the Anti-Christ and who reveals the destructive nature of Satan’s deceptive reign. Revelation also reveals that Satan’s power is limited in time. The End is revealed. God reveals his sovereignty. The Adversary’s defeat is revealed to heaven and Earth.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Seven Statements of Sovereignty

When Jesus was on earth, he fore-told his apostles what he must suffer. Jesus disclosed future events before they took place so that the disciples could know that the Cross was in God’s sovereign plan. In this fourteenth chapter John sees and hears information about end events before they occur. This demonstrates that God is in control. He is sovereign.

First, John gains another view of the 144,000. It is now a heavenly view with this select group singing in triumph. God’s seal shows in their foreheads. They sing what is unique to them and stand before the throne of God without fault and as first fruits. God has brought them through great tribulation in triumph.

Second, John sees another angel in heaven with an earthly mission to preach the everlasting gospel to the entire population of the planet Earth. This message is God’s gracious but final call to repentance before the culmination of judgment by the

outpouring of the vials of God's wrath upon human rebellion against God. Before the Flood, Noah gave God's warning. Before the captivity, the prophets gave warning. Now, before the vials of wrath are poured out, God gives a final call to repentance.

Third, the fall of Babylon is announced and will be explained in chapters seventeen and eighteen. Sovereign judgment falls upon the mighty as well as the feeble. God is no respecter of persons.

Fourth, verses 9 - 12 declare the outpouring of wrath and the eternal doom of those who worship the beast and receive his mark. God's sovereignty controls both the immediate and the eternal.

Fifth, verse 13 shows the sharp difference between the eternal fate of the beast worshipers from the blessed destiny of those who are willing to die for their faith. God's sovereignty triumphs over death. God's sovereignty rewards temporal works with eternal rewards.

Sixth and seventh, verses 14 to twenty chronicle the final angelic reaping of earthly rebellion as God culminates his sovereign purpose. Compare with Joel 3:13 and Matthew 13. This reaping results from the final conflict with great blood shed as indicated in verse 20. Rebellion against divine sovereignty results in destruction of all rebellion. Chapter 19 will detail the slaughter more specifically.

To understand the sequence one must remember that the seventh seal includes all the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet includes all the seven vials and the seventh vial includes all the events to the complete destruction of the devil's power. Sovereignty limits the time focus to three and one half years of great tribulation.

In short, the seventh seal completes the sovereign purpose (the mystery of God) of the earth's destiny according to the God's sovereign redemptive plan and gracious purpose.

The time of delay has expired.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Heavenly preparation for the vials of God's wrath

The outpouring of the seven vials of God's wrath will demonstrate awesome destruction in scope and intensity. The seven vials will climax and complete God's tribulation judgments.

The opening of the seven seals revealed first the nature of the *devil's deception* and the results that merited God's sovereign judgments upon rebellion.

The opening of the seventh seal culminated in the judgments announced by the sounding of the trumpets, which first fell upon nature and then, by demon invasion and by evil human forces, fell upon a rebellious humanity. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the outpouring of the seven vials will climax the tribulation judgments. This culminating judgment of the outpouring of the seven vials answers the prayers of the saints for vengeance and culminates the actual wrath of God Himself against the evil that Satan had established upon earth. The vials contain the direct wrath of God Himself. What awesome judgments!

Verse one, the sign of the vials calls attention to the final response of God's holy

nature to earthly and cosmic iniquity.

Verse two describes the triumphant multitude of tribulation martyrs who will witness the vengeance of God upon Satan's kingdom and rebellious personalities.

Verses three and four record their song of triumph and glory to God for the fulfillment of His promise to crown their deliverance with vengeance upon evil. The martyred but triumphant multitude sing the songs of Moses and of the Lamb, saying, *Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.*

Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest. Revelation 15:3,4.

Verses five to eight show the deity source of the terrible vengeance. The tabernacle of testimony connects the fulfillment of judgment with the covenant of God, His sovereign promises. The angels from the temple show that the wrath comes from the very heart of God and with the blessing of the elders. The justice of the judgments and the holiness of the outpouring are evidenced by the smoke that fills the temple.

God has promised vengeance upon evil and now at the proper and designated time Almighty God is fulfilling His covenant with His people. God's completes His judgments according to His eternal redemptive purpose.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The seven vials of God's wrath outpoured

The seven vials of God's wrath demonstrate judgments beyond the power of devils or humans to execute. In six episodes they climax the destructive vengeance that God has ordained against spiritual rebellion on earth. Verse one orders the execution of God's wrath.

Verse 2 declares that the first outpoured vial produces terrible sores upon the worshipers of the "beast". Evidently what Satan did to Job now befalls those who accepted the "mark" of Satan's kingdom.

Verses 3 and 4 record the horror caused by the second and third vials. Both the sea and the fresh water sources produce only the corrupted blood of the dead. Marine life dies. Human thirst for water and revulsion at the bloody corrupted waters defy description. This future and prolonged repeat of what Egypt suffered temporarily under the plagues causes heavenly beings to praise the righteousness of the judgment God had executed. Had not the Evil One and his followers shed the blood of the righteous servants of God?

Verses 8 and 9 move the target of God's wrath to the sun. The celestial body that has sustained earthly life with light and warmth now blasts earth's inhabitants with scorching heat. Instead of repentance, mankind blasphemes the holy God for His wrathful judgment.

Verses 10 and 11 record that the outpouring of the fifth vial adds a supernatural darkness to the sores, thirst, heat, and unrelieved pain. Rebellion, unbroken by any repentance, speaks of the tragic condition of men's spiritual state.

Verse 12 describes the effect of the sixth vial. The Euphrates river dries up for the approach of the kings of the East. Evidently their vast armies are bent on war and

destruction. Demon powers erupt from the mouth of the two “beast” leaders. With counter miracles a successful crusade is initiated to gather the forces earthly authority to do battle against the Almighty God who is pouring out these judgments.

Verse 15, like a flash of light in the darkness, the record heralds the unexpected and glorious return of the conquering Christ Jesus.

Verse 16 announces the location of the gathering forces of opposition to the judgments of God at a place called Armageddon.

Verse 17 marks the climax as the seventh angel pours his vial in the air. There are two incredible results. The first result is heavenly. Out of the heavenly temple and from the heavenly throne sounds forth a great voice, saying, “It is done!” The heavenly voice is declaring that God’s deliverance and judgments that have been promised and prophesied have finally occurred. What God’s sovereignty had decreed, God’s power had completed in God’s time and method.

The second result is earthly. Earth experiences the direct judgment of God. An earthquake of destructive power shook the entire planet. The great city, the earthly seat of the “beast’s” government was smashed into three parts. Babylon suffered (explained in Chapters 17 and 18) the destructive vengeance of God. Islands moved from their location and mountains moved, crashed, and disappeared. An incredible hail fell upon the stricken population that had survived. Survivors continued to blaspheme God. Though heaven declares judgment and divine vengeance to be just and righteous, surviving humanity continues in rebellion, humanity refuses to repent.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Satan’s Religious System is destroyed

This chapter can be very difficult, if not impossible, to interpret or it can be very simple to understand. The reader who insists in attempting speculations that exceed God’s revelations will stumble in confusion. The reader who is content with the message God has provided will be blessed.

Verses 1 to 6 describe a woman, a prostitute, who has been responsible for the martyrdom of many Christian saints. She has influenced (literally, sat on or controlled) “many waters” or peoples, verse 15. She has corrupted all cultures in human history with immorality and spiritual fornication or false worship of satanic religions and perversions of the truth. She has gathered and used great wealth and according to verse 18 has controlled the rulers of many nations. The woman, called both MYSTERY and Babylon is also identified with a great city that according to verse nine sits on seven mountains. Though this description fits the city of Rome, the Bible message rests not on location but on other stated truths: the long deception, the alliance with Satan, the corruption and persecution, the powerful influence, and the final destruction by God’s judgment.

What John sees in this woman graphically portrays that Satan’s long use of false religions as a tool against God and the truth of what God reveals in his WORD will come to a violent conclusion by God’s judgment.

According to verse thirteen the “beast” of chapter thirteen and his followers who once supported MYSTERY shall come to hate her and shall rob her of her power and wealth. According to verse seventeen this destruction was in God’s will but became

reality by the kings that followed the beast.

To me the message of the chapter is that false religion shall eventually be destroyed in Satan's effort to develop worship of himself. Chapter nineteen clearly teaches that Satan and all his deceits will be destroyed by the return of Jesus.

The message of the chapter is clearly that false religion will be finally exposed and destroyed. This promise of judgment was obviously a comfort to the persecuted Christians of John's day and should be the same comfort to contemporary Christians in every age.

My speculation is similar to that of many scholars. When the church is raptured, false religions, which have operated to the destruction of man for centuries, will unite under the false prophet with headquarters in Rome. During the tribulation falsity will be judged, exposed, and destroyed by God's final judgment and the return of Jesus in power.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Satan's Economic System is destroyed

This chapter deals with the destruction of an economic system called Babylon. As in the preceding chapter where the woman Babylon is called a city, this economic system is also called Babylon, a specific city. While one specific city may typify what has caused the global spiritual corruption and material prosperity, it is obvious that the chapter describes a global system. The mourners include "the kings of the earth" and "the merchants of the earth". Moreover, John graphically describes the results of the kingdom of mammon upon mankind.

The terms "city" and "Babylon" have a larger meaning than one historical location. Cainites built the first city. The city brought people into an abnormal environment in that humanity was divorced from an immediate contact with the production of the soil. Density of population appears to produce economic division of rich and poor with attendant sins of fleshly indulgence, rejection of godliness, greed and crime of every sort. Verses 3 to 7 describe these results and attribute them to this "Babylon".

The specific city of Babylon embodies all of the corrupt influences and evil influences ascribed to this "Babylon". Many scholars believe that a rebuilt Babylon will again embody such an evil and global influence. Civilization's dependence on oil lends weight to this belief. More than any one city, however, seems required to produce such global consternation. "Black Mondays" with the stock market have given an indication of what a global collapse could do to the world economy.

Such is the system that has built civilizations with all of the things that tempt mankind to covet, to corrupt *its morals*, and to give itself to mammon or materialism.

To emphasize, though this economic system is identified with a city that some believe will be the rebuilt Babylon, the statements of the chapter indicate to me that the destruction will extend beyond any one city and include what the present age includes in its economic system. All will be destroyed in preparation for the coming kingdom of Christ. This "present world" will indeed pass away. The temporal is indeed temporary.

The chapter becomes difficult when interpretation seeks to go beyond the statements of the record. When the message delivered is simply that the present system of greed and lust *will be destroyed* then the message is clear. The judgments of

God in the Tribulation are clearing the earth of evil and preparing for the Kingdom of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Chapter nineteen will declare the process of judgment to be righteous and will complete the final, righteous, and eternal judgment of evil. Heaven shouts the righteousness of God.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Triumphant Return of Christ Jesus

The seventh seal has been opened; the seventh trumpet has sounded; the seventh vial has been poured out upon the earth. Though John's record specified a time period of forty-two months for the culmination of judgment, he sets no additional time period for this part of the revelation. The terrible judgments upon evil men and the Satanic kingdom partook of detailed description but this vision of rejoicing, triumph, and final victory has timeless glory.

Verses 1 to 9 are pregnant with praise and excitement, though little description of events, as they praise God for His holiness and anticipate the glorious culmination of the marriage of the Lamb.

To be more specific, consider the emphasis of these verses of joy and praise.

Verse 1 speaks of voices of people in heaven. As the record continues it seems that John sees as well as hears this heavenly praise. In verse one the people in heaven sound "Allelula" for the salvation, glory, honor and power which they ascribe unto the Lord our God. Verse two records continued praise for God's true and righteous judgments with specific reference to the judgment of the whore Babylon for her corruption, participation and propagation of spiritual fornication, and physical persecution of God's servants. They shout Allelula as the smoke of her destruction rises eternally. The presence of evil, with its power to deceive and corrupt, has come to a termination in God's judgment.

It is at that point that the four and twenty elders and the four "living creatures" join with an Amen and additional Allelulas. Whether antiphonal or in unison a voice from the throne calls for universal praise and all swells into the sound of such a great multitude that John describes the sound as of great waters. The message of praise culminates in Allelula for the Lord God omnipotent now reigns and the new announcement is made. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

Verse 8 exults in the fact that the process of cleansing and maturing of the Bride that began with Pentecost is now completed as evidenced by her clean and white garment which is the righteousness that God gives the saints. Verse 9 calls for a special written statement that the guests at the marriage are blessed people.

Verse 10 in this chapter and verses 8 and 9 in chapter twenty-two should produce wonder and praise in every Christian. John prepares to worship the creature who deals with him but is informed that this glorious creature is a glorified believer and servant of God. What a future this foretells for the humblest Christian. As Romans 8;16,17 declares we will be joint-heirs with Christ.

With the blessed but indescribable union, the marriage of the Lamb, consummated in heaven, John sees heaven opened and behold the earthly return of Christ with his saints to destroy all the forces of Satan's puppet kingdom. This is the second part of the Return of Jesus Christ. Chapter 4:1 of Revelation records the first part of Jesus' return in the air for his saints, the Church, the Body of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 more fully describes this blessed hope as God inspired Paul to write to encourage the saints in Thessalonica. Now this section of Revelation describes the second part of Jesus' return when he returns in great power and glory with his glorified saints to complete the final judgments.

John sees the final battle, sees the two devil-dominated "beasts" taken and cast into a lake of fire, sees the slaughter of the rebellious army by the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. So the victories of chapter 19 spill over into the final judgments of chapter 20.

The fourth veil, now removed, shows that Jesus is indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Demonstration of the Power of the Christ

Chapter 20 begins with a remarkable action. One angel now binds the fearsome Satan. The Dragon who has fought the earth's humanity with such success now succumbs to one angel. The Accuser who had filled weak believers with fear is so completely defeated that one angel can bind him. The Prince of this world is cast into the bottomless pit by one angel. What a defeat! What a revelation to those who ascribe god-like power to the devil!

AN INTERLUDE TO GRASP THE TIME SEQUENCE

Up to this point in the book of REVELATION we have dealt with three time periods:

1. What John saw.

From one aspect, this division (Chapter 1) would include the entire book because John actually saw and heard the entire unveiling of the relation of Christ to the past, the present, and all the future. What is meant, however, by the phrase "the things which thou has seen" is the time that it took for God to give the revelation to John. At most that would require only a few days to experience and to write.

What John saw at the beginning revealed Christ as the crucified and risen Redeemer and as the glorified Head of the Church.

This is the first division of the book.

2. The things that are.

This second division (Chapters 2 and 3) of the book of Revelation deals with the Church age or the time period in which we are now living. This period began at Pentecost and will end at the Rapture.

In this division we learned about Christ's relation to the seven types of churches that compose His Body, about His holy requirements, chastening, and

rewards for the churches' character and service.

3. The things that are to be hereafter.

This third division of which Chapters 4 to 20 is the first section deals with the Tribulation period that will begin with the Rapture of the Church and reach a climax with the Return of Christ in power and great glory. This part of the REVELATION focuses upon the last three and one half years that are sometimes called the Great Tribulation.

In this section of the third division we learned about the reign of the Anti-Christ, about the final judgments of God upon a rebellious mankind, about the destruction of false religion and of godless commercialism, and about the return of Christ.

THE SECOND SECTION OF THE THIRD DIVISION CONTINUES:

Jesus, who holds the keys to death and hell, having cast the defeated Anti-Christ "beasts" into the lake of fire, has delegated one angel to apprehend Satan, to bind him, and to cast him into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. Jesus has demonstrated his sovereignty.

Verse 4 depicts the glorious destiny of those who were the martyred believer victims of the Anti-Christ. Beheaded for their faith in the Tribulation, they now resurrected to live and reign with Christ in victory. What had seemed defeat is now revealed a glorious triumph. This group of believers completes the first resurrection, the resurrection of life.

Verse 5 explains that the rest of the dead will remain as they are in Hades during the thousand years of Christ's earthly kingdom. They await the resurrection of the Great White Throne.

Verse 6 declares the blessedness of all who are raised in the first resurrection, the resurrection to life. This first resurrection began with the Rapture and is completed with the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs.

Verse 6 simply states that Christ's reign with his saints will continue for a thousand years but adds no explanation or description. For answers to questions about this era, the student must go to other parts of the Bible.

Verses 8,9, and 10 pass quickly over the release of Satan, his renewed rebellion, his final defeat, his execution to the lake of fire where he and the two "beasts" suffer eternal torment. Two truths resound to the glory of the revelation of the completion of the mystery of God. Each of the truths confirms the same redemptive fact: Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father.

First, God has allowed Satan to develop rival plans for human development for millenniums. Satan's anti-christ cultures, religions, philosophies have challenged God's redemptive plan in the long test of human history. All Satan's substitutes and delusions have ended in ruin and disaster. None has offered a workable alternative to God's redemptive plan which culminated in the Cross and the Resurrection.

Second, the thousand year millennium proved that living in a perfect environment under the rule of Christ would not produce holy character. Those people who were born in that period but were not born again followed the deceit of the released Satan. There is no substitute for the Cross and for the redemptive plan of the holy God. Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father! This fifth unveiling of the unique ministry of Jesus reveals the

falsity of all other religions and philosophies. The Cross is the only way to save mankind. Jesus is the only Savior.

Verses 11 to 15 describe the final destiny of the human sinner in the righteous judgment of Almighty God. The dead in Hades are resurrected so that the unsaved of all earth's ages and populations stand before God for judgment. Jesus had described this judgment in John 5:27-29.

This sixth unveiling reveals Jesus as he declared in John 5: the final God-appointed JUDGE before whose face heaven and earth flee away. What unique awesome Majesty! Man's supreme question, "what will you do with Jesus?" becomes "what will Jesus do with you?"

The judgment is factual, "the books are opened".

This judgment is just, "according to their works".

This judgment shows rejected mercy, "the book of life" is opened.

This judgment is eternal: *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* Revelation 20:15.

This judgment offers no appeal!

Review in retrospect of the righteous judgment of evil

To look back, digest and assimilate what a person has studied helps in retention and usefulness of information. Let us experiment with another backward look at the book of Revelation.

What is the stated purpose of the book?

The stated purpose of Revelation is to "unveil" or to disclose Jesus Christ to his servants with special reference to the final conclusion of his sovereign plan for human redemption.

Why is this disclosure made?

First, the disclosure will demonstrate the glory of Jesus Christ.

Second, the disclosure will comfort Christ's servants with insight concerning the Church age, the true nature of Satan's objective, the punishment and destruction of Satan and his followers, the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ and the glorious and eternal destiny God will give his faithful servants.

Are there stated time divisions in the book?

Chapter one and verse nineteen plainly state the three time divisions, saying, *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*

Division 1 is chapter one: "the things that thou hast seen."

Division 2 is chapters two and three: "the things that are."

Division 3 is chapters four to the conclusion of the book.

What is "unveiled" or revealed in each of the divisions?

Division 1 reveals the following:

1. An explanation about the Book and its human writer, John,
2. Position of the Trinity and their earthly redemptive work,
3. The portrait of the glorified Christ in the midst of the Church,
4. The position of the glorified Christ to the churches and their leaders.

All of these revelations are experiences known to those who believe the Bible and its teaching.

Division 2 reveals the following:

1. Seven representative churches with their strengths, weaknesses, service, and destinies.

2. The oversight and sovereign relationship of Jesus Christ to the churches that represent the Body of Christ in the entire Church Age.

All of these revelations about the Church are evident to those who will read the Bible and will hear and see what is an open secret about the Church in history and our current culture.

Division 3 reveals the following:

1. The unfathomable history of God's sovereign plan for the future transition of human and earthly destiny from its present imperfection into the perfection of God's eternal purpose.

2. The opening of the seven sealed record of the sovereign seven actions that will effect this transformation. As each seal is opened, God's ordained and eternal purpose comes to final fruition. The final or seventh seal divides the completing actions by seven trumpets with the actions announced by the seventh trumpet depicted as the outpouring of seven vials.

3. Interspersed in these culminating and sovereign acts God reveals "signs" of persons, companies, and activities (both Satanic and Godly) that clarify God's final disposition of evil and glorious and eternal provision of grace and love.

a. The beast from the sea is a man dominated by Satan who will rule the nations and war against God,

b. The beast from the land who will lead the world in a godless religion that will worship the first beast and Satan,

c. The woman who gives birth to the man-child (Jesus Christ) who represents Israel,

d. The dragon who represents Satan,

e. The two Babylon, one commercial and one religious, represent earthly systems which will be destroyed,

f. The two witnesses who are not identified by name,

g. The 144,000 Jews whom God seals for a special purpose and security.

h. The glorious return of Jesus Christ as Lord of Lord and King of Kings,

i. The marriage supper of the Lamb.

j. The failed human rebellion against Christ,

k. The 1000 reign of Christ,

l. Satan's release, rebellion, and execution,

m. The Great White Throne judgment.

WHEREWILL CHRISTIANS BE IN ALL THIS TRIBULATION?

This is the Bible answer to this most important question:

1. If you are now living, you must decide: WILL I TRUST JESUS?

2. If you trust Jesus, you are saved and a part of His Church,

3. If you are saved, you will be raptured, escape the TRIBULATION and be in heaven with Jesus.

4. If you are lost and alive you will suffer the TRIBULATION,

5. If you are lost and die you will go to Hades, finally be resurrected for the Great White Throne judgment, be cast into the Lake of fire.

6. If you suffer the TRIBULATION, you may refuse to worship the Beast , Be killed and go to heaven,

7. If you suffer the TRIBULATION, you may worship the Beast, rebel against Christ, be cast into the Lake of fire.

8. If you are saved while you are now living, you will be given a new body, escape the TRIBULATION, reign with Christ in the Kingdom, spend eternity in the New Jerusalem.

And there is MORE!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The seventh unveiling reveals Jesus as the OMEGA, The faithful Author of our faith is the glorious Finisher of our faith.

John beholds God's tomorrow, the eternal "promised land", the "forever home" of the saved. Revelation has leaped from judgment into glory.

What now IS has passed away. The heavens are new. The earth is new. All things have been made new. How this vision should lift the heart of every believer! The secret of this indescribable glory lies in the word "new". The Greek language possesses two words for "new". One is *neos* which refers to time; the other is *keinos* which refers to quality or substance. To designate "new" John uses the latter word to declare that both earth and heaven have now been transformed to possess a quality never before experienced by mankind.

God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in Eden. Verses 2 and 3 promise a divine/human union that transcends the occasional by bringing God and man to dwell together in close and constant fellowship. Sight has replaced faith. The invisible has become the visible. Grace has culminated in Glory, The Presence of God has become actual and personal. Time, space, sensory, earthly limitations separate Creator and creature no longer. The indescribable union of humanity with deity has become actual.

Verse four contains a double promise: all the results of the negative emotions of earth will be wiped away; the causes of sorrow, even to the death enemy, will no longer plague the redeemed because God has made all things new for them. Verses 5 and 6 declare the finality of the old that was tainted by the presence of evil and the eternity of the new world in which holiness dwells. None of this rests upon human frailty but is established by God's sovereign power and continuing presence.

Verse 7 gives God's pledge that the heritage of eternal relationship between deity and the redeemed believer will be that of Father and son. In contrast, verse 8 reveals that the evil are separated from the presence of God and loved ones in a second death of torment.

The remainder of the chapter describes the heavenly city as much as it is possible for earthly language to depict heavenly realities, for the mundane to portray the majestic.

Verse 11, declaring that the city radiates the glory of God, begins a description in which the richest earthly treasures and most precious things of the present age become the building materials of the city come from heaven to earth.. Incredible dimensions stun the imagination with the length, height, and breadth of God's glorious new dwelling place. What is presently impossibly precious, God has made gloriously commonplace.

Verses 22 and 23 declare that the personal presence of Almighty God and the Lamb have outmoded any material temple. Cosmic light of sun and moon pale before the luminosity of Almighty God and the Lamb. As the Gospel removed the guilt of sin and cancelled the power of sin so verse 27 promises that God will remove the very presence of sin forever. The rest of heavenly holiness replaces the earthly struggles with sin's temptations.

Verses 11 to 21 seek to put the beauty of the city into more graphic language. What earth sees as wealth the heavenly city uses as pavement. The precious gems for which earth sold its soul are but building blocks. In height, breadth, and length the city covers a continent. Altogether that which God has prepared for the redeemed is beyond anything that eye has seen, ear has heard or that has entered into the imagination of mankind.

All of this description brings the reader to a firm conclusion: God has prepared a PLACE. Though it is true that heaven is a glorious condition, though it is true that the inhabitants enjoy a personal and spiritual relationship with the Father and the Son and the Spirit, the description given of that celestial dwelling is the description of a PLACE. The bodies of the redeemed have been resurrected to the likeness of Christ. The redeemed are more than spirits. They are humans, but redeemed humans. They enjoy glorified bodies as well as redeemed souls. They know and are known; they feel and will. They see, hear, and feel. They are fully and gloriously alive forever. They transformed into the likeness of the Savior but are fully human. They are the children of God. They are HOME!

Praise God, John is seeing that home is a place, a "prepared place", the place that Jesus promised.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Jesus had said, *I go to prepare a place for you.*

This is the place!

Jesus had said, *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again. . .*

The Spirit and the Bride say, COME!

Let him that heareth say, COME!

Jesus had said, *I will come again and receive you unto myself that ye may be where I am.*

What a glorious and eternal abiding place!

It's all for those who will come!

It's all for YOU!

More more

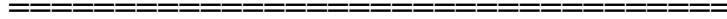
Verses 1 to 5 tell more of the gracious and glorious provision of the "prepared place". And verse 6 stamps, "TRUTH", upon that which exceeds the credible for the natural mind.

Verse 7 repeats Jesus promise to return. This promise is repeated in verses 12 and 20. No wonder that John expresses the desire of all the redeemed when he prays, *Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Verses 8 and 9 give a glimpse of the glorious appearance that the redeemed will

share forever. Verse 12 promises that Jesus will reward the faithful when he comes. Verses 13 and throughout the rest of the chapter warn against attempting to change the message that Jesus has sent in this book and again promises a blessing on those who read and keep this special message.

Amen! Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!



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