



The Book of Revelation

Study Guide

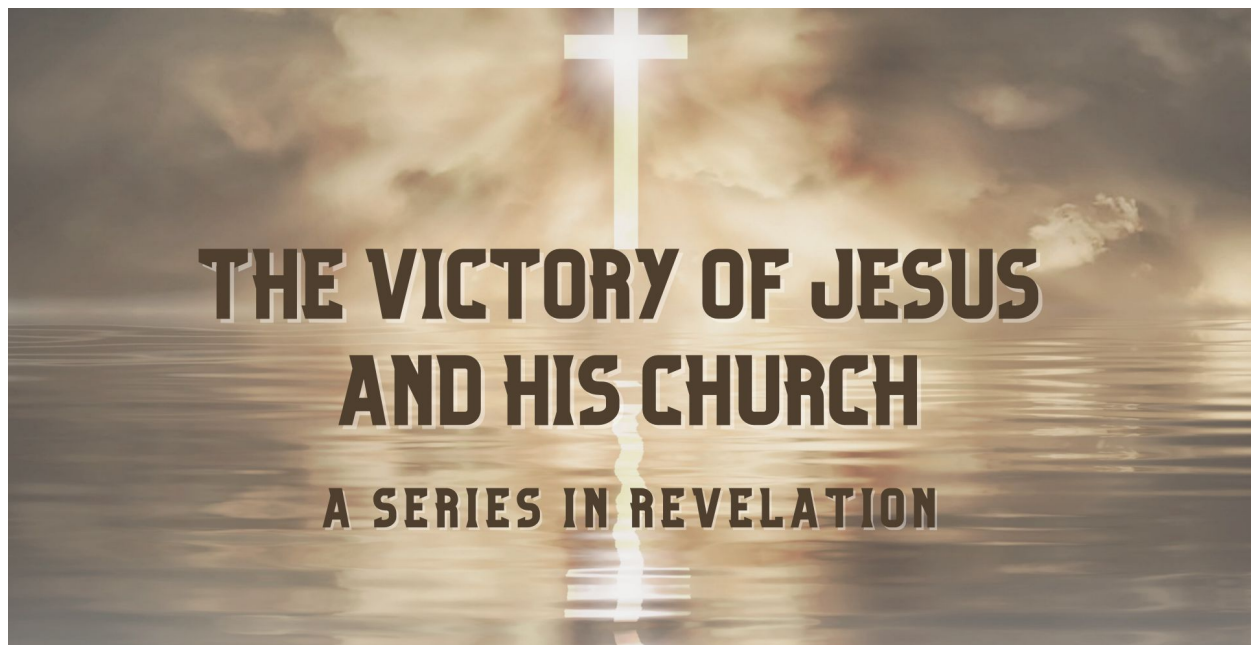
Pastor Willie Harris, Jr.

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The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is not meant to be scary or overly confusing. It was written to encourage believers towards faithfulness and endurance. However, due to the genre of the book, it can present a challenge to interpret. Therefore, this study guide is a compilation of the sermon notes, research, and exegetical work that I did for the sermon series, The Victory of Jesus and His Church, which I preached in 2023. The entire sermon series can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8gYZcVw1kprTQYVlcfy3yrDjdOfnsp-0>

I hope this guide will help you as you continue studying this wonderful book. As it says in Chapter 1, there is a divine blessing for those who read it. But most importantly, there's a divine blessing for those who keep what is written in it.



Revelation Sermon Series preached at Mt. Zion Church in Cary in 2023

Different Views on Doctrine

Since Revelation deals with eschatology (study of end times), it can be challenging to interpret. And there are a lot of different views on it. How do we handle this? How should we respond to those who have a different interpretation?

There are Primary Doctrines (Essentials to the Christian faith) such as the Nature of God (Trinity) and the Gospel. There are Secondary Doctrines (Non-essentials but urgent for the health of the church), such as Baptism (believer's vs infant) and spiritual gifts. Then there are Tertiary Doctrines (Non-essentials but important) which include eschatology. We should be willing to die for primary doctrines but not tertiary ones! So let's give each other grace when we have different viewpoints on Revelation.

Literary Genre

The literary genre of Revelation is Apocalyptic which means it offers a divine perspective on history and is full of symbolism and allusions to the Old Testament. According to G.K. Beale's commentary, there are 404 verses in the book of Revelation, and 278 of those verses contain one or more references to Old Testament passages. Over two-thirds of the verses in the Revelation contain allusions or references to Old Testament passages. In other words, the better you understand the Old Testament, the better you will understand Revelation.

Think of Revelation as a picture book that uses symbolic images to convey its message. Pay attention to how many times it says that John saw. But it's also a book of prophecy and an epistle (letter).

Since Revelation is Apocalyptic, the main interpretation rule we will use is that we will interpret it symbolically unless given a reason to interpret it literally.

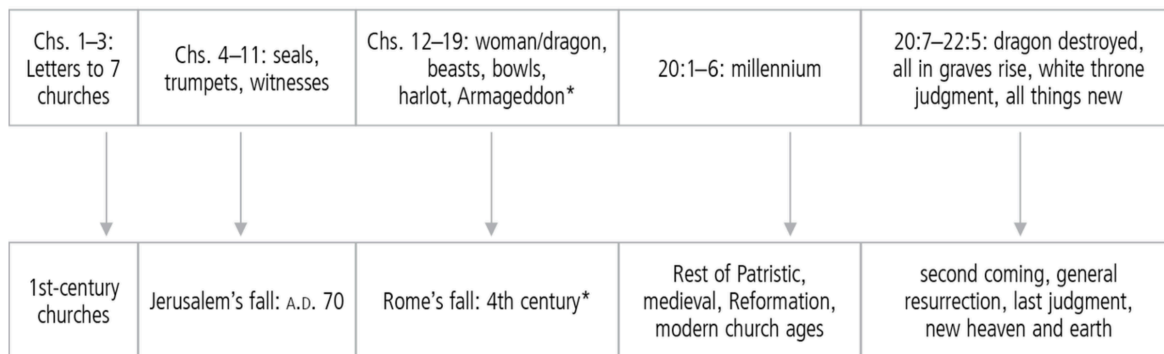
Schools of Interpretation

When it comes to Revelation, there are four primary schools of interpretation. The diagrams in the section were taken from the ESV Study Guide.

First, there is the Preterist (Latin for “past”) view. This view describes events in the first century. Most of the prophecies have been fulfilled in the past.

Partial Preterist School(s)

Revelation's Visions



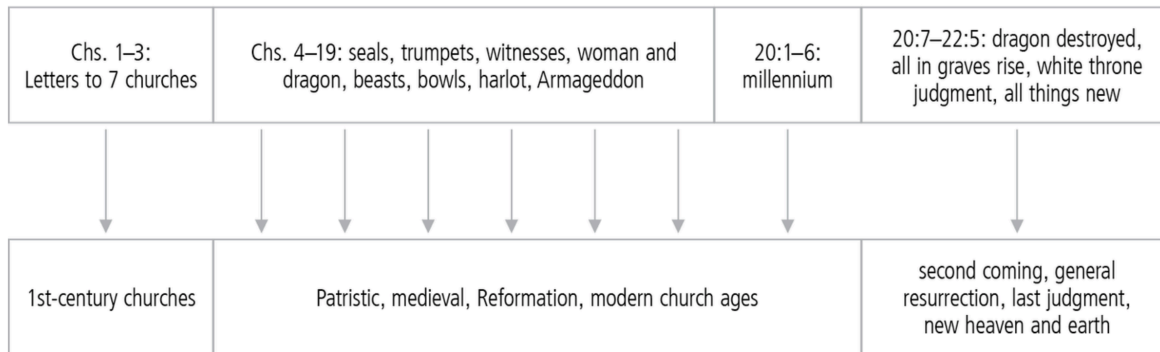
Historical References and Events

* Partial preterists differ on what would (from the original recipients' viewpoint) precipitate the millennium. This chart represents the view that sees ancient Rome as the church's main enemy. Others would understand Second Temple Judaism as the church's main enemy.

Second, there is the Historicist view. This view forecasts world history from Christ onwards. It predicts specific events in history.

Historicist School

Revelation's Visions

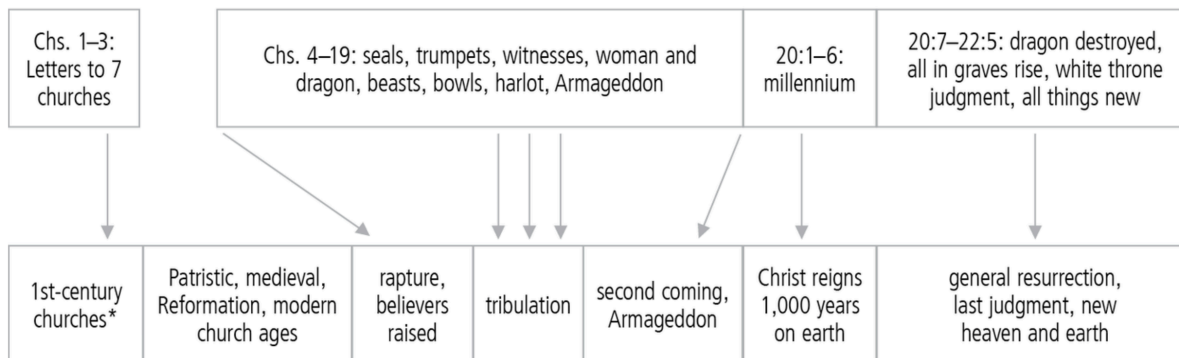


Historical References and Events

Third, there is the Futurist view. This view forecasts future events just before and after Christ's return. Within the Futurist view, there are different variations that deal with the timing of the rapture. Historical (or Classic) Premillennialism believes that the millennium will be preceded by an intense period of persecution called the tribulation. Dispensational Premillennialism believes that Jesus will return in secret to rapture the church before the tribulation.

Futurist (Dispensational Premillennialism)

Revelation's Visions

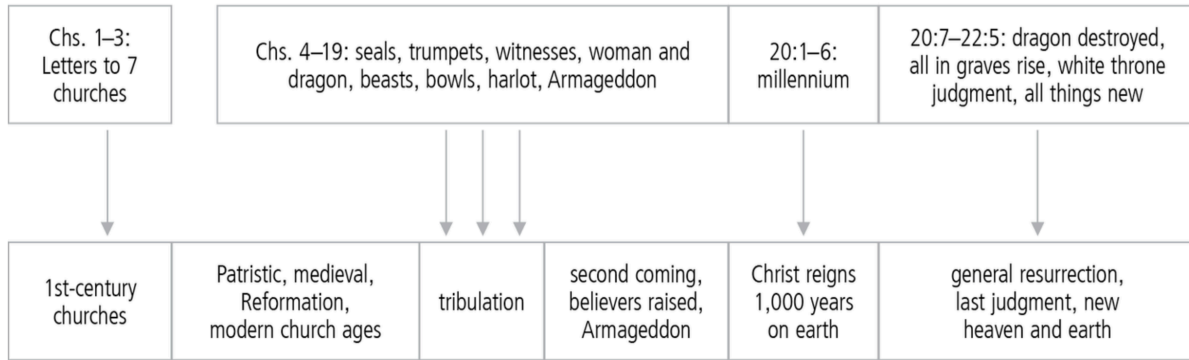


Historical References and Events

* Some dispensational interpreters think the churches addressed in chs. 2–3 predict different periods in church history.

Futurist (Historical Premillennialism)

Revelation's Visions

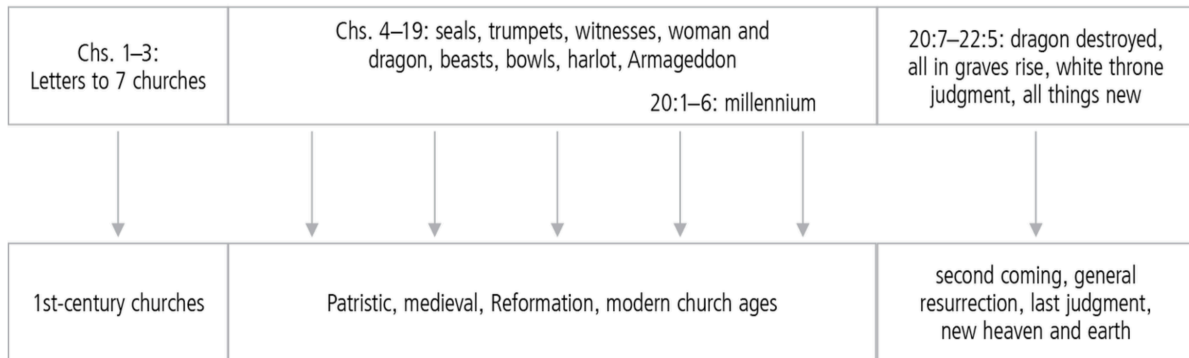


Historical References and Events

Finally, there is the Idealist view. This view portrays timeless principles that are true of any era.

Idealist School

Revelation's Visions



Historical References and Events

Chart: Interpreting the Book of Revelation			
Interpreting the Book of Revelation			
<i>Approach</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Caution</i>
Preterist View	John is writing to encourage Christians in his own day who are experiencing persecution from the Roman Empire.	To gain the same kind of encouragement John's first readers gained from the vivid images of God's sovereignty	Do not forget that most biblical prophecy has both an immediate and a future application.
Futurist View	Except for the first three chapters, John is describing events that will occur at the end of history.	To see in contemporary events many of the characteristics John describes and realize that the end could come at any time	Do not assume that we have "figured out" the future, since Jesus said that no one will know the day of his return before it happens.
Historicist View	The book of Revelation is a presentation of history from John's day until the second coming of Christ and beyond.	To note the consistency of human evil throughout history and recognize that names may change but the rebellion against God has not	Be careful before identifying current events or leaders as fulfilling aspects of the book of Revelation.
Idealist View	The book of Revelation is a symbolic representation of the continual struggle of good and evil. It does not refer to any particular historical events. It is applicable at any point in history.	To gain insight into the past, to prepare for the future, and to live obediently and confidently in the present	Do not avoid the book because it is difficult. Try to understand Revelation within its broader literary context.

*Life Application Bible Notes (Tyndale, 2007), 2167.

What I see is that it's a mixture of these. There are divine predictions of some future events but also a divine diagnosis of the present state of affairs.

John did not think he was predicting future events but wrote to address the experiences faced by his readers. And we can apply what he writes to the challenges we face today.

In this study guide, I will primarily use the Idealist view. This means that every generation must battle the dragon and the beast. Every generation must resist the seduction of Babylon. Every generation must refuse the mark of the beast. Revelation is relevant to the first-century church to the twenty-first-century church and every generation afterward!

Structure

It's not about what happens next, it's about what John sees next!

The book of Revelation is chronologically nonconsecutive in its structure. In other words, the book is not written as a linear chronology. Instead, it has a cyclical structure, in which the time period from the first to the second coming of Christ is traversed over and over again, each time from a different perspective and with a different emphasis.*

*Revelation: A Manual of Spiritual Warfare, Vol. 1 by Max Doner

Theme

The overall theme of Revelation is “Jesus has already gained victory over evil through His death and resurrection, but the church will face great tribulation before its victory is fully realized”.

Historical Context

Who? The Divine Author is Jesus Christ. The human author is the Apostle John (the beloved disciple). The original audience is the first-century churches in seven cities of the Roman province of Asia.

Where? The Isle of Patmos (where John was exiled).

When? A.D. 95-96

Why? This letter was written to encourage Christians facing threats and seductions of life in the Roman Empire to remain faithful to Christ.

Cultural Context

By the time of John's writing, there have been over two centuries of Roman rule. Rome ruled its vast empire through local elites. Rome was known as "eternal Rome".

As emperor, Caesar held the position PON MAX ("Greatest Priest"), which is the head of the state religion. There were 40 major temples where Caesar was worshipped as a god, including one in each city of the seven churches.

The imperial cult was a big part of commercial life through the trade guilds.

The Roman Empire worked through an extensive system of patron-client relationships.

PAX ROMA (peace established by the rule of the Roman Empire) brought many benefits: transport, communications, security, and economic prosperity.

Local officials often made some level of participation in the imperial cult legally binding. Christians' non-participation in the imperial cult was viewed as an act of treachery.

The Great Unveiling (Rev. 1:1-8)

What do you think about when you hear the word "apocalypse"? End of the world? Nuclear war? Zombies? Skynet? Robots taking over? But the word apocalypse comes from the Greek word for revelation. It simply means to reveal or unveil what was previously hidden.

The revelation of what is soon to come was given by God the Father to the Son, Jesus, who made it known to John by an angel. The Greek word for "made it known" means "to give a sign". John was given signs and symbols. This is how we know most of Revelation is symbolic.

What is meant by "soon to come"? It's been over 2,000 years. When will the last days come? Well, we're living in the last days. It's been the last days since the first coming of Christ. Since the first coming, we've been in the last days because when Christ returns, all of human history will be over.

Now there is a divine blessing for those who read this revelation aloud, especially during the time when most people could not read, so they relied on a learned person to read it aloud. There is a divine blessing for those who heard it when someone else read it aloud. But most importantly, there's a divine blessing for those who keep what is written in it. We must do more than read and hear; we must obey! For the time is near!

The reason John was given this revelation was to encourage the Christians facing threats and seductions of life in the Roman Empire to remain faithful to Christ. The reason we're studying Revelation is not to answer all of our intellectual questions or satisfy our curiosity about the end times but to motivate us towards obedience and faithfulness! The time is near, and the church will face many difficulties, hardships, and temptations to align with the world rather than Christ.

John writes this revelation to the first-century churches in seven cities of the Roman province. People thought that Rome would go on forever. It was known as "eternal Rome". Those Christians under Roman rule would be tempted to believe that Roman's power would last forever.

But Rome is not eternal; God is. There is grace and peace from God the Father who is, who was, and who is to come. The Roman Empire has ended. But God is still here! One day, even America will end, but God will still be here! The oppression of nations does not have the final say so, God does. Even when corrupt governments try to destroy the church, the church will continue because God is eternal.

There is grace and peace from the seven spirits before His throne. If we interpret this literally, there would be nine persons in the Godhead, which would be heresy. So this is symbolic. Seven is the symbol of perfection or completeness. Therefore the seven Spirits mean that the Spirit is perfectly complete. The Holy Spirit is all-present and all-seeing.

There is grace and peace from the Son, Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He is the first to rise from the dead with a resurrected body, never to die again. And all who are in Christ will follow in Jesus' pattern to rise from the dead with new resurrected bodies that will never grow old and never die!

Jesus is the ruler of kings on earth. Rome claimed to be the ruler of kings because it ruled its vast empire through local elites. John reminds the church of his time that although it looked like Rome was winning, they were on the right side. Today, it looks like the culture is winning, but we are on the right side. Jesus is the true ruler of kings, and one day His rule will be fully realized on the earth.

To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen! This is the unveiling of our Triune God.

Behold or look! Jesus is coming back. This is the unveiling of Christ's return. He is coming with the clouds. This is an allusion to the OT.

Daniel 7:13 (ESV): "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

One of the reasons I don't believe in Jesus coming to secretly rapture believers is that it says when He comes back, every eye will see Him.

Even those who pierced Jesus will see Him. This means the nation of Israel who rejected and crucified their Messiah will see Him. And not just Israel but all the tribes of the earth will see Him and wail on account of Him.

Matthew 24:30 (ESV): Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Not everyone will be happy to see Jesus! Some will mourn over the judgment they will face. Some will mourn over the lost opportunity for salvation.

Jesus has revealed to the church what is soon to come, so we must hear and keep what is written in it. It is true and certain, for the Lord God has said He is the Alpha and the Omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In other words, He is the A, and the Z. He is the first and the last. He is the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the four primary schools of interpretation of Revelation. Which one do you hold to?
2. What does "apocalypse" mean in the Book of Revelation?
3. What divine blessings are promised in Revelation?
4. When are the "last days"?
5. What do the seven spirits symbolize?
6. What does it mean that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead? What does it mean for believers?
7. How has Jesus freed us from sin and made us a kingdom?

Seeing One Like the Son of Man (Rev. 1:9-20)

The life of the church will not be one of ease but tribulation.

John writes to the seven churches from the Isle of Patmos. He identifies himself as their brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom. Patmos is where the Roman Empire sent political prisoners. This was not an island resort. Patmos was a ten-by-six-mile mountainous island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). It was a penal colony for exiled criminals sentenced to hard labor with insufficient food and clothing.

John was there on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He faced tribulation because of his faith and Christian witness. Tribulation means trouble, pressure, and affliction. Tribulation is a normal part of the Christian life. We should not be surprised when it comes our way, but we often are.

One of the things we need in tribulation is patient endurance. Some tribulations will be so hard and intense that they may cause us to want to give up. But we need to rely on the Lord to give us patient endurance. Patience (a.k.a long-suffering) means waiting on the Lord. Endurance means to stand up under and persevere against all trials and temptations coming against us. But when we look to God, He will give us the patient endurance to seek after His kingdom! The Christian life is not one of ease.

Acts 14:22 (ESV): strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

It's interesting to note that it was the Lord's Day (Sunday) when John received the revelation. He was worshipping in the Spirit. Even in tribulation, we must not miss the opportunity to continue to worship God, especially on Sunday, the Lord's Day.

John was seized with a vision by hearing a loud voice like a trumpet telling him to write what he will see in a book and send it to the seven churches. John turned, and then he saw a vision. He heard, and then he saw. He saw seven golden lampstands. Verse 20 tells us that the lampstands are symbolic of the seven churches. In the midst of the churches, stood one like a son of man. The Son of Man is the Messianic title of Jesus from the OT. Jesus is the heavenly Messiah who took on flesh to establish His eternal kingdom. John was seeing the glory of Jesus.

Jesus was clothed with a long robe with a golden sash around His chest. This is symbolic of Jesus being a priest and king. The ESV says long robe, but the NIV states that the robe reached down to His feet. The longer the robe, the higher the rank. When Isaiah had his vision, the train of God's robe filled the temple!

Jesus appeared with white hair like wool or snow. This symbolized honor and wisdom.

Proverbs 16:31 (ESV): Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Jesus' eyes were like a flame of fire. This symbolizes Jesus being able to see and judge the hearts of people. People like to say, "Well, Jesus knows my heart", as an excuse, but He really does KNOW your heart better than you. The hair and eyes are allusions to the Old Testament.

Daniel 7:9–10 (ESV): "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

Jesus' feet were like bronze burning in a furnace symbolizing His strength and stability. Jesus' voice was like the roar of rushing water, symbolizing His power and authority. Once again, we go back to Daniel.

Daniel 10:6 (ESV): His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

Jesus held the seven stars in His right hand. During this time, Roman coins showed an infant Zeus playing with the stars. But this vision counters the culture by proclaiming that Jesus reigns in heaven and holds the stars.

From Jesus' mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. This symbolized the Word of God. The Word of God is the double-edged sword that judges and saves; wounds and heals.

Hebrews 4:12–13 (ESV): For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus' face was like the sun shining in full strength. This symbolized His holiness, glory, and majesty. This is the awesome glory of the Son of Man! Jesus is worthy of our praise, worship, service, and our entire lives!

Compared to Jesus' glory, we are nothing. It's not surprising that when John saw the glory of Jesus, he fell at His feet like a dead man. Sinners cannot stand in the glory of Jesus. This is why believers will be changed when we live for eternity with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth.

Jesus laid His right hand on John, and His first words to Him were, "Fear not". John is seeing but not fearing. When there is so much in this world that will cause us to fear, Jesus says "Fear not". John was exiled to a penal colony, but Jesus says "Fear not". The churches saw the might and power of Rome, but Jesus said, "Fear not".

Why does Jesus say to "fear not"? Because He is the first and the last. Wait? Where have we heard this before? Back in verse 8, God says He is the Alpha and the Omega, which means the first and the last. Now Jesus is saying He is the first and the last. In other words, Jesus is God!!

Since Jesus is God, we have nothing to fear when we are in Christ. Jesus is the living one who died but is now alive forevermore! Jesus is God who came in flesh to die on the cross for sinners. He paid the penalty, which was death, so that sinners could be forgiven. But death couldn't hold Him! On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead with the keys of death and Hades.

Keys symbolize authority and access. The one with the keys can access areas where others cannot. So when Jesus rose from the dead, He took the keys from death and Satan. So even if the ruling powers of this world throw us into death's prison, Jesus will let us out because He has the keys!! Not even death can hold us because Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. Death has no power over the believer; therefore, we have no reason to fear!

Jesus tells John to write the things he has seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this. John was to write all that he had seen so far, what he was getting ready to see, and the things that would take place. He was not to omit anything.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was John on the Island of Patmos? Describe the conditions there.
2. What does Tribulation mean?
3. What do the seven golden lampstands symbolize?

4. What does the title Son of Man mean?
5. Explain the symbols that John saw when he looked at Jesus.
6. How did John react when he saw the glory of Jesus? Is his reaction surprising?
7. What were Jesus' first words to John?
8. What does it mean that Jesus has the keys of death and Hades?

The Spirit Speaks to the Church (Rev. 2-3)

Jesus, the Son of Man, tells John to write what He sees and send to the seven churches. These were actual churches during the first century, but why send this letter to only seven? There were more churches than these seven. Seven symbolizes perfection or completeness. Therefore, these seven real churches also symbolize the various types of churches you'll find in every generation.

Jesus holds the stars in His right hand and stands among the lampstands (churches). The stars are the angels or leaders of the church. So you can think of these angels as the pastors of the church. Jesus holds the pastors in His hand and walks among the churches. Jesus has all authority over the pastors and churches. Jesus is the Senior Pastor!

The messages to the churches generally contain a description of Jesus, commendation, rebuke, exhortation, and a promise.

The Loveless Church

The first church addressed is the church in Ephesus. Ephesus represents the loveless church. Jesus commends the church for their toil, patient endurance, and discernment. They did not tolerate evil and false teaching. Yet they were rebuked for abandoning the love they had at first. They cared more about orthodoxy (right beliefs and doctrine) than love for Christ. They had great doctrine but terrible devotion. When this happens, the church can easily turn to religious tradition and legalism. When our love for Christ becomes cold, our love for one another will also wax cold.

So the exhortation is to remember where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, Christ would remove the church's lampstand, which means they would lose their witness, or worse yet, Jesus would bring an end to the church.

The promise is that the one who conquers Christ will grant them to eat of the Tree of Life, which is eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Persecuted Church

Smyrna represents the persecuted church. They were commended for standing under tribulation and slander. They were poor materially but rich spiritually. This church received no rebuke. They were exhorted not to fear what they were about to suffer. The devil was about to throw some of them into prison, and for ten days, they would have tribulation. Ten symbolizes fullness. Their tribulation would be for a fully defined but limited time. They were exhorted to be faithful unto death. We have many brothers and sisters in churches around the world who are undergoing immense persecution. How will we fare when this level of persecution comes our way?

The promise is that when we are faithful until death, we will receive the crown of life and not be hurt by the second death. The second death is eternal torment and damnation. If you do not trust in Christ, then you must face the righteous judgment and penalty for your sins. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

The Compromised Church

Pergamum represents the compromised church. They were commended for being faithful despite Satan's throne (pagan temples and altars) being in their city. Yet, they were rebuked for compromising their faith with false teachings that led to idolatry and sexual immorality. This type of compromise is still in the church today. Churches gather to worship and serve yet idolize money, politics, and pastors, while sexual immorality runs rampant in the church.

The exhortation is to repent or face the sword of Jesus' mouth, which is the Word of God. The promise is that those who repent get hidden manna (feast and fellowship with Jesus, who is the Bread of Life) and a white stone with a new name symbolic of being acquitted from judgment and admitted into God's kingdom. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Corrupted Church

Thyatira represents the corrupted church. They were commended for their love, faith, service, and patient endurance. But they were rebuked for tolerating a false prophetess symbolically named Jezebel, which led them into sexual immorality and idolatry. The corruption of Jezebel is still in the church today. Do we look holy and respectable on Sundays, yet during the week, we're corrupted by idolatry

and sexual immorality in the world around us? Notice that in both the compromising and corrupted churches, false teachings led to idolatry and sexual immorality.

The exhortation is to repent because judgment is coming against the Jezebels and those who commit sexual immorality with her. But those who have not corrupted themselves with her must hold fast to what they have until Jesus comes. The promise is that those who conquer will be given authority over the nations. Jesus is the morning star, and we will reign with Him. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Dead Church

Sardis represents the dead church. They were commended for their works and those who had not defiled their clothes. But they were rebuked for having a reputation of being alive, but they were spiritually dead. It doesn't matter how impressive your singing, preaching, teaching, or service is if you are spiritually dead. If they didn't repent, Jesus would come suddenly (like a thief in the night) to bring judgment.

The exhortation is to wake up and strengthen what remains before it truly dies. Remember what you received (the Gospel, faith, grace, mercy, etc.), keep it, and repent. The promise is that one who conquers will be clothed in white garments, and their names will never be blotted out of the Book of Life. This is not an indication that believers can be removed from the Book of Life but a statement of eternal security that the names of believers cannot be blotted out! He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Loving Church

Philadelphia represents the loving church. They were commended for keeping Jesus' word and refusing to deny His name. They received no rebuke. The exhortation is to hold fast to what they have. We must hold fast to our love for God and others. The promise is that they will be protected through the hour (time period) of trial and made a pillar in God's temple. The Jews excluded them, but God included them. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Apathetic Church

Laodicea represents the apathetic church. This church received no commendation. They were rebuked for being lukewarm, wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. They were neither cold nor hot; therefore, God would spit them out of His mouth.

This rebuke would have been especially meaningful to this church because the water was piped to the city. Aqueducts would bring water from hot springs and a cold water supply, but by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cold...only lukewarm and filled with impurities, so it tasted terrible. Just as this water was tepid and bland, the Laodicean church was just as lukewarm. Christ would rather they be hot or cold. Many take the word “cold” as negative and “hot” as positive. But both “cold” and “hot” should be taken as positive while “lukewarm” is negative. The lukewarm, half-committed, apathetic person turns God's stomach such that He will spit them out of His mouth.

The exhortation is to get spiritual gold from Jesus, spiritual clothing to cover their nakedness, and spiritual eye salve so they can see. Being prosperous can blind you to your true condition. God rejects the lukewarm because they are self-righteous! The church felt that it was rich and prosperous and needed nothing. So be zealous and repent.

Jesus is standing at the door and knocking. The promise is that Jesus will come and commune with them if they repent. Many use verse 20 to say Jesus is knocking on the hearts of unbelievers. But remember, this is a letter addressed to a church, not to unbelievers. Jesus is not knocking on the door of the unbeliever's heart; He's knocking on the church door! Jesus is pictured outside the church, knocking to come in. The one who conquers will sit on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Spirit Speaks

The Spirit speaks to the church, so the church must listen! All churches are not the same, so we must ask: Is what the Spirit says about these churches true of our church, whether bad or good? Is it true about you?

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the number seven symbolize? What do the seven churches symbolize?
2. Which churches received no rebuke? Which church received no commendation?
3. What happens when you get doctrine right but lose your love for Christ & others?
4. What two things mentioned in these messages to the churches are the results of false teaching?

5. What does it mean to have a reputation of being alive but actually be dead?
6. What does it mean to be lukewarm?
7. How does one conquer?

Worthy is the Lamb (Rev. 4-5)

“Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain”. That's a famous line from The Wizard of Oz when Dorothy and her gang discovered that the wizard was just a man pulling levers. Similarly, John gets invited to look behind the spiritual curtain. In fact, he's called to pay attention to the Lord who sits on the throne.

After the message to the churches, John sees a door open to heaven, and he's invited to come up to heaven to be shown what must take place after the revelation he's already received. John's in the Spirit once again and sees the throne room of heaven. The one who sits on the throne has the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian. Jasper may represent holiness, majesty, or purity. The Carnelian stone represents wrath or judgment. The rainbow around the throne that looked like an emerald reminds us of God's covenant sign with Noah. All together, John sees the majesty, glory, and faithfulness of God.

There are twenty-four elders around the throne. Since there are twelve tribes of Israel in the OT and twelve apostles in the NT, these twenty-four elders most likely symbolize all of God's people who have been redeemed. They are clothed in white garments and wearing golden crowns. What a glorious vision for us to read about...that one day, when this life is over, all of us who are God's children will be glorified by having the presence of sin removed (symbolized by the white garments), and we'll have eternal life (symbolized by the crown of life)!

There's so much power around the Lord's throne that there's thunder and lightning. The seven spirits of God symbolize the complete presence of God through the Holy Spirit. Before the throne, John saw what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. To the Jews, the sea symbolized chaos because storms could quickly come on the sea, causing damage to ships. But around the throne, the chaos has been tamed. The sea is still like glass and clear like crystal.

Also around the throne are four living creatures. If we take their descriptions literally, these would be creatures from our darkest nightmares. They are covered with eyes, the first looked like a lion, the second like an ox, the third had a face

like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. These are angelic beings who have the characteristics of Isaiah's seraphim and Ezekiel's cherubim.

Isaiah 6:2 (ESV): Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Ezekiel 1:10 (ESV): As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

These angelic beings symbolize the majesty and power of the lion, the faithfulness of the ox, the intelligence of humanity, and the swiftness of the eagle. They represent the best of the living creatures that give praise to God.

Day and night, they declare, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come". They don't say "loving, loving, loving". Although God is love, the one attribute that stands above all others is His holiness. He is morally perfect, but Holy also means "wholly other". He is wholly or completely different from everything else in existence. There is no one like our God! Three holies for each person of the Trinity. Three also symbolizes perfection. God is perfectly holy!

The twenty-four elders (all of God's people) fall down to worship the one who sits on the throne. They declare, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory, honor, and power for you created all things, and by your will, they were created and have their being". By His will, God created everything. There was no Big Bang...it was God who spoke everything from nothing! It was not millions of years of evolution...it was God who created animals and humans.

Next, John sees the Lion who has conquered. In the Lord's right hand is a scroll with seven seals. In those days, books were written on scrolls, rolled up, and sealed with clay or wax. The scroll that John sees contains the account of God's plan for the world. The seals are located throughout the scroll so that as each one is broken, more of the scroll can be read. But an angel asks, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" No one in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth could open the scroll. So John began to weep until one of the elders told him to behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered. He can open the scroll.

This lion is Jesus. Jesus is the Lion who has conquered. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 49:9 (ESV): Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

Jesus is a descendant of King David.

Jesus has conquered sin by paying its penalty for sinners by His death on the cross!

Jesus has conquered death by rising from the dead!

Jesus has conquered Satan by freeing sinners from His domain!

Jesus is the Lion who has conquered.

But when John turned to look for the Lion, he saw a Lamb as though it had been slain--the Lamb who was slain. The Lamb had seven horns. Horns represent power. So the Lamb has complete and perfect power. The Lamb had seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the earth. The Lamb has complete and perfect sight over the earth as He has sent the Holy Spirit to come to the earth.

The Lamb is Jesus! Jesus is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere). When Jesus took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders began worshipping Him, singing a new song, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals".

Why is Jesus worthy? Because He is the Lamb that was slain to save people. He was slain as our substitute. By His blood, Jesus ransomed people for God. The idea of ransom is that a price is paid to free someone. But the ransom that was paid to save us was not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ. No amount of money can save a sinner but only the blood of Jesus Christ!

Jesus has ransomed people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Jesus had died for every people group in the world. Jesus is not just a white man's Savior. Jesus is not just a black man's Savior. Jesus is not just an Asian man's Savior. Jesus is the Savior of any and all who call upon Him to be saved.

Romans 10:9-13 (ESV): because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

This is why the church is called to go and make disciples of every nation (people groups). We have the assurance that if we go to a people group who has never heard of Jesus when we proclaim the Gospel, somebody is coming out of darkness into His marvelous light!

Jesus had made all these ransomed people into a kingdom of priests so that they shall reign on the earth. John looked and heard so many angels saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing”.

The word “worthy” means to ascribe weight or worth to something. Jesus is weighty! He's not thin like tin foil! He has substance to Him! Jesus is worthy!

Because of who Jesus is and what He accomplished, He is deserving and worthy of all attention, all glory, all praise, and all honor in heaven and earth. He is the only object that is deserving of worship.

But what if you don't feel like worshipping Jesus? I totally understand, but worship is not about your feelings. As Pastor JD Greear said, “The central premise in worship is not what you feel like, but what God is worthy of.” You worship based on who God is and what He has promised, not your feelings. Remember this: worship is putting the worthiness of God on display. Worthy is the Lamb!

The question for us to ponder is this: Is Jesus at the center of our worship? Yes, Jesus is sitting on the throne of heaven, but is He seated on the throne of our lives? Or are we trying to sit on the throne and ask Jesus to take a side chair?

Jesus is the Lion and the Lamb who is worthy to receive all glory, so we must center our worship on Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the twenty-four elders?
2. The sea symbolize chaos. So what does it mean that the sea is still like glass and clear like crystal around the throne?
3. What do the four living creatures symbolize?
4. What does it mean for God to be holy?
5. Why was John weeping?
6. Why is Jesus called the Lion of Judah?
7. Why is Jesus called the Lamb that was slain?
8. What does “worthy” mean? How does it apply to Jesus?

The Seven Seals (Rev. 6-8:1)

In chapters 6-19, we see three sets of seven divine judgments (seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls). Some read these chapters as a literal, chronological sequence of events. But the problem with reading it chronologically is that each set concludes with the final judgment and the second coming of Christ. These are not consecutive periods, but the same event told from different angles. For example, Genesis 1 describes the creation of man and woman but Chapter 2 also tells us about the creation of man and woman. If you read this as a chronological sequence, you'll get God creating two sets of humans. But Chapter 2 describes the events of Chapter 1 in more detail. So the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls are all describing the same events but from different perspectives, with each giving more details than the previous. It's like watching a sports replay from different angles.

If you are a preterist (past view), then the seven divine judgments have already happened with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the fall of Rome in the 4th century. If you are a futurist, then the seven judgments are future events to happen during a literal seven-year period called the tribulation. If you are an idealist (the view we're using), most of these events are ongoing realities in every generation, with the final judgment happening in the future at the end of the age.

Here's the idealist's view of the seven divine judgments*:

- Numbers 1-5 = the realities of history
- Number 6 = what happens at the end of history
- Number 7 = the final judgment and beyond

*Revelation For You by Tim Chester

As the Lamb, Jesus, breaks the seals, judgment is unleashed on the world. The first four seals are the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

The white horse symbolizes war and conquest. This is external conflict. And notice that the white horse looks like the white horse of Revelation 19. But that rider is Jesus; this is a counterfeit. G.K. Beale writes, "The first rider represents a satanic force attempting to defeat and oppress believers spiritually through deception, persecution, or both. The image of the rider may include reference to (1) the antichrist, (2) governments that persecute Christians, or (3) the devil's servants in general."

The red horse symbolizes war and civil conflict. It is internal conflict.

The black horse symbolizes famine. It's famine caused by rampant inflation.

The pale horse symbolizes death. A fourth of the earth (symbolizing only a portion) dies due to war, conquest, conflict, and famine.

We don't have to look to some future time to see these four horsemen. Due to the fallen nature of humanity, every age is characterized by evil conquest, war, famine, and large-scale death.

Matthew 24:4–9 (ESV): And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.

And it will not get better. These four horsemen will be riding until Jesus comes back. Mankind will not create a utopia. We will not be able to solve the problem because the problem is us! It's the sin in us. The solution has to be someone outside of us. The solution is Jesus!

When the fifth seal is broken, we see the heavenly martyrs under the altar. They were killed for the Word of God and their Christian witness. The martyrs want to know how long it takes the Sovereign Lord before He judges and avenges their blood. They are looking for vindication. So God gives them a white robe which symbolizes their purity, righteousness, and vindication from God. The world rejected them, but God received them. They received no justice on earth, but God, who is the ultimate Supreme Court, will overturn the world's decision and give them justice. But they are told to wait a little while longer because more martyrs will come. This lets us know that Christians are not immune to suffering, injustice, and death.

It might look like evil, and injustice are winning, but the martyrs called God the Sovereign Lord. God is sovereign (total control). The four horsemen are under the sovereignty of God and can only ride as far as God allows. One day, God will bring justice. This is symbolized by the opening of the sixth seal. There will be a great earthquake, the sun will become black, and there will be cosmic upheaval. These are the events leading up to the Day of the Lord. People will hide themselves, wanting rocks to fall on them to avoid the face of Him who is seated on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb. The great day of the Lord's wrath is coming. The question is, “Who can stand?”

The answer is only the church will be able to stand. Only those who are in Christ. Only those who have been sealed by God. This sealing has roots in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 9:4 (ESV): And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."

God's mark or seal is His sign of possession and protection. As sinners trust in Jesus, they are sealed by the Holy Spirit and saved. We are saved from God's wrath. We are protected on the Day of the Lord. John heard that the number of sealed is 144,000 from every tribe of Israel. Some groups have taken this number literally, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, who taught that only 144,000 would be saved. But twelve is symbolic of completeness, and 1,000 is symbolic of many. So twelve tribes times 12 times 1000 gives us completeness times many. In other words, it's all of God's people. So how do we know that it's all of God's people when it says the sons of Israel were sealed?

Remember, John heard that the number of sealed came from the tribes of Israel. This is the expectation from the Old Testament. But when John looked, he saw something different. Just like he heard about the Lion but saw the Lamb, John heard about the 144,000, but he saw a great multitude that no one could number. And they came not just from Israel but from every nation, from all tribes, peoples, and languages. This is the fulfillment of the New Covenant. This multitude was standing before the throne, clothed in white robes. This echoes back to the twenty-four elders around the throne in chapter 4. God is saving a great multitude from all people groups.

The church is around the throne in white robes with palm branches, declaring that salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. This is the church glorified. One of the elders quizzes John about the identity of those clothed in white robes. John probably didn't know, so he said, "You know". The elder said that they were the ones coming out of the great tribulation. Depending on your view, this could mean that the church is raptured before the entire tribulation period or just the final Day of the Lord.

The church serves God, who has given them shelter with His presence. Just to be in the presence of God brings shelter and security. They will hunger no more. They will thirst no more. The sun will not strike them. When the church is glorified, we will no longer face the famine, destruction, and death of the four horsemen.

The Lamb is there, and He will be the church's shepherd. Jesus is the Lion, the Lamb, and our Shepherd. As our Shepherd, He guides the church to springs of living water.

Psalms 23:1–2 (ESV): The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no sorrow in heaven. One day, all believers will sing around the throne because our tribulations and sorrow will be over. There will be no more tears over sin because all sins are forgiven. There will be no more tears for suffering because suffering will be over. There will be no more tears over death because death will be no more!

When the seventh seal is opened, the final judgment on the wicked comes, and the victory of the church is complete. There is silence in heaven for about half an hour. What's the significance of this silence? Again, we go to the Old Testament.

Zephaniah 1:7 (ESV): Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.

Habakkuk 2:20 (ESV): But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

When God makes His final judgment, there will be nothing for anyone to say: No more excuses, no exceptions, and no defense. The seven seals bring judgment, but those who trust in Jesus will be in the great multitude that will be saved.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain why the three sets of seven judgments should be read as the same event.
2. What do each of the four horsemen of the apocalypse symbolize?
3. What is the question of the martyrs? How is their question answered by God?
4. How is the severity of God's judgment displayed when the sixth seal is opened?
5. God's enemies ask, "Who can stand (under His wrath)"? What's the answer?
6. What do the 144,000 symbolize?
7. What does it mean for God to seal the church?
8. What is the significance of the silence in heaven?

The Seven Trumpets (Rev. 8:2-11:19)

Revelation shows us that when the prayers of saints go up to heaven, something happens! The imagery at the beginning of chapter 8 shows an angel mixing our prayers with incense to go up to God. When the censer is empty, it's filled with fire and thrown on the earth. In other words, it is the prayers of the saints that bring judgment. When the saints over the centuries are praying for justice, vindication, and God's kingdom to come, God answers by pouring out His judgment on the earth.

God uses our prayers to accomplish His will. Our prayers don't change God's mind, but they can move Him to act. God used the prayers of the saints to bring out the woeful trumpets. The seven seals released the four horsemen who brought conquest, war, famine, and death. These are the work of evil men. But the trumpets are the judgment of God's wrath against them. The symbol of the trumpet is used because trumpets are loud to warn people of coming judgment. They are used to get our attention. This is God's mercy to warn people before judgment comes.

Trumpets bring woe to the earth. A “woe” is a warning of judgment for those who do not respond properly to God. The first four trumpets bring natural disasters.

Trumpet 1 symbolizes natural disasters on the land, represented by hail and fire.

Trumpet 2 symbolizes natural disasters in the sea, represented by a great mountain burning with fire, causing the sea to turn to blood.

Trumpet 3 symbolizes natural disasters to fresh water, represented by the star Wormwood falling and poisoning the water. Wormwood is a bitter-tasting plant that symbolizes suffering and judgment in the Old Testament.

Trumpet 4 symbolizes natural disasters in the atmosphere, represented by the heavenly bodies being struck, causing darkness.

These four trumpets are ongoing realities. When Mount Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the Roman city of Pompeii, it dumped fire into the sea and darkened the sky with ash. Recently, the smoke from the wildfires in Canada brought a thick haze and eerie glow over New York City. There were wildfires in Hawaii driven by winds from Hurricane Dora that killed six and injured dozens. People were diving into the sea to escape the fire; one resident called the scene “apocalyptic.” So when we experience natural disasters like wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, tornados, tsunamis, etc., it should get the world's attention to repent.

C.S. Lewis said, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world”.

Trumpet 5 releases what look like locusts, but they sting like scorpions. These are not literal locusts because they do not harm the vegetation, only unbelievers, those who have not been marked with God's seal. These locusts symbolize the spiritual torment and uneasiness that unbelievers have because they have rejected Jesus. When people believe the lies of Satan and practice wickedness, it results in misery, despair, and destruction. These five trumpets remind us of the Egyptian plagues. God used those plagues to demonstrate that the so-called gods of Egypt were powerless before the one true God. These plagues also revealed the hard hearts of the Egyptians.

When the sixth trumpet is blown, it releases a vast demonic army. Whether this is an army of demons, humans influenced by demons on military conquest, or both, we're not certain, but this will be the start of the final judgment. Despite all the natural disasters, spiritual torment, and demonic army, people will not repent! Just like the Egyptians, people will continue to worship demons and idols that cannot see, hear, or walk. Despite these tribulations and judgment, people will not repent of their murders, sorcery, sexual immorality, or thefts.

In chapter 10, we get a little break in the action between the sixth and seventh trumpet for the bitter-sweet scroll. An angel comes with a little scroll containing the Word of God, and John hears seven thunders he's about to write about but is told not to. So here's another set of seven (seven thunders), but we have no revelation about it. There are some things about God's work that He has not revealed to us. John is told to eat the scroll. This is symbolic of how believers must feed on God's Word.

1 Peter 2:2 (ESV): Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

We grow up into salvation by longing for and feasting on the pure spiritual milk of God's Word.

John ate the scroll, and it was sweet. The Word of God is sweet to us.

Jeremiah 15:16 (ESV): Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.

God's Word should be a joy and delight to believers! The scroll was sweet in John's mouth but bitter in his stomach. The Word of God can be bitter to us when others (especially those we love) reject it and even persecute us. It should hurt us

to see people turn away from the Word and reject the very One who can save them. Yet, we must continue to proclaim the Word of God! John was told that he must prophesy about the judgment that was coming to many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

In chapter 11, we're introduced to the two witnesses. Some interpret the two witnesses as two literal prophets. But the two witnesses are called lampstands, which we know from chapter one are symbolic of the church. Two witnesses are needed to give legal testimony according to Old Testament Law. So the two witnesses represent the church (all of God's people). The church is called to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The two witnesses wear sackcloths to symbolize the repentance they call the nations to.

The church has the ministry and mantle of Moses and Elijah to engage in spiritual warfare and call the nations to repentance. For 42 months, the nations will trample God's temple while the two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days. Forty-two months is 1,260 days which is 3 1/2 years represented by a time, times, and half a time. This is a reference to Daniel.

Daniel 7:25 (ESV): He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Time, times, and half a time (3 1/2 years) is a figurative symbol representing a period of suffering for God's people from Jesus' first coming until it ends in victory at Jesus' second coming. When the two witnesses are killed by a beast (Satan or those doing his bidding), the world rejoices and exchanges presents. It looks like the church is dead. The Pew Research Center recently found that the percentage of American adults identifying as Christians dropped 12 points in the last decade alone. More Americans are identifying as atheists, agnostics, and unaffiliated. By 2050, Muslims will almost equal the number of Christians globally. When the church appears "dead", the world will rejoice because the church's prophetic message is a torment to them.

But Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. Even when wickedness and evil seem to kill the church, they cannot stop the church!

The church will "rise" from its dead-like state to life, and God will rapture the church before the final judgment of the seventh trumpet. When the church rises to new life and is raptured, many will give glory to God. I want you to note that it was not judgment that brought the nations to repentance but the witness of the church when we emulate Jesus by loving and even dying for our enemies.

When the seventh trumpet is blown, the final judgment comes, and Jesus returns to make the kingdom of the world His kingdom, and He will reign forever and ever. And God's people, symbolized by the 24 elders, worship and give thanks to the Lord God Almighty who is, who was, for He has taken great power and begun to reign.

The nations raged against God, but His wrath came, and now it's time for the dead to be judged and His servants, prophets, and saints to be rewarded.

Discussion Questions

1. What happens when the prayers of the saints go up to heaven?
2. The trumpets bring woe to the earth. What is a “woe”?
3. What do the first four trumpets symbolize?
4. How do the first five trumpets recall the plagues in Egypt?
5. What is an idol? What are some of today's idols?
6. What's the significance that the scroll John ate was sweet to taste but bitter to his stomach?
7. From an Idealist view, what do the two witnesses symbolize?
8. Where in the world today do you see the church being threatened and being victorious?

The Cosmic War (Rev. 12)

This is NOT the Christmas story you read to your children. Instead of Mary, baby Jesus in the manger, and singing angels, we have a dragon wanting to eat the baby of the pregnant woman and warring angels!! This pregnant woman is a great sign that John sees in heaven. This is the first of seven signs that appear in the remainder of Revelation.

The woman symbolizes either Mary or the true Israel. There's precedent in the Old Testament for Israel being portrayed as a woman in childbirth.

Isaiah 26:17–18 (ESV): Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O LORD; we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.

Plus, the description of the woman with the sun, moon, and twelve stars corresponds to Joseph's vision of the fledgling nation of Israel.

Genesis 37:9 (ESV): Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

So, the woman most likely symbolizes the true Israel (God's people under the old and new covenants). The woman gives birth to a male child who will rule the nations. The child is clearly Jesus, whom the nation of Israel gives birth to. The red dragon symbolizes Satan, which we are told in verse 9. The dragon has seven heads and ten horns. Seven symbolizes perfection, ten symbolizes totality, and horns represent power. The seven heads of the dragon wear diadems (or crowns). So, the seven crowns and ten horns symbolize the dragon's power, for he is the god of this world. But his power is limited by God's sovereignty. He is the deceiver of the whole world.

He has crowns because he wants to be worshipped. Satan wants to be God! Since he can't be God, he goes after those who bear the image of God: us! Satan, that ancient serpent, showed up in the garden to tempt our first parents, Adam and Eve, to rebel against God. After humanity fell into sin, God made a promise that He would send an offspring...a child that would defeat Satan. This is the first gospel.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV): I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

This enmity between the serpent and the woman and the serpent's offspring (those who follow him) and the woman's offspring is shown throughout the rest of the Bible. But God would send the gift of an offspring that would save us from the serpent and the consequences of our sin. But the dragon wanted to devour the child when He was born. Herod acting, as an agent of the dragon, attempted to kill Jesus as a toddler when he killed all the male children two and under. But God sent Joseph and Mary with Jesus into Egypt just like the woman who fled to the wilderness. That dragon filled the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. The dragon's offspring, the Pharisees, had Jesus arrested so He could be condemned to crucifixion by the Romans.

On the cross, Jesus defeated the dragon, Satan. He died but rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, as verse 4 says (caught up to God and His throne). The war between the two offsprings is still raging even now. But we have the victory

because Satan has been defeated. He has not only been defeated at the cross but he was also defeated in heaven.

Satan was the angel leading the angelic choir, but his pride led him to rebel against God. A war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against and were victorious over Satan and the angels who sided with him. Satan and his fallen angels were cast out of heaven because there was no longer a place for them. God evicted Satan and his angels and sent Michael to carry out the eviction notice! Satan took a third of the angels symbolized by the stars in verse 4, and they were cast down to the earth. Because Satan is furious with God, he makes war against anyone and anything of God's. He wars against the personhood of humanity because we are made in God's image. He wars against marriage because it was God's first institution created in the garden. He wars against the church because we are God's people.

The name Satan is really a title. Satan means adversary, accuser. He is the accuser of God's people. We see this played out in...

Job 1:6–12 (ESV): Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

So, there was a day when the sons of God (angels) came to present themselves before the Lord. And guess who was with them...Satan. Satan is not crashing a party; he is invited there as the angels present themselves before God to report on what they've been doing.

Satan reports that he's been walking up and down the earth. Before God, Satan makes an accusation against Job by saying that he only fears God because of God's blessings and hedge around him.

Satan is an accuser who desires to stop our worship by accusing us before God that we are not as righteous as we think. The reality is that we are not righteous in

ourselves. But Jesus is the final answer to Satan's accusation. Satan accuses us of being ungodly, so what does Jesus do? He justifies the ungodly!

Romans 8:31–34 (ESV): What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. His death paid the penalty that was due to us. Jesus not only died, but He rose from the dead. His death and resurrection justified believers. That means, by faith, we are declared righteous and holy before God. The Judge Himself declares the accused person righteous based on faith in Jesus Christ. As a result, all charges are DISMISSED, and NO ONE can bring an accusation that will stand!

Since Satan cannot bring his accusations to God, he brings them to us. He whispers his accusations in our ears: “God doesn't love you because you've messed up too many times”; “you're not fit to serve in ministry”; “nobody needs you in this church”; “you can't understand the Bible so why bother”; “you can't pray so stop”, etc.

Because Jesus has defeated Satan, we, as the church, can conquer him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. We are reconciled to God by the blood. The blood purifies us from all sin. We have been bought, acquired, and redeemed through the blood. And since we have been saved by the blood of Jesus, we ought to testify to the Gospel and His goodness in our lives. Satan cannot keep you from being saved, so he wants to keep you from testifying!

Verse 15 says that the serpent poured water from its mouth like a flood to sweep the woman away. Satan attacks God's people with a flood of evil and blasphemous words. But we have this promise!

Isaiah 43:2 (ESV): When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Satan is furious because he could not destroy the people of Israel, so he makes war with Jesus and those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Satan is waging war against the church. This is why it is hard to live as a Christian. Satan is mad and lashing out with great wrath because he knows his time is short.

The woman goes to the wilderness where she is nourished for 1,260 days (3 1/2 years) or a time, and times, and half a time. Interpreting this symbolically, this represents the time of tribulation and testing from Jesus first coming until His second. But not only is it a time of tribulation, but it's also a time of nourishment and provision.

Just as God provided for Israel in the wilderness, He will provide for and keep us. God will take care of His people in every generation as we wait for Jesus to return. This present world is not our home. We are in the wilderness, awaiting the time when we will go to our true home.

Satan opposes God and His people, but there's no reason for us to despair. We can trust God to save us. As the church, let us stand firm because God has defeated Satan, and we conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony!

Discussion Questions

1. There are three main characters in chapter 12: the woman, the child, and the red dragon. Who do they symbolize?
2. Describe some ways in which the dragon has tried to devour the child. Was he successful?
3. What happened when a war arose in heaven? Who was kicked out?
4. What do the descriptors for Satan in verse 9 tell us about his character and goals?
5. Why does Satan want to destroy the people of God?
6. How do the death and resurrection of Jesus enable you to respond to Satan's accusations?

The Battle Against The Beasts (Rev. 13)

Antichrist. When we hear that word, it might stir up a lot of imagery and feelings. But antichrist simply means "against Christ". The Bible uses "antichrist" in at least four ways*:

1. An evil empire or political power
2. The evil spirit of the age (the spirit of the antichrist)
3. Literal persons who are forerunners of the final antichrist

4. The final person who is the embodiment of satanic power

*Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 220.

John sees the beast from the sea. This is the antichrist. This first beast symbolizes political power. This beast comes from the sea of humanity. The sea also symbolizes chaos. In this chapter, the beast seems to be both a person and a political empire.

Notice the beast has ten horns and seven heads with ten diadems, just like the dragon. This shows that the beast (antichrist) is Satan's representative. The dragon has given power to this beast. Behind every evil political power is satanic influence! The beast has features like a leopard, bear, and lion. This imagery comes from the vision in Daniel describing the rise and fall of various evil kingdoms.

Daniel 7:23–25 (ESV): “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

One of the heads of the beast is healed from a mortal wound. This could be a miraculous healing of a person's wound, or it could be symbolic of the fall and rise of political powers. During the writing of Revelation, Nero is dead, and Domitian is the emperor of Rome. He was considered a “second Nero” because he was just as evil. The Assyrian empire fell, but Babylon rose. Babylon fell, but the Medes and Persians rose. They fell and gave way to the Romans. The Roman Empire fell, another empire rose to take its place, and so on and so on.

The point is that the beast wants everyone to worship it and the dragon. The political powers of the world want our allegiance. They want us to worship the state. But this beast utters blasphemy against God and makes war on the saints. Think of the Supreme Leader in North Korea who violently persecutes Christians. Think of our own country, which blasphemes God by redefining marriage, gender, and sexuality. Verses 9-10 tell us what the results of the war against the saints will be. Some will be imprisoned, and some will be martyred. So, this is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

We need endurance. What is endurance? It is the ability to withstand hardship or adversity, especially the ability to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity. It's perseverance, steadfastness, and patient enduring. Our lives will increasingly be under pressure from the political powers of the antichrist, which will cause us to encounter agony, pain, hardships, trials, and suffering. We must have the faith to endure.

We need endurance so that we will continue to do God's will. It's so easy to allow persecution and the trials of life to keep us from doing the works that God wills for us to do.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV): Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

We can be steadfast and immovable because we have hope. We have hope that Jesus will return. We have hope of being resurrected to eternal life. Revelation shows us our glorious future, which should stir us to be steadfast and immovable in serving the Lord.

You cannot be neutral in this. Verse 8 says that everyone on earth will worship the beast except those whose name is in the Book of Life. Either you are a saint, which means your name is in the Book, or you're not, which means you are worshipping the beast!

Then John sees another beast...the beast from the earth. The second beast is the false prophet and symbolizes propaganda and deception. In contrast to the first beast, who comes from chaos, this one will seem more grounded. This beast looks like a lamb, harmless and gentle. But it speaks like a dragon. In other words, the beast looks like Christ but speaks like Satan.

Matthew 7:15 (ESV): "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

The job of this beast is to deceive the world into worshipping the first beast. It does this by false information and signs. Don't be deceived by signs and wonders if they don't ultimately point you to Jesus!!

Deuteronomy 13:1–3 (ESV): "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Both the first and second beasts want full allegiance and worship. This is symbolized by taking the mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead. Without it, one could not buy or sell. Six is the number of man, for on the sixth day, God created man. Six is also one less than seven, which is perfection. So, six symbolizes imperfection and incompleteness. Why three sixes? Three symbolizes totality and completeness. So 666 is complete incompleteness!! Hebrew letters are also numbers. Spelling out Nero Caesar in Hebrew would add up to 666. Nero is not the ultimate fulfillment of this, but he is just an example of world leaders and empires who exalt themselves to demand allegiance and even worship.

What is the mark of the beast? Let me tell you what it is not: the vaccine, barcodes, microchips, etc. It cannot mean for us what it did not mean for the original audience. John's readers would have immediately understood that this mark is like the Shema from Deuteronomy 6.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (ESV): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This is a statement of allegiance to God where God's Word is written on the hand and forehead to symbolize all of your actions (hand) and thoughts (head) are devoted to God. I don't believe that the mark of the beast is a literal, visible mark because God's people have been marked as His own (we'll see this in chapter 14). Yet there's no visible sign on our foreheads. The antichrist will have blasphemous names on its head, and that won't be visible otherwise; it will be easy for everyone to identify who it is. Rather, the mark is a symbol of who you worship and who has your allegiance. To have the mark of the beast is to have the characteristics of the beast.

What does it mean that one cannot buy or sell? In John's day, there was immense pressure to participate in the imperial cults of Rome. These cults were set up to worship Caesar as lord. The peace established by the rule of the Roman Empire brought many benefits, like transportation, communications, security, and economic prosperity. Local officials often made some level of participation in the imperial cult legally binding in order to conduct business. When Christians did not participate in the imperial cult, it was viewed as an act of treason. Even now, there are times when Christians get canceled, lose jobs, and cannot participate in

commercial life because they refuse to align with the two beasts. The first beast called for endurance by the saints. The second beast calls for wisdom.

We need wisdom so we don't fall for the deception of the false prophet. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Do we fear the Lord enough to study His Word so that we'll be able to discern good from evil and right from almost right?

Satan wants to be God so bad that he counterfeits God. He is the counterfeit god. God is the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), but the dragon and the two beasts make up the unholy trinity.

God marks His people with the Holy Spirit, while Satan marks his people with the mark of the beast.

Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and rose from the dead. The first beast is wounded and recovers from that mortal wound.

Those who worship God say, "Who is like our God?". Those who worship the beast say, "Who is like the beast?".

Jesus is the Lamb, while the second beast looks like a lamb.

Satan wars against the church through corrupt political power and propaganda, but we must endure and have the wisdom not to fall for his deception.

We battle the beast by worshipping the one true God! You can refuse the mark of the beast by taking the mark of God. You cannot be neutral. Do not trust in the counterfeit god but the one and only true God. You must trust in what God has done to save sinners by sending His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for sin and then rise from the dead in victory over sin, death, and Satan.

Discussion Questions

1. What does antichrist mean? Name some of the ways that the Bible uses "antichrist"
2. What does the beast from the sea symbolize?
3. How might the healing of the mortal head wound be interpreted?
4. What does the beast from the earth symbolize?
5. What does it mean to get the Mark of the Beast?
6. What was the Imperial Cult during John's day? Do you see anything similar in our culture today?
7. Why is there a call for endurance after the first beast and wisdom after the second?

8. How does Satan try to counterfeit God?

Who Will You Worship? (Rev. 14)

The question is not, will you worship? Everybody is a worshipper. We were created to worship. Everyone, everywhere, all the time, is always worshiping. The question is, who will you worship? Because of the fall, people began to worship created things instead of the Creator. The book of Revelation shows us why Jesus is the worthy object of our worship!

John now sees the Lamb on Mount Zion, God's holy mountain. The Lamb is Jesus, and with Him are the 144,000. This number symbolizes all of God's redeemed people who are no longer at war with Satan and the beasts but are now safely in the presence of Jesus. The redeemed will be safe and secure with the Lamb.

Unlike those with the mark of the beast on their foreheads, the redeemed have the Father's name written on their foreheads. Again, this is not a literal mark but a spiritual one to indicate the one a person belongs to.

What will the redeemed be doing in the presence of the Lamb? We will be singing to Him. The redeemed will learn a new song. This is the song of the redeemed we saw in chapter 5.

Revelation 5:9–10 (ESV): And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Singing with joy and celebration is the natural response for those who have been redeemed. When we recognize that we don't deserve salvation, nor could we ever earn it, it should cause us to burst forth with praise and worship!

The redeemed are those who have not defiled themselves with women. This is symbolic language for being faithful to God. Redeemed people are spiritual virgins who have not stepped out on God with the prostitution of the world. The redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. As Jesus leads, we follow.

No lie is found in the mouth of the redeemed. They are blameless. Let's be honest; everybody in here has lied. If you say you have never lied, you just did. But the redeemed are those who have placed their faith in Jesus, who took their sins and gave them His righteousness. By faith, we are declared holy, righteous, and blameless before God. It's like we never lied and always told the truth! To know that when God the Father looks at you and sees the righteousness of Jesus is another reason to worship Him!

And when we are in the presence of Jesus, we will be glorified, which means we will be made totally righteous and blameless.

Next, John sees angels who bring messages. Angels are messengers. These could be real angels or symbolic of gospel preachers. The first one proclaims the eternal gospel. Angels have never preached the gospel...that's our job. The eternal gospel is the same gospel that has been declared throughout history. So what is the gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (ESV): Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the gospel. Jesus died for our sins so that believers would be forgiven. He rose from the dead in victory over sin, death, and Satan. This gospel is to be declared to all who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people. This is the Great Commission of the church.

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV): Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We are calling people to fear God and give Him glory. We are calling people to worship Him, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and the springs of water.

The reason the gospel is preached is because Babylon will fall. This is the message of another angel. Babylon symbolizes any empire or kingdom that opposes God and persecutes God's people. Babylon is great and makes people commit sexual immorality with it. Sexual immorality and adultery are symbolic of unfaithfulness to God. We live in Babylon now! There is so much pressure to get

in bed with the world and conform to this ungodly culture. Babylon would have the church take on the world as a “side chick”. This is why Revelation is a call to endure and keep the commandments of God and stay faithful to Jesus. Babylon wants you to worship the beast, which ultimately goes back to the dragon, Satan.

Babylon will fall, and everyone associated with Babylon will fall into judgment. Everyone who has the mark of the beast (meaning they have rejected Jesus, thereby giving their allegiance to Satan) will face the judgment of hell. This is the message of the last angel. God's wrath is described as wine poured full strength into a cup. Those who reject Jesus to follow the beast will be made to drink that cup. They will be tormented with fire and sulfur day and night. The smoke of their torment will go up forever. They will have no rest. Hell is eternal conscious torment. But hell is not the absence of God.

Notice it says they will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. Hell is the absence of His loving presence to only face His holiness and wrath. I heard Pastor Mark Dever say, “Hell is real, so we want to warn. But we want to be clear that God wins”.

Those who die in the Lord are blessed because their sins are forgiven, and they will be in the loving presence of the Lamb, where they will rest from their labors. But there is no rest for the wicked.

Next, John saw the Son of Man seated on the cloud with a crown on His head and a sickle in His hand.

A sickle is a farming tool used to harvest wheat. The angel told Jesus it was time to harvest, for the earth was ripe. The earth will be harvested. Jesus described the final judgment as harvesting to separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

Matthew 13:30, 39-43 (ESV):
Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,
“Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.””



39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Another angel comes to swing his sickle, but this one is to gather those who will face the wrath of God. Like grapes thrown into a winepress, so will the wicked be thrown into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

Joel 3:13 (ESV): Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

A winepress is where grapes were stomped on by foot, and a duct leading to a basin would collect the juice. The splattering of juice is a picture of the splattered blood of the wicked who will be destroyed.

Isaiah 63:3–4 (ESV): “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood splattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

So again, it comes down to who will you worship. The world (or Babylon) is a different worship system altogether. There is no neutral ground.

Either you worship the Lamb, or you worship the beast.

Either you have the Father's name on your forehead, or you have the mark of the beast.

Either you follow Jesus, or you follow Satan.

You can't mix the two. No one can serve two masters. You will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

So, who will you worship? You need to answer this question because your answer determines your eternal destiny.

Discussion Questions

1. What is worship?
2. What is significant about the 144,000 having God's name written permanently on their foreheads?

3. Why has Christianity always been (and always will be, based on this passage) a faith that sings?
4. The angel proclaims the eternal gospel. What is the gospel?
5. What does Babylon represent?
6. What would you say to someone who believes that, in the end, everyone goes to heaven? How does this passage correct that belief?
7. How will the redeemed be declared blameless?

The Seven Bowls (Rev. 15-16)

The judgment of the seven bowls brings the seven plagues, which are the last. Those who are futurists interpret “last” to mean that these are the last of God's judgment following the seven seals and seven trumpets. But idealists say that since these seven judgments cover the same time period (just at different angles), the seven bowls are the last of the visions about the seven judgments given to John (not that they occur chronologically last in history). It's not about what happens next but what John sees next. But whatever view you take, the seven bowls represent God's final judgment throughout the age.

But before we can get to the seven bowls, John sees something like a sea of glass. Remember, the sea symbolizes chaos, so a sea of glass shows that God is going to calm the chaos. And the sea of glass is mingled with fire. Fire represents God's purifying judgment. So, how is God going to calm the chaos? By bringing judgment on the wicked.

And look who is standing by this sea of glass mingled with fire...God's people! Those who conquered the beast with its image and number. They have musical instruments in their hands because they are singing a song of victory. Just as Moses, the servant of God, delivered God's people from bondage in Egypt, so shall Jesus, the Lamb of God, deliver God's people from sin, Satan, and the beasts!

Great and amazing are God's deeds. Just and true are His ways. I want you to note that God's people sing and worship God while He is pouring out His wrath. Some people say they cannot worship a God who is wrathful and sends people to hell. But apparently, God's people in heaven have no problem worshipping God who judges because they know that His ways are just and true. The redeemed from all the nations will come and worship God as His righteous acts in judgment are revealed.

Next, the bowls of wrath are poured. In chapter 16, John sees the seven angels coming from the sanctuary dressed like Christ as His representatives. When the angels receive the seven bowls full of God's wrath, the sanctuary is filled with the smoke of God's glory. God's wrath is so holy and just that His glory fills the heavenly sanctuary much like God's glory filled the earthly sanctuary in Exodus after it was built. Moses could not even enter the earthly tabernacle, and the angels could not enter this heavenly tabernacle until the plagues were finished.

The angels pour out the bowls. The seals affect a quarter of the people, while the trumpets affect a third. Those were partial judgments to give people an opportunity to repent. But these bowl judgments are for those who refuse to repent!

The first five bowls echo the plagues in Egypt (similar to the seven trumpets). There are sores on those who bear the mark of the beast. The sea and the rivers become like blood. The sun scorched the people with fire and fierce heat, yet people still do not repent. Darkness comes upon the land. People gnawed their tongues and cursed God for their pain and sores. Can you imagine gnawing your tongue while trying to curse God? They would rather curse God than repent. This is happening now. Despite all the disasters, war, pain, and suffering, people still refuse to turn to God. One of the purposes of pain and suffering is to awaken our need for God. It should cause us to run to Him, not run from Him.

The sixth bowl dries up the river Euphrates so that the kings can gather from the east for war. This gathering of kings points to the gathering of the armies from the dragon and the beasts against the Lamb in the final battle of Armageddon. Armageddon means "the mountain of Megiddo". Megiddo is a two-day walk from Jerusalem and was the battleground where God delivered Israel from her enemies during the days of Judges. But there's no mountain in Megiddo. It's a plain. So why does Armageddon mean "the mountain of Megiddo"? Mountains symbolize strength. Israel saw God as their mountain that they could run to for deliverance. Therefore, Armageddon represents the place where God will deliver His people from a superior enemy. God is our mountain of deliverance! God is our Armageddon! Armageddon won't be a battle but a slaughter.

Robert Mounce writes, "Wherever it takes place, Armageddon is symbolic of the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God. The great conflict between God and Satan, Christ and antichrist, good and evil, that lies behind the perplexing course of history will in the end issue in a final struggle in which God will emerge victorious and take with him all who have placed their faith in him. This is Armageddon."

We'll get more details later, but no armies will be able to stand against the judgment of God.

The seventh bowl brings the terrible Day of the Lord with lightning, thunder, earthquake, and hailstones weighing one hundred pounds each. This sounds so severe, but verse 6 (chapter 16) says that it is what they deserve. Verse 7 says that God's judgments are true and just! You will either get mercy or justice. Nobody gets injustice.

Sin deserves justice. Since God is holy, He must judge sin. Sin against an eternal God deserves eternal judgment. Even if it appears that the wicked are getting away with their evil or it seems that you are not reaping what you have sown, there is a Day coming when all accounts will be settled. No one gets away scot-free! Judgment is coming! The prophet Obadiah prophesies about the Day of the Lord.

Obadiah 15 (ESV): For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.

Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile said, "The Day of Judgment will reveal what and who we really are. There'll be no hiding place. We will either be found in Christ or in sin. If in sin, all will be lost. If in Christ, all will be gain."

But the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus took what we deserved. On the cross, Jesus took the justice of God so that we can receive the mercy of God! Jesus died the death that we deserved to die, and then He resurrected from the dead in victory.

Are you ready to face judgment? Judgment is going to catch many people by surprise. Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming like a thief". A thief always comes at a time when you least expect it. So if you want to be ready for the thief, you can't go to sleep. You have to stay awake. The one who is awake is blessed.

Staying awake means to be alert. Don't let the deception of the dragon and the beasts put you to sleep spiritually.

Keep your spiritual clothes on! Otherwise, you will be naked and exposed. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they recognized that they were naked. Their sin brought guilt and shame. So they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves.

Genesis 3:7 (NLT): At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

So many people try to cover themselves with good deeds and their own righteousness. Those are fig leaves! It didn't work for Adam and Eve, and it won't work for us. Fig leaves are not an adequate covering. So God killed an animal to use its skin as a substitute for the inadequate fig leaves.

Genesis 3:21 (ESV): And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

God sacrificed an animal to cover Adam and Eve. Likewise, God sacrificed His Son, Jesus, as our substitute to cover our sins. Jesus took our sins on the cross so believers can be clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

It's interesting to note in verse 17 that when the seventh bowl is poured, and all of God's wrath is poured out, a loud voice cries out, "It is done". God's wrath is complete. When Jesus hung on that cross, and all of God's wrath was poured on Him, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished". God's redemption is complete.

The seven bowls bring God's just judgment. So we must be ready. We must stay awake, for Jesus will come like a thief in the night.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the sea of glass mingled with fire symbolize?
2. How can God's people sing while God judges the wicked?
3. What do the plagues of the first five bowls remind you of?
4. Why will no one be able to accuse God of being unfair when they receive His judgment?
5. What does Armageddon mean? What does it represent?
6. What does it mean to stay awake and remain clothed in preparation for Jesus' return?
7. Why are "fig leaves" not an adequate covering for shame and nakedness?
8. What does it mean to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus?

The Great Fall of Babylon (Rev. 17-19:10)

The greatest threat to the church is not persecution. It's seduction! When we see persecution, we can prepare ourselves to face it. But seduction can be so subtle that we don't realize we're in danger until it's too late. The goal of seduction is to

get believers to compromise their faith and witness. Remember Samson? Samson was seduced by Delilah, who was a temple prostitute. Her goal was to get him to reveal the source of his strength, which was his hair. She eventually got the truth out of him and had his hair shaved while he slept in her lap and was bound.

Judges 16:19–20 (NLT): Delilah lulled Samson to sleep with his head in her lap, and then she called in a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. In this way she began to bring him down, and his strength left him. Then she cried out, “Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!” When he woke up, he thought, “I will do as before and shake myself free.” But he didn’t realize the LORD had left him.

Are you being lulled to sleep by Babylon? Babylon is called the great prostitute. Babylon represents any evil and idolatrous nation. Babylon wants to seduce people to commit sexual immorality and become drunk with wickedness. Babylon is anti-Christian and calls to the world to “come and fornicate with me”. Babylon wants you and I to indulge in fleshly desires and carnal pleasures. She wants us to be unfaithful to God.

In John's day, Babylon is Rome. There was tremendous pressure on Christians to participate in the imperial cult that worshipped Caesar as lord. The great prostitute is dressed in purple and scarlet. Roman emperors and senators wore purple, and priests wore scarlet. The woman sits on seven hills. Rome was often referred to as the City of Seven Hills. The ten horns refer to Daniel 7, which prophesies the successive empires that climax with the Roman Empire. Rome was considered the great city that ruled over the kings of the earth. The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints. The Roman Empire killed many Christians. Entertainment played a significant role in the Roman Empire, from gladiator games, chariot races, theater, gaming (board games, dice, gambling), and music and dance. Sexual immorality ran rampant in the Roman Empire. Prostitution was legal and widespread. Homosexuality was relatively prominent and accepted in various forms.

Do you notice any similarities to today? The USA is widely considered a world leader (exerting power and influence over the “kings” of the earth). Entertainment is a huge part of our culture, from sports, movies, video games, gambling, music, and dance. Sexual immorality runs rampant in this country (prostitution, promiscuity, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, transgenderism, pornography).

WE LIVE IN BABYLON!! Babylon is trying to seduce us with the American dream! The beast will use the seductions of Babylon to make war on the Lamb and those who follow the Lamb. Believers must resist the seduction of this world!

CS Lewis said, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.”

But Babylon will not last. She will self-destruct. This will be the death of the great prostitute. The very ones that profited from her will turn on her. Verse 16 (chapter 17) says that the kings and the beast will hate the prostitute and make her desolate and naked and will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. We must not align ourselves with Babylon because the winds of political power can so easily change.

This is all a part of God's plan to have evil turn on itself to lead it to destruction. Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. God will judge Babylon for her demonic nature, idolatry, immorality, and pride. This is why God's people are told to come out of her. You don't want to take part in her sins; otherwise, you might share in her plagues. We live *in* this world, but we should not be *of* this world.

2 Corinthians 6:17 (ESV): Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

When Babylon the prostitute is dead, people will weep and wail over her judgment. They mourn because they can no longer make money from her. They had gained wealth from her, but that will be gone when Babylon falls. This is why we must resist her seduction. Sin is pleasurable for a season! Sin feels good to the flesh, but it's fleeting. It won't last. Sin leads to ruin and destruction. Hell will be the place where the enjoyment of sin is turned to unending nausea and vomiting. This is why Revelation warns us that the lure of sin and wickedness is deceitful! The prostitute wants you to drink from her golden cup full of abominations and sexual impurities, but it's poison.

Galatians 6:7–8 (ESV): Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

But not everyone will be mourning over the death of the great prostitute. In verses 20-24 (chapter 18), the angels sing over the destruction of Babylon. God has judged evil and wickedness, so heaven rejoices because God has done it rightly. There will be no more music from Babylon. There will be no rebuilding of Babylon. There will be no more light coming from Babylon. There will be no redemption for Babylon, for she is guilty of the blood of the prophets, saints, and all who have been slain on the earth.

In chapter 19, the great multitude is crying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory, and power belong to our God, for His judgments are true and just. He had judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of her servants”. The great prostitute is going to die.

So we go from the funeral of the prostitute to a wedding reception. There will be great rejoicing for the marriage of the Lamb has come. His Bride has made herself ready. The Lamb is Jesus, and the Bride is the church.

The church will be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure. The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. The good deeds we do in faith will adorn us for eternity!

The angel told John to write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. What a blessing it will be to be a part of the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Once you have secured your invitation to the marriage supper, you must make yourself ready for when Jesus returns. How does the Bride make herself ready for her Groom?

We make ourselves ready by staying faithful to Christ in this fallen world.

We make ourselves ready by daily repenting of our sins.

We make ourselves ready by enduring hardship.

We make ourselves ready by trusting God in suffering.

We make ourselves ready by fulfilling the Great Commission to take the gospel to the nations.

John is so overwhelmed with the good news of the marriage supper that he falls to his feet to worship the messenger. But the angel quickly rebukes John for this action. Angels are fellow servants with us who hold to the testimony of Jesus. We are to worship God alone. No matter how wonderful angels might be, we are not to worship them or anything else. Only God is worthy of our worship. Only the Lamb is worthy of our worship!

Adrian Rogers said, “You become what you worship. True worship will make us more like God”. If you worship this world, you will fall for its seductions. And if you become like the world, you will die the same death. But those who worship the Lamb will become more like Him and be invited to the marriage supper.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is seduction a greater threat to the church than persecution?

2. Why is Babylon considered the great prostitute?
3. How does this description of Babylon resemble the American dream?
4. What does it mean that we are too easily pleased by the things of this world? What kind of pleasure should we strive for?
5. What does the beast's turn against the prostitute tell you about Satan's character? About his end goal?
6. How does marriage in the Bible reflect the gospel?
7. How can a person secure their invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb?

The Reign of the Lamb (Rev. 19:11-20:15)

When Jesus first came, He came as a baby. He walked the earth as a gentle and peaceful Savior. But Jesus will return as the King who makes war!

As we near the end of the revelation of Jesus Christ, John sees seven visions ("then I saw", depending on your English translation). Seven symbolizes completion. John sees heaven open, and before him is a white horse. This is the first vision. Jesus Christ will be the conquering King. This is what the white horse symbolizes. In ancient times, when a Roman general entered a city as the conqueror, he rode a white stallion to celebrate his triumph. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, demonstrating His humility, but the day will come when Jesus will return to this earth riding a white horse as the conqueror!

Jesus is the faithful and true King. Faithful means that He can be trusted and relied upon. He said that He will conquer, judge, and condemn all the ungodly and evil of this world, and He will be faithful to do it. True means the absolute truth as opposed to the lies and deceptions in our world today. The conquest and judgment of Jesus will be true.

Jesus will judge and make war upon the earth in righteousness. His righteousness will be the criteria, the law by which all shall be judged. Your comparison is not with other people. Your comparison is with Jesus! He's the standard. Any person who does not measure up to the righteousness of Jesus Christ will be conquered, judged, and condemned exactly where he or she comes up short. Our only hope is to place our faith in Jesus!

Jesus is the consuming King. His eyes will be like fire symbolizing piercing, penetrating power. He sees everywhere, even in the dark places and behind closed doors. His eyes search the innermost recesses of the heart. Many people

use the phrase “the Lord knows my heart” as an excuse. But He does know your heart! He knows all. He is omniscient, and He is able to conquer all those who reject Him and do evil.

Jesus will be wearing many crowns, that is, the royal crowns of rule and authority over many kingdoms. He is coming to conquer all the kingdoms of the earth. He will have a name written somewhere that only He knows. But one name that we know He has is the Word of God. And with that name, He will slaughter His enemies. His robe will be sprinkled with blood. This is not His blood. He already shed His own redemptive blood on the cross. No, this is the blood of His enemies.

Isaiah 63:2–4 (ESV): Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

Jesus is going to defeat all the ungodly and evil of this earth. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God!

When the king returns, He will bring an army with Him. This army will include all believers down through the centuries and the multitude of angels. He will have a weapon; a sharp sword will proceed out of His mouth. This symbolizes that His weapon will be the power of the Word. The Word of God is the sword of God. He will smite and rule the nations of the earth with a rod of iron. He will conquer and subject them all and take His rightful place as the Sovereign Lord over the earth.

In the second vision, John sees the enemies of the Lamb come together to fight against Him at Armageddon (first mentioned in chapter 16). It's a battle they cannot win. Previously, we read about the marriage supper of the Lamb. But this is the great supper of God. This is the supper you don't want to attend. The invitation goes to the birds so they can eat the flesh of the wicked who arrogantly thought they could prevail against Jesus.

The victory of Jesus will bring the defeat of the beast and the false prophet. This is the third vision. They were thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. The rest are killed by the sword of God's word, and the birds get fat on their flesh.

Make no mistake about it: the King will return! He's not a weak or impotent King. On His robe and thigh is written the title that indicates total sovereignty: King of kings and Lord of lords.

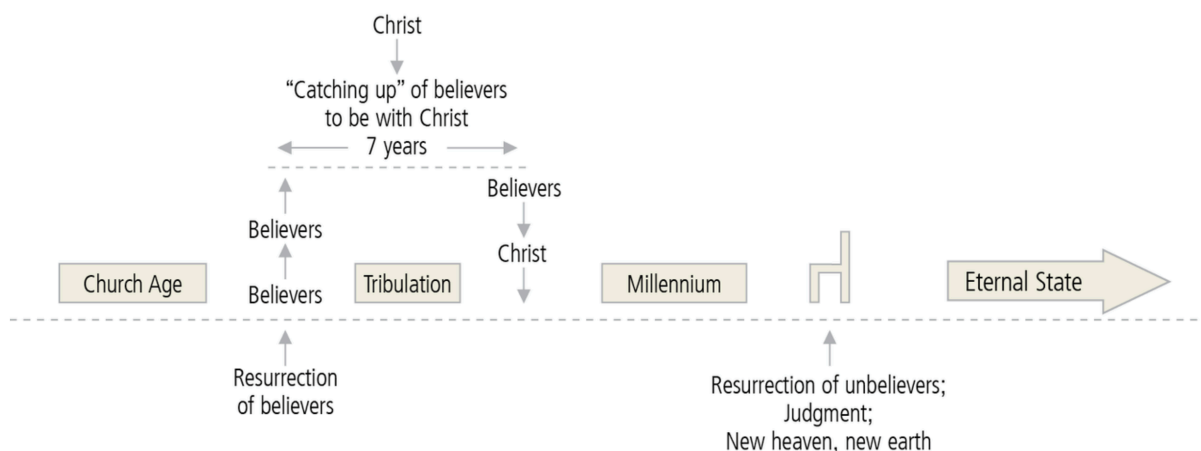
The dragon, Satan, that ancient serpent, will be bound for a thousand years so that he might not deceive the nations any longer. This is the fourth vision. After a thousand years, he'll be released for a little bit.

Now, there are three major views when it comes to the thousand years known as the millennium. The graphics in this section are taken from the ESV Study Bible.

There's Premillennialism. This view says that Jesus will come before the millennium and rule for a literal thousand years, followed by the final judgment. There are some nuisances to this view such as classical or pretribulational premillennialism.

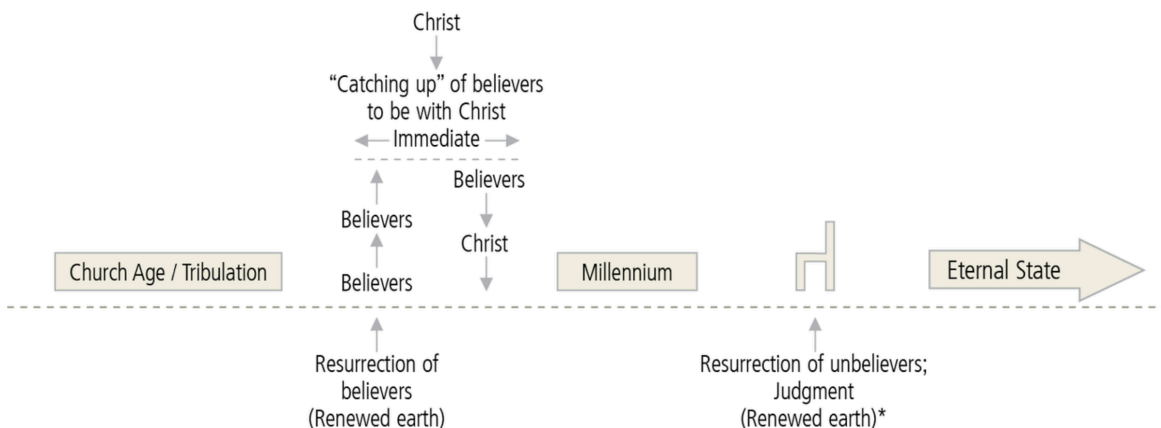
Pretribulational Premillennialism

(Christ comes before the millennium and *before* the tribulation)



Classical Premillennialism

(Christ comes before the millennium but *after* the tribulation; the chair, in this and following illustrations, represents the judgment seat of Christ)

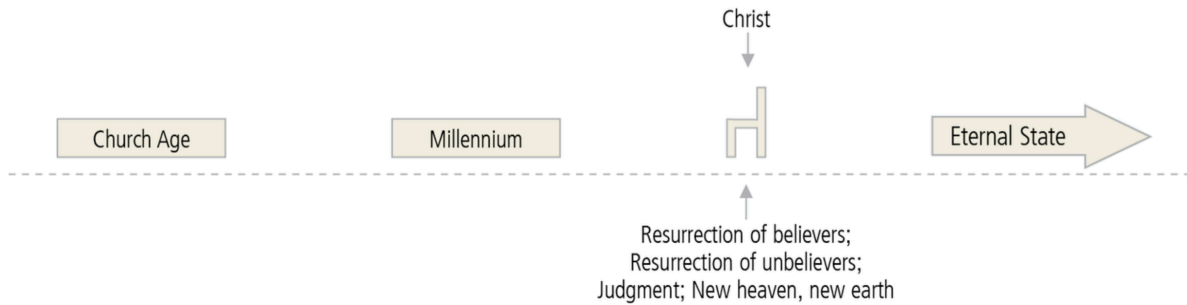


*Classical Premillennialists differ over whether the renewed earth will begin in the millennium or the eternal state.

There's Postmillennialism. This view says that the church will usher in a literal thousand-year period of peace on earth. Jesus' second coming will not occur until after the thousand years for the final judgment.

Postmillennialism

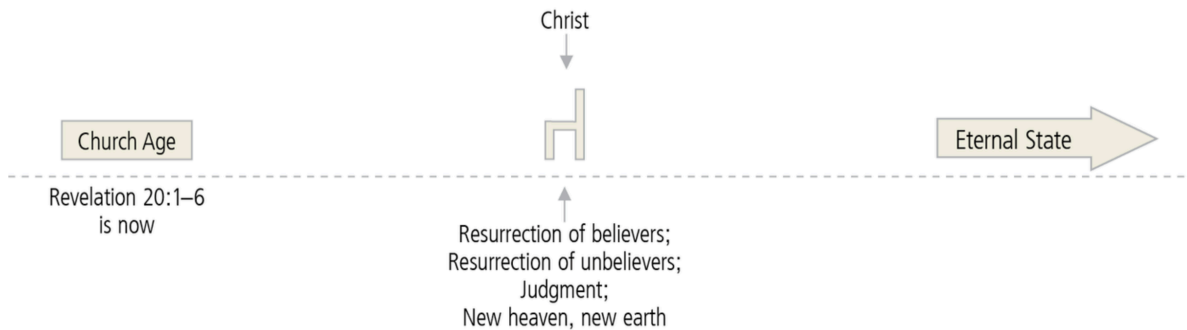
(Christ comes after the millennium)



Finally, there's Amillennialism. This view understands the thousand years to be symbolic of the time between Jesus' ascension and His return. When Jesus returns, final judgment happens, and the eternal state begins.

Amillennialism

(No future millennium)



Whichever view you hold should not divide us as believers. We should all acknowledge and agree that Jesus will return, defeat Satan and all His enemies, and reign forever!

But the idealist would take the amillennium view, which says the millennium is the reign of Christ from heaven in the hearts of believers and His church. This is another way of referring to the current church age.

With this view, Satan is already bound. When was Satan bound? He was bound at the first coming of Jesus. When you read the OT, have you ever wondered why the scope of God's kingdom never expanded beyond Israel? Because Satan was deceiving the nations! But when Jesus came to the earth, He bound Satan so that He and the apostles could cast out demons.

Mark 3:26–27 (ESV): And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Jesus tied up the strongman, Satan, so that He could plunder believers from his power. The binding of Satan does not mean he is not going around devouring people. What is bound is Satan's capacity to deceive nations, not individuals. The binding of Satan means that he cannot stop the spread of the gospel. After the cross, the gospel of Jesus has spread across the globe, with millions of people from every tribe, language, and nation being added to the kingdom of God.

The saints (those who trusted in Jesus Christ) will be resurrected first. This is the fifth vision. Blessed are those who share in the first resurrection. Because sin is still present, we will all physically die, but we will not experience the agony of the eternal death called the second death. If you are not in Christ, you are facing the second death that is eternal!

After a thousand years, Satan is released from his bondage to go and deceive the nations. Gog and Magog are names from ancient Israel's history. They symbolize all who have opposed God and His people. Satan deceives the nations, and they gather to battle the “camp of the saints” and the “beloved city”. These terms symbolize God's people, the church.

But fire comes down from heaven to consume them. This is the final defeat of Satan as he is thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet. In hell, they will be tormented day and night forever and ever!

In the sixth vision, John sees the great white throne where the final judgment of the living and the dead will take place. The second resurrection is where the

wicked are brought back from the dead, the sea, and even Hades. When believers die, their souls go to heaven to be with the Lord until the time of the first resurrection. When unbeliever die, their souls go to Hades, a place of torment until the time of the second resurrection.

Two books are opened. The first book is like a book of history where all the deeds of people are recorded. With this book, Jesus can rightly judge people by what they have done. If this were the only book, we'd all be in trouble!

But the second book is the Book of Life, also known as the Lamb's Book of Life. This book contains the names of everyone saved by the Lamb. Everyone whose name was not written in this book is thrown into the lake of fire.

Even death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. So Hades is not really hell. Hades has only a limited existence. The lake of fire is ultimately hell. Death and Hades are part of this present creation and will not be a part of the new creation, so that's why they are thrown into hell! This is the second death.

How can you know if your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life? If you are currently trusting in what Jesus did on the cross to forgive your sins, then your name is in the book! If you are confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then your name is in the book!

Jesus will return. He will defeat Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and every wicked person and throw them into the lake of fire. Jesus will reign for a millennium and forevermore.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the differences between Jesus' first and second comings. Why did He not come in majesty and power the first time?
2. What does the sharp sword coming out of Jesus' mouth symbolize?
3. What's the difference between the marriage supper of the Lamb and the great supper of God?
4. Which view of the Millennium do you hold? Why do you hold this view?
5. In the Idealist view, what does it mean that Satan is bound?
6. What is the second death?
7. Describe the two books opened at the final judgment. What happens to those whose names are not written in the Book of Life?
8. Is it just for God to punish someone (even Satan) for eternity? Why?

Heaven on Earth (Rev. 21:1-8)

What comes to mind when you think about eternity? Is the image in your mind that we'll be sitting on a cloud (in a diaper) playing a harp? Do you believe eternity will be bland and boring, with nothing to do but float around? Many people think that we'll spend eternity as immaterial spirits in heaven. But that's the intermediate state where our souls reside with the Lord until we are reunited with our resurrected bodies. The eternal state for believers is a bodily existence on the earth. But not this current version of the earth. Trust me, eternity will NOT be boring!

John sees the seventh and final vision: the new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. I don't believe this means that there will not be seas on the new earth. Since the sea symbolizes chaos, this statement tells us that there will be no chaos or disorder on the new earth!

Heaven comes down to the earth in the form of the holy city, the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem comes prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Jerusalem is both the city and the people. Think of it the same way as when we talk about the church. The church is the place where we come to worship ("I'm going out to the church"), but the church is also us ("we are the church"). New Jerusalem is the redeemed people of God coming down from heaven to spend eternity on the new earth. New Jerusalem is also the place where God will dwell with His people.

God has always wanted to dwell with His people. The Greek word for "dwell" can also be translated as "tabernacle". God wants to tabernacle with His people. When God created the earth, He placed the first human beings, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. God would "walk" (speaking in human terms) among them in Eden. Eden was the garden tabernacle where heaven intersected with earth. But man rebelled against God, and sin entered into the world. God lovingly kicked man out of Eden.

But God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle where God would come to dwell among His people in the Most Holy Place, but only the High Priest could enter once a year. The Tabernacle in the wilderness eventually became a temple. But the Holiest of Holies remained the place where heaven intersected with earth.

But eventually, heaven came to earth in the form of a man. Jesus took on a fleshly tabernacle so He could dwell among humanity!

John 1:14 (ESV): And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the eternal state, God will tabernacle with the redeemed for all eternity! I don't exactly know what we will be doing on the new earth, but the most important aspect is not what we will be doing but who we will be with! Many of us may be looking forward to seeing our believing loved ones who preceded us in death, but seeing them will be nothing compared to seeing God! We will see Jesus face-to-face! God will dwell with us, and we will be His people, and He will be our God! That's an eternal relationship that has already begun when you placed your faith in Jesus Christ!

The CSB says, “they will be his peoples”. Peoples should be plural because it's a reminder that heaven on earth will be diverse with peoples from every nation, tribe, and language. There will be no segregation in the new Jerusalem!! The promise of Matthew 5:8 is now fulfilled.

Matthew 5:8 (ESV): “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

As beautiful as the earth is now, we are constantly reminded that we live in a fallen world cursed by God because of our sin.

Life is hard. You and I face so many hardships, griefs, disappointments, persecution, heartaches, sickness, and bereavement. But heaven on earth will be a place where there will be no more hardships, no more sickness, and no more death. All of our tears will be wiped away. Everything that causes us to cry in pain and sorrow will be gone! Mourning, crying, pain, and death are all products of sin. These are current things that we have to deal with, but one day these CURRENT things will be FORMER things!

2 Corinthians 5:1–5 (ESV): For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

All of the pain and suffering that we go through in this life is NOTHING compared to the awesome glory that awaits believers in heaven!

Romans 8:18–23 (ESV): For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

God promises to make all things new. He who sits on the throne declares, “Behold, I am making all things new”. God will restore what was lost in the fall. If God said it, it will be done, for His words are trustworthy and true. God declares, “It is done”. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He sees and determines the end from the beginning.

Death will finally be destroyed. Death is the last enemy we must all face. Through Jesus, we already have the victory. In eternity, death has been cast into the lake of fire and is no more.

Heaven on earth is where the children of God live with no fear of the second death. Those who conquer have this heritage of being adopted as sons of God and dwelling with Him forever. Those who conquer are those who have endured in their faith. Believers are secure and have no fear of the second death.

The second death is the lake of fire that burns with fire and sulfur. It is an eternal death. Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul and the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the person from the loving presence of God. Whereas the redeemed will dwell with God as a Father in the new heaven and new earth, the unredeemed will dwell in the lake of fire to experience God as a wrathful Judge.

This is the portion given to the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators, and liars! This is an interesting list. On the surface, it seems like being cowardly doesn't belong on this list.

But the cowardly are those who professed faith in Jesus, but when threats, suffering, and persecution came from the beast, they abandoned Christ. They are so afraid of temporary pain that they will miss eternal bliss!

Let's be honest; we can all identify ourselves on this list. Everyone who does these things is fit for the lake of fire and unfit for the kingdom of God!

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (ESV): Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The Good News is that only by the death of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead will you and I be redeemed from the lake of fire! Jesus died for every sin listed! He paid the penalty with His death and secured our redemption with His resurrection. Jesus took thirst on the cross so that our spiritual thirst would be satisfied.

John 19:28–30 (ESV): After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

All who come to Jesus, He will satisfy with Himself, who is the living water without payment. You cannot pay for it. You cannot earn it. Eternal life is a free gift given to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus redeems sinners so that they will be ready for heaven on earth! The redeemed will spend eternity with God on the new heaven and new earth.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your image of heaven? The new heaven and new earth?
2. What is significant about there being “no sea” in the new heaven and the new earth?
3. How is the new Jerusalem both the city and the redeemed people?
4. Explain the different ways that God has “tabernacled” with His people.
5. List some of the former things that will pass away with the new heaven and new earth.
6. What is the heritage of those who conquer?
7. List those whose portion will be in the lake of fire. Why is the cowardly included?
8. What does it mean that God will satisfy the thirsty with springs of water without payment?

The City of God (Rev. 21:9-22:5)

When the Apostle John saw the vision of Babylon as the prostitute, he was taken to a wilderness.

Revelation 17:3 (ESV): And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

But now the angel takes him to a high mountain to see the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

New Jerusalem is the perfect city. It's the perfect city, for it contains the glory of God. The city is perfect because Jesus will be there! It will be a radiant city like rare jewels and clear as crystal.

The city will have high walls. Walls are symbols of security. When Nehemiah returned to a desolate Jerusalem, he first rebuilt the walls to secure the city that would be restored. The walls of New Jerusalem are high to indicate that everyone inside the city is safe and secure. What is it that makes you feel anxious and fearful? Every believer who has been persecuted, oppressed, talked about, slandered, ridiculed, and even killed will be eternally secure within these walls!

Yet twelve gates provide access for God's people. The wall has twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles. This refers to the church being built upon the apostles and the prophets.

Ephesians 2:19–20 (ESV): So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The angel measures the city, and it's massive. The city's length, width, and height is 12,000 stadia, which is about 1,400 miles. The length of the city is 1,400 miles, the height is 1,400 miles, and the width is 1,400 miles! Remember that twelve is symbolic of the completeness of God's people. Twelve prophets and twelve apostles represent all the Old Testament and New Testament saints. So if you take twelve times 1,000, you get completeness times many! The city is so massive because it will contain all of God's redeemed people (a multitude that no one could number).

Revelation 7:9–10 (ESV): After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

In Exodus, the priest wore a breastplate that had jewels embedded in it to represent the tribes of Israel. In this way, the priest would take the tribes with him into the presence of God in the temple. But these same jewels are listed here, and they are embedded into the very city. This means we won't have to be brought into the presence of God by a priest; we'll already be there like permanent fixtures in the city of God! We will be there because Jesus is our High Priest!

Just as Solomon's Temple was coated in gold, God's perfect city will be paved with gold. No more potholes and endless road construction; these streets will be paved with gold!

But for all the similarities to the temple, there's no temple in this city. That's because the city itself is the temple. New Jerusalem is the temple city. The temple was the place where God's people could meet with God. The Most Holy Place, which was in the inner part of the temple, was where the High Priest would enter into the presence of God. Check out the dimensions...

1 Kings 6:20 (ESV): The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid an altar of cedar.

The Most Holy Place is a cube (20 cubits long, wide, and high). Do you remember the dimensions of New Jerusalem? It's 12,000 stadia long, wide, and high. The length, width, and height are equal. It's a cube. In other words, the cube-shape of New Jerusalem is symbolic of the Most Holy Place. This means that the entire city is the Most Holy Place where ALL of God's people, not just the High Priest, get to meet with God!!

Just as God's glory filled the earthy temple, His glory will fill the city such that there will be no need to get light from the sun or moon. The nations of God's people will be able to walk by God's light. Jesus is the light of the world. Those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness. That's why there's no night in New Jerusalem.

The gates will never shut, yet nothing unclean will ever enter the temple city. Just as the priests and the High Priest needed to be ceremonially clean to enter the

presence of God in the earthly temple, only those who are clean can enter the temple city.

The problem is that you and I are unclean. We are stained with sin. We sin by thoughts and deeds. Because of our sin, we would not be able to enter through the gates of the city of God. But God provided a solution to this problem! Jesus came to make the unclean clean. Jesus did this by shedding His blood for us. Our sins have separated us from God, but Jesus took our sins upon Himself and paid the penalty for us. The penalty was death. He died the death that we should have died. But then Jesus rose from the dead, proving that He is God and stronger than sin, death, and Satan.

Jesus cleanses what we cannot. Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem so that we can live inside the New Jerusalem!

We're not going back to the Garden of Eden (that's a half-truth), but we're going forward to a restored Eden in Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is the garden city. The imagery of the river of the water of life flowing from God's throne and the Tree of Life is drawn from Genesis and Ezekiel.

Genesis 2:10 (ESV): A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

Ezekiel 47:1 (ESV): Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

In the garden city, a life-giving river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. The Tree of Life is there, yielding fruit and producing leaves for the healing of the nations. Whereas Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden to never partake of the Tree of Life, God's people will be able to enjoy the Tree of Life in eternity. The fruit and leaves are symbolic of the fact that there will be no sickness, death, or sorrow in the city of God. God will nourish and care for us for all eternity.

God promised that nothing accursed would be there. God will be there, and we, His servants, will worship Him. Verse 3 (chapter 22) in the ESV says, "His servants will worship Him", but the NIV says, "His servants will serve Him". The Greek word can be translated to "worship" or "serve". In other words, our worship will include our service, and our service will be our worship. So, if you have the misconception that we'll spend eternity in an endless worship service, then you have narrowly defined worship to only mean singing. From this, I believe we will be serving and working in eternity. I bet some of you are thinking, "But I don't like

working now”. This work won't be like work is now. Remember, work now is difficult because of the curse of the fall. But nothing accursed will be in the city of God. Work is NOT a product of the fall because God gave Adam work prior to the fall. So, we will spend eternity worshipping God by singing, working, and serving.

Isaiah 65:17-18, 21-23 (ESV): “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.

Most importantly, in this garden city, we will see God's face and bear His name.

So here's the comparison of the two cities of Revelation (the following is drawn from Revelation For You by Tim Chester):

Babylon is an adulterous prostitute. New Jerusalem is the pure bride of Christ. Babylon gets its grandeur from exploitation. New Jerusalem gets its grandeur from God's glory.

Babylon seduces and corrupts the nations. New Jerusalem gives light to the nations.

Babylon is full of filth and immorality. New Jerusalem contains nothing unclean.

Babylon provides a cup full of abominations and impurities to get drunk from. New Jerusalem offers the water of life to satisfy. Babylon will fall. New Jerusalem will endure forever.

So, which city do you belong to? Are you a citizen of Babylon? Or will you be a citizen of the city of God, New Jerusalem?

New Jerusalem is the glorious city of God where the inhabitants will only be those listed in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways will New Jerusalem be the perfect city?
2. What do the high walls of the city symbolize?

3. Why is there no temple in New Jerusalem?
4. What are the parallels between the Most Holy Place in the Old Testament and the New Jerusalem? What do these parallels tell us about this city?
5. In what ways does this city look like the Garden of Eden? How is it different?
6. If nothing unclean can enter this city, how can sinful humanity gain entrance?
7. List some of the differences between Babylon and New Jerusalem.
8. Why is seeing the face of God the greatest blessing of all in the new creation?

Jesus is Coming Soon (Rev. 22:6-21)

As we get to the epilogue of the book of Revelation, the angel who was talking to John tells him that these words are trustworthy and true. These words refer to the entire revelation of Jesus that has been given. The visions that John has received are not from some fever dream or his imagination running wild. No, it was God who sent His angels to show His servants what must soon take place. John wrote this revelation down so that we, God's servants, during the 21st Century can know why things are the way they are and what is to come.

Now, Jesus talks and says, “Behold, I am coming soon”. When Jesus says that He is coming soon, we know that it's true. So what should we do in response to this fact?

Jesus said that the one who keeps the words of this book's prophecy is blessed. What does it mean to keep the words of the prophecy? The central issue is worship. Once again, John falls down to worship at the feet of an angel who quickly rebukes John. The angel's message to John is the book's message to us: Worship God! We will be able to keep the words of the prophecy when we worship God alone.

When we worship God alone, we will not worship the political power of the first beast. Our allegiance is not to a political party like the Republicans or Democrats. We do not belong to the elephant or the donkey, we are people of the Lamb and the Lion!

When we worship God alone, we will not worship the false religion of the second beast. We must reject every false religion that denies the God of the Bible. We reject the teachings of everyone who denies the triune nature of God, that Jesus is God in the flesh and the virgin birth of Jesus. We must reject every false gospel

that says you must work to be saved or that God is there for you to name it and claim it.

When we worship God alone, we will not fall for the seductions of Babylon. We must not fall for the world's call to live to please our fleshly desires. We must not fall for the seduction that we can live outside of God's design and order.

When we worship God alone, we will not take the mark of the beast. We must not walk in allegiance with this corrupt world under the influence of the dragon, Satan.

When we worship God alone, we will be able to face trials, suffering, and persecution, and endure to the end. When we worship God alone, we will be compelled to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to those near and far.

And we have no excuse for keeping the words of the prophecy because John was told not to seal up these words. The revelation of Jesus Christ is not hidden, but is available to us now!

The time is near. We don't have time to play "church". Every day, we get nearer to the time of Jesus' return or the time of our departure from this life. The reality is that as the events of Revelation play out, people will continue to behave according to their nature. The evildoer will continue to do evil. The filthy will still be filthy. So that means the righteous must still do right. And the holy must still be holy. You can pretend, but your true nature will always reveal who you are. It only takes time and pressure.

But when Jesus comes, He will bring His recompense with Him. He will REPAY everyone according to their deeds. For the believer, it means we will be rewarded for our faithfulness. For the unbeliever, it means being cast into the lake of fire for eternity. So, how does one become a believer? How does one become righteous and holy?

Wash your robes. There's a Tide commercial where a couple has a lot of laundry because they have triplets. They switched to a bargain detergent to save money, but the clothes were not as clean. The tagline is that if you want it clean, it's got to be Tide.

Well, there are so many people trying to be righteous and holy through good deeds, good morals, religious efforts, church attendance and activities, etc. But those are just bargain detergents. If it's got to be clean, it's got to be the blood of Jesus! We are all stained by sin, but at Jesus' first coming, He shed His blood for us. There's no stain of sin too tough for the blood of Jesus!

Jesus died and rose to show that His sacrifice for sins was accepted by God. Those who place their faith in Jesus will be made righteous and holy. This grants them entrance into the Holy City of God, New Jerusalem, and access to the Tree of Life.

Those who reject Jesus will not enter the perfect city. They will be outside the city where the dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and false loving practitioners are. Who are the “dogs”? The Jews often referred to Gentiles as “dogs”, but the context here suggests that the “dogs” are false teachers.

Philippians 3:2 (NLT): Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.

We all have been guilty of being on this list. We may have taught falsely about God, practiced some form of socially acceptable sorcery or witchcraft (like horoscopes, crystals, etc), committed sexual immorality, murdered someone with our thoughts or words, worshipped an idol, and lived a lie. But only by the blood of Jesus did we have our robes washed.

Jesus testifies of Himself that He is the root and the descendant of David. How is that possible? As a human, Jesus was born as one of David's descendants. He is the Son of David. But as God, Jesus existed long before David. Jesus is the source or root of David's existence. Jesus is the bright morning star. He is the light of salvation for all who will trust Him.

Whoever is thirsty, let him come. Thirsty ones are invited to drink the water of life. This living water is free for the taking...by faith. Jesus is the living water!

John 7:37–38 (ESV): On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

As this book closes, there's a warning issued that we must pay attention to. Jesus is coming soon, so heed the warning. The warning is for everyone. We are warned against adding to or taking away from the prophecy of this book. We are warned against tampering with the book of Revelation and, by implication, the entire Bible. This book of Revelation is in the same category as God's revelation in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 4:2 (ESV): You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

There's a nice play on words being used in verses 18-19. You add, God will add. You take away, God will take away. If one adds to the book then God will add to him the plagues described in the book. This is exaggerated language to indicate the severity of God's judgment. If one takes away from this book then God will take away his share in the Tree of Life and the Holy City described in the book. This does not mean a loss of salvation for true believers. But this addresses those who confess to be believers, yet their contempt for God's Word proves they are not.

Here's what Pastor John MacArthur says, "No true believer would ever deliberately tamper with Scripture. Those who know and love God will treat His Word with the utmost respect...That does not, of course, mean that believers will never make errors in judgment or mistakenly interpret Scripture incorrectly or inadequately. The Lord's warning here is addressed to those who engage in deliberate falsification or misinterpretation of Scripture, those whom Paul denounces as peddlers of the Word of God."

We must treat God's Word with the highest respect. Deliberately adding to or subtracting from God's Word reveals the unbelief and arrogance of many. So be careful who you are listening to. Always compare what people are saying about the Word of God with the Word of God.

Jesus is coming back to bring judgment and reward, so trust in Jesus who is the water of life without price. Jesus says, "Surely, I am coming soon". Our response should be, "Amen, come Lord Jesus".

Let us long for Jesus to return to make all things new. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!

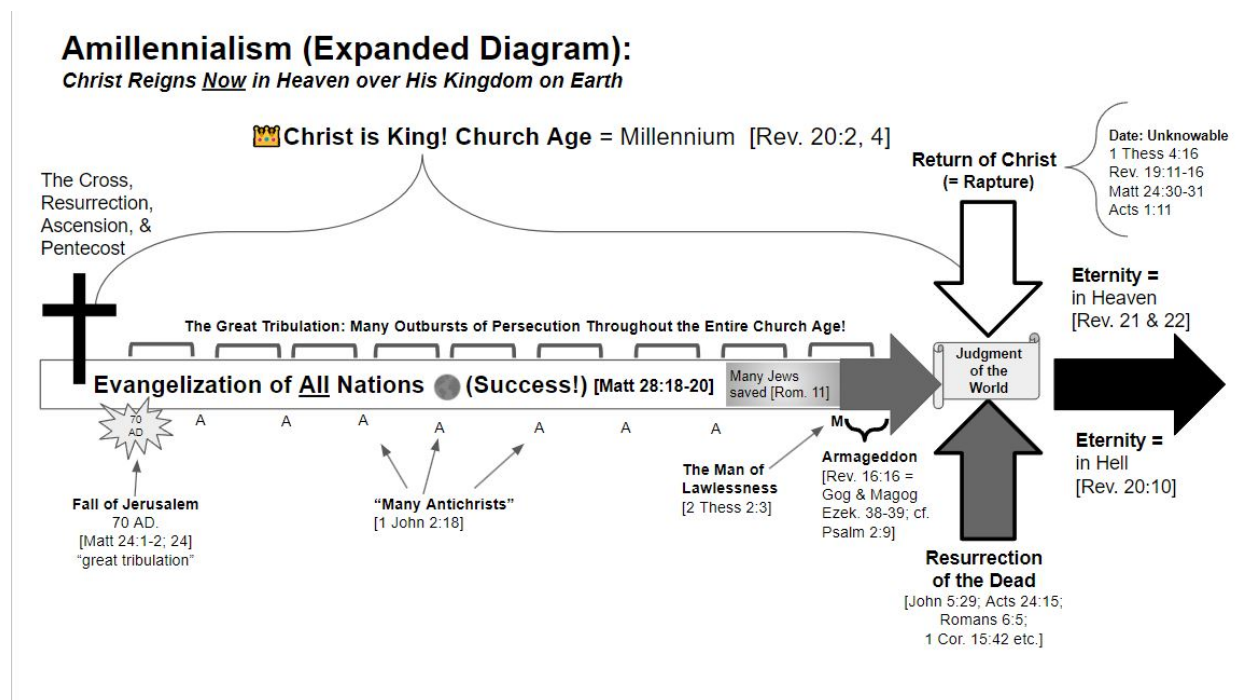
Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. How is worship central to keeping the words of the prophecy?
2. What does it mean that Jesus will bring His recompense with Him?
3. Contrast verse 14 with those who believe all that is necessary to enter heaven is to go to church, pray a simple prayer, or perform a religious ritual.
4. What does it mean to have your robe washed in the blood of Jesus?
5. Who are the "dogs" mentioned in verse 15? Why are they outside of the city?
6. How is Jesus the root and descendant of David?
7. What warning is issued about the prophecy of the book of Revelation?

Revelation Recap

Here's a summary of Revelation from the Idealist view. The following diagram was developed by Matthew Everhard.



Ever since Jesus' first coming and ascension back to heaven, we have been living in the end times.

During Jesus' first advent, He bound Satan's ability to deceive the nations so that the church could go forward with taking the Gospel to the nations.

The one thousand years of the millennium is symbolic of the time between Jesus' first coming and His return. During this time also known as the church age, Jesus is ruling from heaven. Believers who die during this time go to heaven to rule with Him.

During the church age, there will be great tribulation described by the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Many antichrists and false prophets are

seducing people to take the mark of the beast (which is not a physical mark but is symbolic of one's allegiance to the devil and this world).

Eventually, it will culminate with the coming of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. Satan will be released to deceive the nations again and they will gather to fight God and His people at Armageddon.

But Jesus will return, rapture the church, and bring the final judgment. This current world will pass away to be recreated. The resurrection of the dead will take place and the world will be judged. Those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter into New Jerusalem but those who are not will be judged for their sinful deeds and thrown into the lake of fire (which is hell) along with Satan, the two beasts, Hades, and death.

Then, all of God's people will spend eternity dwelling with God on the new heaven and new earth.

That's the book of Revelation!

Symbols

Revelation is written in symbols to not just convey information but to capture our imagination. Here is a list of symbols (definitely not exhaustive):

- Seven = completeness or perfection
- Six = incompleteness or imperfection
- Seven Spirit/Sevenfold Spirit = the ever-present Spirit of God
- Four = completeness, especially geographic completeness
- Two = complementary and interdependent union
- Three = perfect set, completeness, and finality
- Ten = perfection and totality
- Twelve = completeness for God's people
- 1,000 = many
- 144,000 = $12 \times 12 \times 1000$ = completeness \times many = all God's many people
- Horn = strength
- Eyes = sight or wisdom (insight)
- Sea = the forces of chaos
- Living creatures = power or imperial powers

- White robes = God's declaration of the wearer's purity, righteousness, and vindication
- Earthquakes = earth-shattering events
- Rainbow = covenant faithfulness and mercy
- Virginity = faithfulness to God (ready for the marriage of the Lamb)
- Adultery = unfaithfulness to God
- Trumpets = warnings of judgment, victory, or battle
- Time, Times, and Half a Time = "3 1/2 years" = figurative symbol representing a period of suffering for God's people which ends in victory
- The Four Horsemen
 - White horse = external conflict
 - Red horse = internal conflict
 - Black horse = famine (by rampant inflation)
 - Pale horse = widespread death
- The First Beast = Political power (intimidating violence)
- The Second Beast = False Prophet = deceptive heresy and propaganda
- The Prostitute = beguiling affluence
- Two Witnesses = All of God's people (the church)
- The Woman = Mary(?) or the people of God from whose seed the Messiah came
- The Child = Jesus
- The Dragon = Satan or great empires/evil forces
- 666 = manifestation of satanic power
- The Mark of the Beast = symbolic of allegiance to the corrupt system

Study Resources

In addition to the Bible, here's the list of resources that I used to study Revelation which I would recommend:

- ESV Study Bible
- CSB Study Bible
- Revelation For You by Tim Chester
- Exalting Jesus in Revelation by Daniel L. Akin
- Revelation: A Manual of Spiritual Warfare by Max Doner