

A Study of **Revelation**

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THANK YOU

I consider it a privilege to teach the Word of God to spiritually hungry souls. These notes were prepared for a class of intelligent middle school students at Point Pleasant church of Christ, and I appreciate their continual encouragement and desire to delve deeper into the Scriptures. I also wish to offer thanks to their parents for instilling in them a love for God's Word, and to the elders for their love for the Truth and support of the youth.

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REVELATION 1 (INTRODUCTION)

The apostle Peter wrote by inspiration that within Paul's writings there "are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Peter 3:16). No doubt, the same can be said about the visions recorded by John in the book of Revelation. Impossible to understand? No, but certainly difficult, and it is important that we read it diligently so that we do not "twist" what is written.

It is good to study Revelation, but it is daunting. In the course of this study, we will attempt to approach the text with first century glasses, to read and understand the things written as the original recipients would have understood them. As we break down the various signs and symbols and the meanings of each, it is my prayer that we will gain a great understanding of the nature of God and the triumph of His goodness.

Context is extremely important, and a proper handling of the text will help us avoid many of the false doctrines that have arisen from misunderstandings and misapplications.

The date of writing has become a point of contention for some in recent years. There are two prevalent views among sound teachers, but we need to make one thing clear. The date of the book of Revelation is *not* a fellowship issue. Whether one thinks the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or later in the first century around 96 A.D., we can still learn about Christ's victory over evil. I agree with Paul R. Blake, who concluded "that both views of the book support the theme and message John was inspired to deliver."¹

The interpretation of the signs and symbols in the book will be determined by which date one takes in the study of the book. There are many who hold to the later date and believe the book has to do with the Roman persecution faced by Christians late in the first century. However, there is another view that is beginning to gain support, and it is the belief that the book of Revelation was written before 70 A.D., and much of the symbolic language has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem. It is from this early date point of view that we will approach this study.

Read Revelation 1:1-3. The book begins with the identification of the heavenly source, God, and revealer, Jesus Christ. John was the medium through whom Christ revealed this message. It is important to note that the message was "signified" to John, that is, "transmitted in code by signs and symbols."²

Twice in these three verses John indicates the immediacy of the message. In verse 1, he says there are "things which must shortly take place." In verse 3, John states that "the time is near." We will discuss later in this study a refutation of false doctrines based on misunderstandings in Revelation, but here in the first three verses is a quick refutation of those who claim the signs and symbols of the book apply to modern-day events!

Read Revelation 1:4-8. A somewhat standard greeting of grace and peace is offered, with the Godhead as the bringer of both. The Father is He "who is and who was and who is to come." God is eternal, meaning He has always and will always exist; this is true of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son, but in this first instance John refers to the Father.

The Holy Spirit is "the seven Spirits who are before the throne." Numbers play a big part in prophetic language; the number seven often represents completeness or perfection. Isaiah 11:2 also identifies Him in seven ways: "The Spirit of the Lord...The Spirit of wisdom and

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”

Jesus Christ is next identified as a bringer of grace and peace. He is “the faithful witness;” whatever He has said is true. He is the “firstborn of the dead;” Lazarus was raised again, but also died again, as did Dorcas and Eutychus and other such beneficiaries of the miraculous in the first century. Christ, on the other hand, “was raised from the dead never to die again.”³ He is also “the ruler over the kings of the earth.” This is a good reminder, especially during the political season, that God is still over all, regardless of who occupies the Oval Office.

Jesus “loved us” (John 15:13) and “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (1 John 1:7). As this letter is being addressed to Christians, there was no need for John to explain how one comes into contact with Christ’s blood (Romans 6:3). All men have the opportunity to have their sins covered by the blood of Christ, but only those who obey His commands, coming to Him in repentance, confession, and immersion, will actually receive that blessing.

The American Standard Version of 1901 translates verse 6, “and he made us *to* be a kingdom,” rather than “made us kings” as the NKJV reads. When considering passages such as Colossians 1:13, “kingdom” may be a more accurate reading. However, Peter does state that we are “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). We must realize, however, that all must subject to Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

John writes, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.” This does not refer to the second coming, which many suggest. Rather, this is a proclamation of the coming judgment (not the final judgment) upon Jerusalem. Consider how the Lord answered His disciples in Matthew 24. He had just told them that the temple would be destroyed, stating that “not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). They privately asked when that would happen. In Matthew 24:30, He said, “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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.” He was not speaking of His second coming there, and John is not speaking of Christ’s second advent here. In both cases, the “coming with/on the clouds” has reference to the impending judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; omega is the last. This signifies the eternal nature of God the Son. The same description that is given of the Father in verse 4 is repeated here in verse 7 to describe the Son.

Read Revelation 1:9-20. The tradition is that a Roman ruler exiled John on Patmos as punishment for his faith. While it is certainly possible, especially in light of his statement that he was their “companion in the tribulation,” an exile is not conclusively stated here or elsewhere in the inspired Scriptures. It is possible that he was simply there to preach the gospel, or that God led him providentially to Patmos to receive this particular revelation.

John records a remarkable description of the One speaking to him in verses 12 through 17. The seven golden lampstands are identified in verse 20 as the seven churches. In the midst of the seven lampstands was “One like the Son of Man.” Not only did John spend more than three years with the Lord in the flesh, but as one of His inner-circle apostles he witnessed the transfiguration (Matthew 17), and later, with the eleven, Christ’s ascension (Acts 1). Wallace believed the garment to be “a royal garment which was indicative of monarchical dignity,”⁴ while

Ogden asserts, “The girdle symbolizes the High Priesthood of Christ, who was *made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec* (Psm. 110:4; Heb. 6:20-7:3).”⁵ The white color of His head and hair speaks to His purity, while “His eyes like a flame of fire” has reference to His omniscience.

“Feet like refined brass symbolizes the untainted and unalloyed nature of the truth of the message Jesus brings. The refining process represents the trials that shaped Him (Rom. 10:15; 1Peter 1:7; Isa. 1:25). The voice like many waters is symbolic of rhythm and harmony of utterance.”⁶

The seven stars of verse 16 are identified as the seven angels or messengers of the seven churches. Blake suggests that these are “symbolic of the character, attitude, nature, or spirit of each congregation.”⁷ The vision of the “sharp two-edged sword” coming out of Christ’s mouth immediately brings to mind Paul’s description of the Word of God in Hebrews 4:12. The description of “His countenance...like the sun shining in its strength” hearkens back to the transfiguration, in which it is recorded that Jesus’ “face shone like the sun” (Matthew 17:2).

John’s reaction to the Lord’s appearance is understandable: “I fell at His feet as dead.” Overwhelmed by the vision, he fell to his face; prophets of old like Ezekiel and Daniel had similar responses when they received visions from God. Daniel said, “[M]y vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength” (Daniel 10:8).

Review

1. What is meant by “things which must shortly take place” and “the time is near”?
2. What does the word “signified” indicate?
3. To what event did “He is coming with clouds” point? Where else do we see this same phraseology used?
4. In what three ways was John the “brother and companion” to the seven churches?
5. What phrases in this chapter emphasize God’s eternal nature?

REVELATION 2-3 (LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES)

There is a general consistency in the messages to the seven churches: (1) Who the message was from; (2) positive reinforcement; (3) actions or attitudes that required repentance; (4) a promise to those who overcome. There were two congregations that were faithful, and one of which nothing positive could be said. But in each case, the message was from Christ and the promise was offered to the penitent and faithful.

Read Revelation 2:1-7. The Ephesians were commended for their works, their labor, their patience, and for their intolerance of evil, and that they “hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans.” This same congregation was likewise commended by the apostle Paul, who wrote, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord....And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:8,11). Paul warned the elders at Ephesus about “savage wolves” (Acts 20:28-31), and Timothy was “urged” by the apostle to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine” while he was in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

Despite these good qualities, Jesus tells the Ephesians that they “have left your first love.” Ogden suggests, “The Lord demands of each individual that he deny himself (Lk. 9:23), his family (Lk. 14:26), and his possessions (Lk. 14:27, 33), and that he seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33), that in all things Christ might have the preeminence (Col. 1:18). If this is the original love with which we are to serve Him, then any insufficiency in any part is equal to leaving our first love.”⁸ Blake considers the context, writing, “It is not uncommon for Christians in the war against doctrinal error to forget the first principles, or to forget to exhibit a Christ-like spirit when dealing with error.”⁹ Whichever is the case, Christ told them to repent and get back to doing what they should have been doing from the beginning.

Read Revelation 2:8-11. The church at Smyrna received nothing but words of commendation and comfort from the Lord. They were recognized for their works, tribulation, and poverty, and were promised the crown of life for their fidelity to the Lord. The proper translation verse 10 should read, “unto death” (KJV, ASV), rather than the NKJV’s rendering, “until death.” The Christian’s faith should remain even if death is the direct result.

The “ten days” of verse 10 should not be taken literally. Remember that much of the language in Revelation is symbolic. That will be important to keep in mind throughout this study. “This cannot mean a literal ten days, but rather to the ten persecutors, the number of which is historically factual. As there were five fallen imperial rulers before Nero—from Nero to Diocletian there were ten persecuting emperors. This era of persecution reached its crescendo in Diocletian’s *reign of terror*, in which he vowed to obliterate the name Christian from the Roman Empire.”¹⁰

Read Revelation 2:12-17. The church in Pergamos stayed faithful despite persecution; Jesus cites the faith of Antipas, calling him a “faithful martyr.” The Lord says that Pergamos was the location of “Satan’s throne” and “where Satan dwells,” indicating the rampant sin in the area.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is again mentioned, along with the doctrine of Balaam. “They advocated participation in pagan worship, eating things sacrificed to idols, and committing fornication, essential ingredients of all pagan worship. Significantly it is the ‘works,’ the behavior of the Nicolaitans, that is condemned in the Ephesian church; but at Pergamum, the practice of immorality has become an established teaching by some who openly advocated it,

perhaps on the basis that some kind of compromise with paganism was inevitable.”¹¹ Such compromise with unscriptural practices and beliefs was condemned then, and is equally wrong today. It is the “sharp two-edged sword” that will determine right from wrong, not man’s selfish opinions or misguided beliefs.

Read Revelation 2:18-29. The church in Thyatira likewise had some good (“I know your works, love, service faith, and your patience”) and bad (“you allow that woman Jezebel...to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”). Coffman notes a progression in the pervasiveness of these sins among the churches. “It is quite evident, therefore, that in the three churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, the problem was the same, that being the type of wickedness described here; and that the principal thrust of the messages regards the progression of this evil from: (1) the conduct of a few at Ephesus; to (2) the justification of it by a body of teaching at Pergamum; to (3) the leadership of the church, in the person of Jezebel, having been thoroughly corrupted by it.”¹² If we do not stand against false doctrine when it first appears, it will become more and more difficult to remove as it becomes accepted by those within the church.

Even when sin enters the local church, it is important for individual Christians to remain pure in sound doctrine. There were some who remained in Thyatira who did “not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan.” They refused to give in to false doctrine, and as long as they remained faithful, they would be rewarded.

Read Revelation 3:1-6. The church in Sardis had a reputation among the brethren that they were strong and thriving, but Christ, who knows all, said they were dead and still dying. Jesus warned His disciples in the sermon on the mount against doing things publicly for the wrong reasons (Matthew 6:1-6). Our motivation should be for the glory of God and to strengthen His kingdom, not personal recognition from those on this earth. The warning to repent is ever present, but, just as He had found in the other congregations, there were “a few names who have not defiled their garments” who were still considered “worthy.”

Read Revelation 3:7-13. How encouraging for the congregation in Philadelphia, of whom the Lord said nothing negative. They were said to “have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Christ promises to reward them for their perseverance if they hold fast.

Read Revelation 3:14-22. The final congregation to which Revelation was addressed in the church in Laodicea. While the Lord was able to find some good in the other congregations, He could not commend the Laodiceans for anything. It is not as if they had gone down the road of false doctrine, either in compromise or in practice, but neither did they stand against it. Basically, they didn’t care. Jesus says they were “neither cold nor hot,” and it made Him sick.

All hope was not lost for Laodicea, however; they could “buy from Me gold refined in the fire...and white garments...and anoint your eyes with eye salve.” Their condition was such that they needed to trust in the Lord’s rich blessings rather than their own wealth, to be clothed in purity by the washing of His blood, and to open their eyes to their pitiful condition so that they could “be zealous and repent.” The Philadelphians were told that Christ had “set before you an open door;” but in Laodicea, that door had been closed and Christ was on the outside knocking. The choice was left to the Laodiceans whether they would open the door.

Review

1. What false doctrines were being tolerated, taught, and practiced by some of these congregations?
2. Christ's promises are for Christians who _____.
3. To what does the following statement refer: "And you will have tribulation ten days" (Revelation 2:10)?
4. What does God require of all men, everywhere, including Christians (Acts 17:30)?
5. Why is apathy such a dangerous attitude for a Christian?
6. If Christ wrote letters to local congregations today, would you be counted among those who are worthy or those who need to repent?
7. Explain how the denominational image of Christ knocking at the door of the sinner's heart is misguided, taking into consideration Revelation 3:20?

REVELATION 4-5 (THE THRONE SCENE)

Read Revelation 4:1-3. The One on the throne was (and is still today) God. “The jasper stone (clear, transparent diamond) and sardius stone (flesh-red, opaque precious stone) represent attributes of the one who sits on the throne, namely righteousness and mercy.”¹³ Keep in mind the highly symbolic nature of Revelation; this is not a literal description of God and the throne scene.

The rainbow that surrounds the throne brings to remembrance the covenant God made with man following the flood (Genesis 9:12-17). “The colors may reflect the characteristics of God, such as holiness, righteousness, justice, and mercy, or they may simply signify His splendor and majesty.”¹⁴

Read Revelation 4:4-5. The twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Christian dispensation. “(T)he Old and New were combined in the symbol represented in the chiefs: the patriarchs of the Old, and the apostles of the New.”¹⁵ The “lightnings, thunderings, and voices” are reminiscent of the “thunderings and lightnings” of Exodus 19:16, signifying Jehovah’s omnipotent nature.

Read Revelation 4:6-8. Often in apocalyptic language, a sea represents a society. Here, the society that is before the throne of God is said to be “glass, like crystal,” which “would indicate the tranquility and peacefulness of souls in the service of God, and how his eyes can penetrate to the very bottom.”¹⁶

The four living creatures that also surrounded the throne are described as winged creatures with eyes in front and in back. Some versions render “living creatures” as “beasts,” but these should not be confused with the persecuting forces later in Revelation. “The lion was a symbol of ferocious strength; the calf (ox) demonstrated great endurance under burden; the man showed intelligence, reason, and wisdom; the eagle symbolized penetrating vision and swiftly executed judgment.”¹⁷

While these living creatures are described in detail, the mention of six wings along with the doxology of verse 8 is similar to the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-3. There, two of the seraphim’s wings were said to cover the face and two to cover the feet, signifying reverence and humility, and the final two were used to fly.

Read Revelation 4:9-11. The casting of the crowns of the twenty-four elders shows humility and a knowledge that any power they could lay claim to came from the One before whose throne they now fall.

Coffman chides the scholars who claim John borrowed the language of verse 11 from the emperor worship of the first century, writing, “Our book says that John heard the heavenly chorus ‘saying’ this; are we to suppose that they copied it from Domitian? It is evident that Domitian borrowed this from the Christians, not the other way around.”¹⁸

Read Revelation 5:1-5. God held a scroll in His right hand, written on both sides, sealed with seven seals. The seals restricted unauthorized people from opening it to reveal its contents. The fact that no created being was worthy to open the scroll caused John great consternation, but he was comforted by one of the elders. There was One who was worthy: “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.” There is obvious reference to the blessing Jacob gave to Judah (Genesis 49:8-10) and the royal relation to David. “The Root of David is a paradox: though

Christ sprang from David, He is also the Lord of David and the foundation of the royal lineage of God's people on all dispensations (Isa. 11:1,10; Rom. 15:12; Zech. 3:8, 6:12)."¹⁹

Read Revelation 5:6-7. When John looked, he did not see a Lion, but a Lamb in the midst of the throne. The Lamb appeared "as though it had been slain," making it a clear representation of the Messiah. Many times in the Scriptures, Christ was depicted as the sacrificial Lamb without blemish (Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-21; etc.). "Horns are the power and might of sheep....The seven horns of the Lamb of God symbolize His full and complete authority."²⁰

As we noted in the first chapter, the seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit. Here, the seven Spirits are "sent out into all the earth." Is this not what the Lord promised His apostles in John 14-16? He promised "another Helper," who He identified as "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:13).

"Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." No one tried to prevent Him; He was the One who was worthy to break the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll.

Read Revelation 5:8-10. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders recognized the worthiness of Christ to accomplish this task; they also worshiped Him, showing to all that He was indeed Deity.

The harps are symbolic of joy and praise. Many turn to Revelation to justify the use of mechanical instruments in the worship of the church, but such disregards the symbolic nature of the language. This does not give us any more authority to use literal instruments in praise than it gives us the authority to use literal incense in prayers.

Read Revelation 5:11-14. Just as the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worshiped Christ, "many angels" (verse 11) and "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them" (verse 13), worshiped the Lamb. Verse 12 declares, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain / To receive power and riches and wisdom, / And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" It is no accident that He is declared worthy to receive seven things, as seven is the symbolic number of completeness.

Review

1. What was the covenant God made with man which is represented by the rainbow?
2. What do the twenty-four elders represent?
3. What are the four living creatures, and what do they symbolize?
4. Who was worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals? In what three ways is He depicted?

REVELATION 6-7 (THE FIRST SIX OF THE SEVEN SEALS)

Read Revelation 6:1-2. When the Lord opened the first seal, John heard one of the four living creatures speak with a voice like thunder. “Thunder is the sign of an approaching storm....They also symbolize every demonstration of God’s power poured out in His wrath repeatedly upon His enemies. Since the Apocalypse reveals the events which lead up to and include the destruction of Jerusalem, and since this book is understood to be the demonstration of God’s wrath upon rebellious Israel (cf. 6:16-17), the thunderous voice of the living being pictures the severity of the coming storm.”²¹

In the following verses, John introduces us to what are commonly called “the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.” Horses were seen as noble creatures, “warriors, reserved for the arsenals of war, used by kings, either mounted or harnessed to chariots.”²²

John looked and saw a white horse; white often represents purity, but can also signify victory. In this particular instance, with additional war imagery, victory seems the more reasonable symbol. The bow was a weapon used in a long battle. “A battle with swords could only last as long as the wielder had strength. A battle fought with arrows usually ended up being a lengthy siege. Christ’s war against evil will last until the end of time.”²³

Read Revelation 6:3-4. The red horse represents the bloodshed to come against the persecutors of the children of God. The rider of the red horse “had *power*, and political authority, to *take peace from the earth*.”²⁴ Blake recalls another prophetic red horse from Zechariah 1:8-11, stating it “was a symbol of the nations around Jerusalem currently at peace with them, but who would soon arise against her at the command of God.”²⁵

Read Revelation 6:5-6. The black horse was a symbol of distress; famine was coming. The scales were used to measure food, which was scarce, accurately so that nothing was wasted and everything was accounted for. While food was affected by the coming distress, the voice from the midst of the four living creatures commanded the black horseman to “not harm the oil and the wine,” which could be used medicinally. “Though physical gratification through abundance was not possible the Jews still had available spiritual healing through the Gospel of Christ if they would accept it.”²⁶

Read Revelation 6:7-8. The pale horse represents death—not death by martyrdom, but “by the destructive forces of the sword (war); of hunger (famine); of death (pestilence or disease); and of wild beasts (devoured or ravished).”²⁷ These four categories of death did not foretell of separate events throughout history, but all pointed to the fall of Jerusalem. The severity of the famine caused some to resort to cannibalism. Josephus writes of a woman who “slew her son; and then roasted him, and ate the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed.”²⁸

Read Revelation 6:9-11. The fifth seal reveals the altar of souls, the martyrs who died for the cause of Christ. These martyrs were crying out for judgment upon their oppressors, but they were implored to be patient as God’s time was not yet come. Others would join them, and when that time was completed, the judgment upon Jerusalem would occur.

Read Revelation 6:12-17. “In Old Testament prophecies, the following symbols find these interpretations: earthquakes represent unrest between nations, the sun is a great political leader, the moon is a great religious leader, stars are lesser officials, mountains represent people

who worship God, islands represent pagan Gentile nations, the sky would be the existing government over all. In summary, there would be a complete and utter collapse of Judean society in and around Jerusalem.”²⁹

The sixth seal is God’s response to the plea of the martyrs. Isaiah used similar imagery of the earthquake against Israel (Isaiah 29:6) in his prophecy against Babylon (Isaiah 13:10); Jesus also utilized these symbols in his denouncement against the city of God (Matthew 24:7,29).

Celestial bodies represent leaders throughout the Scriptures; here, “the stars of heaven” stand for Jewish leaders, and their fall shows that they will be toppled from their position of power. They sought protection from the mountains and rocks in very similar language to that of Hosea 10:8; Jesus quotes from Hosea in reference to Jerusalem’s destruction in Luke 23. “Since the quotation in 6:16 and Luke 23:30 are from the same prophecy of Hosea 10:8, it is the Lord’s own application of its fulfillment in those events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, and it is therefore solid evidence which cannot be controverted that the seals of Revelation are not now future.”³⁰

The last verse of chapter 6 alludes back to Nahum 1:5-6. While many want “the great day of His wrath” to point to the final judgment, the context demands the placement of such in the first century judgment against Jerusalem.

Read Revelation 7:1-3. A short interlude appears between the sixth and seventh seals. The four angels were agents of destruction sent against Jerusalem, initially restrained until God’s people were identified. While the children of God would be spared from the judgment upon Jerusalem, this did not prevent tribulation in their lives. The child of God should expect some suffering if he lives according to the will of God (2 Timothy 3:12).

Read Revelation 7:4-8. This passage is abused and misused by false religions to promote some idea of a limit of those who will be saved. The one hundred forty-four thousand is not intended to be a literal number; neither are those in that number from the literal Jewish tribes. This number represents a great number, and the use of 12 and 1000 indicate fullness and completeness. “The spiritual, figurative, use of the twelve tribes elsewhere in the New Testament designated the whole church, the spiritual Israel, as in the Old Testament they represented the whole of fleshly Israel.”³¹

Read Revelation 7:9-17. John sees another vision of praise, performed by the faithful “of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.” These people are identified by one of the elders as “the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Here again, the white of the robes could refer to the purity or the victory received. They had suffered on this earth, but now hunger, thirst, and affliction from the elements were no more. Any tears that they might shed, “God will wipe away.”

Review

1. Who opened each of the first six seals?
2. What did each color of the horsemen represent?

3. When would God execute His judgment against His people's oppressors?
4. What do the symbols of 6:12-13 represent?
5. How many people in the tribes of Israel are sealed? Is this a literal number?
6. What are the two possible meanings of the white robes at the end of chapter 7?

REVELATION 8-11 (THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE SEVEN TRUMPETS)

Read Revelation 8:1-6. The silence of Revelation 8:1 brings to mind the phrase, “calm before the storm.” Ogden called it “solemn reflection”³², and Wallace noted that it was “a waiting awe, after the voices of ‘all the angels’ in chapter 7 had ceased.”³³ The number seven, once again, is featured as a sign of completeness or perfection. “Seven trumpets indicate a great announcement that will be heard everywhere is about to be made.”³⁴

What was this great announcement? “The trumpets sounded the beginning of the end of Jerusalem, of the Jewish temple, of Judaism and of all that constituted the Jewish state. It signaled the end of the world of Matthew 24:3, and 24:14—not the inhabited world, but the Jewish world.”³⁵

After the prayers of the saints came before God, the angel cast fire from the altar to the earth—the home of the persecuting Jewish powers—causing “noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”

Read Revelation 8:7. The first four trumpets each strike a different area: the earth (8:7), the sea (8:8-9), the rivers (8:10-11), and the sun (8:12-13). The earth, as just noted, represents the home of the persecuting powers. “The meaning of a *third part* was based on the three woes, one part for each woe of devastation.”³⁶

Read Revelation 8:8-9. Mountains were often used in prophetic language to symbolize government. While the earth of 8:7 represented the Jewish powers, the sea in these verses signified the Roman powers.

Read Revelation 8:10-11. The great star falling from heaven represents the downfall of power; here that power is Jerusalem’s ruling elite. Wormwood, a bitter plant, shows “the bitter effects accompanying the downfall of the powers here symbolized, which attended the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.”³⁷

Read Revelation 8:12-13. “The blackout of the sun, the moon, and the stars, the darkness of the day and even the denseness of the night are the signs of the stark distress and pall of gloom descriptive of the fourth stroke of the trumpets, in the darkness that settled over the Jewish state and nation.”³⁸ The three woes are directed toward the inhabitants of the earth, but we must not forget the symbolic nature of the book and the meaning of “the earth” in prophetic nature—in this case, it refers to the home of the Jewish powers.

Read Revelation 9:1-12. This chapter “describes the siege (vs. 1-12) and the fall of Jerusalem by sword (vs. 13-21).”³⁹ The imagery of a star falling from heaven is once again utilized, this time representing the power of Satan. Heaven is not used here as the eternal abode of God and His elect, but as the existing ruling government. Similar language is used by Christ in Luke 10:18 and by Isaiah in Isaiah 14:12.

The locusts are noteworthy for their destruction; consider their role in the plagues upon Egypt in Exodus. Here they represent the Roman army that was to destroy Jerusalem. “As the prophet Joel’s apocalypse of the invasion of locusts concerned the Jerusalem of about B.C. 600, this vision of John’s apocalypse concerned the Jerusalem of A.D. 70, when Vespasian and Titus executed the imperial orders of Nero to besiege and destroy the city, the miseries of which exceeded all of its calamitous history before and after.”⁴⁰

Scorpions bring great agony to their victims, as they do not die quickly after the sting. “History records that when the Romans first laid siege to the city, they killed no one; rather, they simply bided their time until the Jews were weakened, and then they killed them.”⁴¹ The faithful followers of Christ, however, would not be harmed because they heeded the warnings (Matthew 24:15-30) and fled the city.

The “angel of the bottomless pit” can be identified as “Satan personified in the persecutor.”⁴² The Hebrew word Abaddon and the Greek word Apollyon both mean “destroyer.”

Read Revelation 9:13-21. Remember that in chapter 7, these angels were restrained from their destruction so that God’s elect could be identified. Here, they are released, indicating that God’s faithful had recognized these events as those the Lord had prophesied in Matthew 24 and took flight. “Josephus records that after the siege had begun for some unknown reason Vespasian withdrew his armies to such distance and for such time for the flight of the disciples from the city to the mountains to be accomplished.”⁴³

The four angels are now “released to kill a third of mankind.” The Euphrates served as security in times of war; armies could not cross it with ease making it a natural border. “Here it is a symbol of the force (orders) that held back the Romans from invading the city.”⁴⁴

The size of the army (two hundred million) was not literal, but “the symbolic description of immensity so overwhelming as to make human resistance impossible.”⁴⁵ The colors of the breastplates matched the destruction brought: fiery red (fire), hyacinth blue (smoke), and sulfur yellow (brimstone).

There were still some Jews that were not killed in this wave, but they still refused to repent of their idolatry. The Old Testament is full of examples of idolatry, and the practice continues even to this day among God’s people who should know better. The apostle Paul identifies covetousness as idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5), and it is not difficult to find even modern-day examples of otherwise religious people who put material desires above spiritual needs. The same was true in first century Jerusalem, as “seditious Jews robbed the people, charged exorbitant prices, and hoarded all the valuables they could steal.”⁴⁶ The final verse identifies four additional sins: murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, and thefts. These same four sins were charged against Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:14-15 and 2 Kings 9:22.

Read Revelation 10:1-4. Here is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. John sees “another mighty angel,” and the identifying characteristics show this mighty angel to be no less than a messenger of Deity, and possibly Jesus Christ Himself. The mighty angel was holding a little book which was already open, as opposed to the book earlier in Revelation which was sealed and could only be opened by Christ. “It was therefore no longer sealed, no longer a mystery, but now an open book. When it was sealed it seemed large. Unknown things are greater in seeming proportion than the things that are known. They become simplified and minimized in proportion to the knowledge of them. When the seals within the book were loosed, or revealed, it became an open book, and it was a *little book* compared with knowing and not knowing its contents.”⁴⁷

The position of the mighty angel’s feet showed his power over both the persecuting forces of Jerusalem and of Rome. “The land and the sea were the territories of their persecutors. Later the Jewish persecutors of Palestine were described as ‘the beast of the land’ and the Roman persecutor was designated ‘the beast of the sea.’”⁴⁸

John then heard seven thunders, but was forbidden to record what those seven thunders said. God has revealed all that we need to know (2 Peter 1:3); there are some things we do not need to know that still remain with God (Deuteronomy 29:29). Speculation on what the seven thunders said would be a fruitless endeavor.

Read Revelation 10:5-7. The angel then swears that the waiting period was over, that the judgments of the book would commence and God's mystery would be revealed in its entirety. There is no difficulty in reconciling the fact that the mighty angel "swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it," and the possibility that the mighty angel is Christ Himself. There are several examples of God swearing by Himself (Genesis 22:16; Isaiah 45:23; Psalm 89:35; Hebrews 6:13).

Some object to the early date of Revelation by claiming the entire New Testament had not been written before the destruction of Jerusalem. Ogden points out, though, that "it had all been revealed to mankind, though not in written form, by 58 A.D. (cf. Acts 20:20,27,35). The years between 52 and 66 A.D. produced the written New Testament."⁴⁹

"This mystery is the Divine plan spoken of in Ephesians 1:9-10; it neared completion in Colossians 1:6,23 written in the year 64 AD which closely paralleled the writing of Revelation. When the gospel had been preached in all of the world, the end would come. The husk of Judaism would be swept away, and the work of redemption completed (Matt. 24:14; Isa. 2:2-5; Micah 4:1-4; Dan. 2:10; Zech. 14; Heb. 8:13)."⁵⁰

Read Revelation 10:8-11. John is instructed to take and eat the little book, which tastes sweet but becomes bitter in the stomach. God's promises are sweet, but the pronouncements against those who are disobedient are bitter. The Word of God has that dual effect. "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Romans 11:22). The last verse of this chapter shows that John himself would leave Patmos after this Revelation was completed, giving further credibility to an early date.

Read Revelation 11:1-6. The "reed like a measuring rod" that John received "symbolized the authority of this 'mighty angel' (10:1), and his power to protect and preserve the true believers."⁵¹ Those who were found worshiping within the temple would be protected, while those who were in the court outside the temple would be "given to the Gentiles." In verses 2 and 3, we have two of the very few instances of a number that can be taken literally: "forty-two months" and "one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Both numbers are equivalent to three and a half years, which is the length of time Jerusalem was under siege. "The interpretation of scriptural numerals in relation to days and months should not be made on the basis of the literal number unless an over-riding reason for the exact mathematical application exists....From the imperial order and the beginning of the siege to its end and completion, it was forty-two months, or *a thousand two hundred and threescore days*, or the oft-mentioned *twelve hundred and sixty days*—that was the exact period of time, as a matter of historical record, which covered the events of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem."⁵²

The power of verse 3 refers to the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit in God's inspired preachers of the first century. Jesus told His disciples that even when they are "brought before governors and kings...do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be

given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:18-20). This applied only to those who were inspired in the first century, and not to us today. When we have an opportunity to speak to someone about the gospel, whether it is in a Bible class, a sermon, or a private study, we must be prepared through a study of the Word. Going into a situation without proper preparation can be dangerous, and often leads to more spiritual harm. The Spirit does not operate in the same manner today; they did not have the completed written Word until the end of the first century.

“The two witnesses represent the prophets who were to preach the gospel before the end truly arrived (Matt. 24:14). The testimony of two is based on a requirement of the Law of Moses and the doctrine of Christ (Deut. 19:15; John 8:17; Luke 10; Heb. 10:28).”⁵³ The witnesses had such power that no earthly force could stop them, and divine judgment would be against those who even tried.

Read Revelation 11:7-10. Jesus told His apostles, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). When the message of the two witnesses was completed, then they were killed. “This introduces the beast which will be described in the following chapters, personified in the persecuting emperor, or power, which though as yet had not appeared in the form of the beast, was symbolized in ‘the angel’ of the abyss of chapter 9:11. The ‘king’ leader of chapter 9:11 was ‘the angel of the bottomless pit,’ and from the bottomless pit this beast ascended also. He was the ‘Destroyer,’ the persecutor, they were identical.”⁵⁴

John identifies the geographic location, “which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” “The two most wicked places on earth are now used to illustrate Jerusalem, the only city where Christ was crucified (Jer. 23:14; Ez. 16:46-52). As Egypt was the place of Israel’s bondage, so Jerusalem is now the place of Christian bondage.”⁵⁵ No greater insult could be hurled against a city than to compare it to sinful Sodom, but the spiritual perversions of the Jews were sickening to true children of God.

There was evil rejoicing in the death of the two witnesses, but in the end, evil never wins. The truth will offend and repulse those who are carnally minded, tormenting those who are seeking after their own sinful lusts.

Read Revelation 11:11-14. The resurrection of the witnesses is a demonstration of the power of God’s truth; the truth cannot be defeated. “The triumph of the cause of the apostles and prophets over all foes was thus signified, and they were glorified for their testimony. It is on this principle that the souls of the slain lived and reigned with Christ in Rev. 20:4; and that true Christians now reign with Him, as affirmed by the apostle in Rom. 8:17; I Cor. 4:8 and II Tim. 2:11.”⁵⁶

Even as the witnesses ascended—“in the same hour”—God continued to reveal His righteous judgment upon wicked Jerusalem. “The *earthquake* signified the revolutionary storms, uprisings and upheavals in human affairs, in governments, and among both Jewish and Roman authorities, as it became evident to all, even the most desperate that the Jewish state and Jerusalem, their city, were doomed.”⁵⁷

Read Revelation 11:15-19. Here is the seventh and final trumpet, signaling the end of Jerusalem. The twenty-four elders praise God for His power and judgment. The appearance of the ark of the covenant “symbolized that what was lost in the old is restored in the new—and the

apostate Jewish state yielded its place to the complete restoration and perfection in the New Testament church of Christ.”⁵⁸

“Thus chapter 11 ends the first sequence of events. The second begins with chapter 12, and repeats the imagery in another but similar set of symbols, extending the same events and experiences.”⁵⁹

Review

1. The seven trumpets signaled the beginning of the end of what?
2. What is represented by the star falling from heaven in chapter 9?
3. Why is the little book sweet to taste but bitter in the stomach?
4. What is the power in Revelation 11:3?

REVELATION 12-14 (THE GREAT CONFLICT)

“The Rider of the white horse had conquered. Judaism, the arch enemy of Christ had fallen; the stars of Jewish rulership had been plucked from their orbits of dominion; the Jewish state was ended; the temple was no longer standing. The New Jerusalem and the spiritual temple of New Israel had prevailed. From the apocalypse of the Conquering Christ, the visions turned in chapter 12, to his tortured but triumphant church.”⁶⁰

“In the section now before us, we see these same events as they develop from the standpoint of the earth. We see forces at work in the world from the beginning that contribute heavily to the conflict under consideration.”⁶¹

Read Revelation 12:1-6. The woman of verse 1 is none other than the church. Ephesians 5 shows the relationship of the church to Christ; He is the head over her, just as the husband is the head over the wife. Here, she is gloriously adorned with the sun, with the moon under her feet and twelve stars decorating her head. “The *twelve stars* on the head of the woman is representative of totality, of completeness, of perfection. There were twelve tribes of Israel, representing the whole Old Testament church. There were twelve apostles for the New Testament church. The twelve stars in the diadem on the woman’s head were a complete symbol of the whole church as typified in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.”⁶² The pains of verse 2 represented the persecutions that the church as a whole was undergoing, yet despite those persecutions, more children of God were being born.

The “great, fiery red dragon” is none other than Satan. This chapter identifies the evil adversary in four ways: dragon, serpent, devil, and Satan. The red color represents the bloodshed he would bring against the children of God. Seven heads served as “an evident symbol of the complete power of the ruling Roman emperor”⁶³ and the ten horns “denoted the ten kingdoms over which the emperor ruled.”⁶⁴

Despite the dragon’s great desire and attempt to destroy the church, he failed. Even if he succeeded in killing the bodies of God’s children, their souls were delivered back to the Father. Verse 6 again refers to the 42-month siege, and the faithful church’s ability to recognize the signs Jesus gave in Matthew 24 and flee for protection.

Read Revelation 12:7-12. Do not forget the symbolic nature of the majority of the book. While there are some things that should be taken literally, such as the forty-two months, much of the Revelation is given in signs and symbols. In this section, we read of a war between Michael and his angels, fought against the dragon and his angels. Michael represents the church’s protectors, while the dragon, as already noted, represents the forces of Satan. “During the siege of Jerusalem, the Romans were distracted from pursuing their own persecution of Christians....God used the divided society of Rome to help preserve the Christians who had fled to the mountains of Pella to hide from the Roman attack on Jerusalem. Satan failed to mobilize Rome against Christians until it was too late; Satan lost the one chance he may have had to crush the early Church with the military might of the Roman Empire.”⁶⁵

John calls Satan the one “who deceives the whole world.” That deception started in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), and has continued throughout history. Jesus said the devil “is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). However, it must be noted that Satan cannot force anyone to

commit sin; it is each individual's decision whether to be a slave to sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness (Romans 6:16).

Satan lost the war, but he would not give up on his persecutions. Faithful Christians are those who "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." This brings to mind the church at Smyrna, who were told to "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10, KJV).

Read Revelation 12:13-17. "The '*two wings of a great eagle*' that were given to her was the same symbol of divine strength employed in the exodus of Israel from Egypt."⁶⁶ Satan continued to give chase, but was hindered when "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth." Again, don't forget the use of symbols in the book. "The symbol of the *earth* in Revelation has been defined as the *place of nations*. That was its meaning here. The rebellions and uprisings and local wars which were occurring and increasing at this time, causing many conflicts among the subordinate kingdoms and nations and the empire, diverted the attention and action of Rome, and thus detracted Roman authorities from the persecutions."⁶⁷

Read Revelation 13:1-10. The sea beast was Rome. "The ten horns represented the ten divisions of the Roman empire, the emperor of which was seated on a throne situated on the seven hills of Rome, the universal symbol of the imperial city."⁶⁸ The power of Rome came from dragon, Satan.

"The beast has ten horns which are identified as 'ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; yet receive power as kings one hour with the beast' (17:12). These kings were the tributary kings who served the Roman Empire."⁶⁹

The healing of the deadly wound refers to the conflicts that arose within the empire, distracting from the siege upon Jerusalem which allowed the faithful Christians to escape unscathed. These conflicts were so severe that it appeared the empire might topple, but instead it recovered, and "all the world marveled and followed the beast." In worshiping the empire, people were by association worshiping Satan himself.

Verses 9 and 10 are "a break in the vision...to give encouragement to the righteous and warning to oppressors. In short, one reaps what he sows."⁷⁰

Read Revelation 13:11-18. The land beast "is the symbol of the Jewish persecutors in Palestine."⁷¹ This beast only had two horns, as opposed to the sea beast's ten, indicating less power. Yet the land beast exercised "all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast." "He is not the dragon (Satan), but his voice reveals his Satanic kinship."⁷²

The mark of the beast was not a literal, physical mark. "This visional mark was an evil emblem of submission to emperor-worship. It was the stigmatic badge of the beast stamped *in their right hand, or in their forehead*, signifying a binding oath of loyalty."⁷³ Those who pledged allegiance to the emperor were permitted to buy and sell in the marketplace; those who refused to submit were denied such a privilege. "By means of economic warfare, everyone was forced to comply with the imperial edict. The law was 'worship the emperor or die.' Emperor worship became the mark, or badge, of those who followed the beast. Just as the mark of Christians is following God, the mark of the beast is following the devil-guided emperor."⁷⁴

Along with the mark of the beast, the number of the beast has generated a great deal of discussion throughout the years. There have been many attempts to attribute this number to individuals that lived many, many years outside the scope of Revelation, from the Pope to Hitler to Ronald Reagan. There are even websites devoted to equating Donald Trump and the Fox News Network to 666.

“The significance of 666 should not be underestimated, as John encourages those with understanding to calculate the number....Keeping the context of Revelation and its time in view, the number 666 may be a cryptogram referring to ‘Lateinos’ (which in Greek can be calculated to 666); and in turn points to the ruler of the Latin or Roman empire (Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 177). In Hebrew the number can be calculated to mean ‘Nero Caesar’ (Adams). Taken more symbolically, the number may simply signify evil raised to its highest power (Hailey, Summers) as was the case in emperors like Nero and Domitian.”⁷⁵

“The context implicates Neron Caesar (Nron Ksr – Hebrew; Neron Ksar – Greek transliteration of Hebrew; Nero in English)....To help reinforce the implication of Nero, note that Hebrew letters also stand for numbers. Nero’s name in Hebrew adds up thusly: N=50, R=200, O=6, N=50, K=100, S=60, R=200; total: 666.”⁷⁶

“Many names could be figured to match the magic number of 666, possibly your own, but none could fit the picture John painted more perfectly than Nero, for he was the first Roman emperor to ‘make war with the saints’ (13:7). It was he also who ordered Vespasian, his own hand picked general, to subdue the Jews and bring them into submission. It was this act on Nero’s part that set in motion the fulfillment of the prophecies of Israel’s desolation and Jerusalem’s destruction, and the accomplishing of God’s purposes toward them (cf. Acts 13:40-41; Lk. 21:22).”⁷⁷

Read Revelation 14:1-5. Most of the imagery of this passage has already been discussed; the Lamb is Christ, Mount Zion represents the new Jerusalem, and the 144,000 stands for the redeemed martyrs. “This new song is not one of worship by earthly beings, but of the victory given those in the Lord’s presence. Living persons have not yet enjoyed the bliss of eternal triumph over the earthly suffering.”⁷⁸

Read Revelation 14:6-11. Even in an apocalyptic book such as Revelation, the importance of evangelism is on full display. The angel “having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue and people” proclaimed the importance of fearing and giving glory to God. This echoed the preacher of Ecclesiastes: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). The evangelistic angels of Revelation commanded their listeners to worship God and warned against the worship of the beast.

The identity of Babylon is important as we consider the symbolic language of Revelation. John uses Babylon as a symbol for Jerusalem. The assertion by some that Babylon stands for Rome is nonsensical for a number of reasons, as outlined by Blake:

“1) In Revelation 17:16, the beast hates the harlot and seeks to destroy her. Why would Rome hate its self?

“2) It is illogical to describe Rome as play the harlot since Rome never was faithful to God (Isa. 1:1-21; Ez. 16). Jerusalem is the Great Harlot often unfaithful to God over the course of its history.

“3) Apocalyptic names have often been given to Jerusalem throughout the Bible, even in Revelation (11:8). In First Peter, the author describes himself as being in Babylon. The Babylon of the Old Testament had been destroyed, and there is no evidence that Peter had ever been in Rome. He is speaking of Jerusalem as Babylon.

“4) Revelation is not directly concerned with Rome. That city enters the picture as the instrument of God’s wrath.”⁷⁹

Read Revelation 14:12-13. While we do not deny that faithful Christians are blessed at death because of their lifetime of fidelity, the immediate context of these verses refer to those who died in martyrdom. “They belonged to the martyred group—the aggregation of the *man child* ‘caught up unto God’ the *hundred forty-four thousand* ‘redeemed from the earth.’ They were the dead who had died *in the Lord*—in the cause for which they were martyrs.”⁸⁰

The direct application of these verses to the martyrs of the first century does no damage to the idea of the eternal blessing of the faithful child of God. Those in the first century were in need of encouragement in the face of great tribulation; we have the advantage of the completed Word with all its promises today that they did not enjoy. We can gain encouragement at any time by simply opening our Bible, whether it is a physical copy or on our digital devices.

Read Revelation 14:14-20. The remainder of the chapter focuses on justice, both for the faithful and the unfaithful. “As before repeated, the *earth* in Revelation imagery referred to the land of which Jerusalem was the center—Judea and all of Palestine, the scene of these visions of the persecuted church. The harvest of the grain symbolized the rich reward for the faithful still living in the church; the vintage of grapes signified retribution of the wrath of God for the enemies of the church.”⁸¹

“The language is symbolic, yet it conforms somewhat to the literal descriptions given by Josephus of the destruction of the city. He said, ‘the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men’s blood.’ The slaughter was immense.”⁸²

Review

1. Who is the woman of Revelation 12?
2. What is represented by the sea beast? What is represented by the land beast?
3. Who is most likely identified by the number of the beast?
4. What does Babylon represent?

REVELATION 15-16 (THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH)

Chapter 14 was a pause in the action, skipping ahead to show the ultimate triumph of God despite the beast's deception and might in chapter 13. Chapter 15 returns to the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Read Revelation 15:1-2. "The seven angels with seven bowls parallel the seven seals and seven trumpets with this exception, the seven seals and trumpets had Christ as the central figure, and the seven bowls have the Bride of Christ as the central figure."⁸³

Verse 1 says that in the plagues "the wrath of God is complete," "which indicated the fulfillment of time."⁸⁴ God works at His pace; we are often impatient and ready for the next step, but God often grants time for repentance to those in sin. He told Abram that his descendants would be "strangers in a land that is not theirs...four hundred years," but when the time was right, they would return to their own land. "But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:13-16). Abram would not see that promise fulfilled in his lifetime, as God was not ready to pass judgment on the Amorites. May we never forget, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

You may recall from chapter 4 that a sea often represents society. It was noted that the crystal sea like glass of that chapter was indicative of "the tranquility and peacefulness of souls in the service of God, and how his eyes can penetrate to the very bottom."⁸⁵ Here, the sea of glass was "mingled with fire," which "denoted the consuming judgment of God soon to descend upon the beast and his minions."⁸⁶

Read Revelation 15:3-4. "The reference to the song of Moses indicated that the elements of this vision were formed from the deliverance of Israel and were a comparison with the Red Sea, which swallowed up Pharaoh [sic] and his hosts....It was Pharaoh [sic] there, and the emperor here; the victorious Israelites there, the triumphant saints here; it was oppressed Israel delivered from Egypt there, the persecuted saints 'redeemed from the earth.'"⁸⁷

In reference to the harps, Coffman rightly opposes a literal understanding. "Actual harps in heaven? Who could believe such a thing? Is there also a department of cats to supply the cat gut strings? Ridiculous! Note that God 'gave' these harps to the singers. What else could this be except the voices which were created by God? In the entire history of the world up to this time, that is the only musical instrument which God ever made; and we refuse to believe that he will enter into the manufacture of mechanical instruments of music in heaven."⁸⁸

"The song of Moses was that song of deliverance sung by the children of Israel upon their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (cf. Ex. 15:1-19). Only Israelites could sing that song! The song of the Lamb is the song of deliverance from the bondage of sin through Jesus Christ (cf. 5:9-10; 7:10), and only Christians can sing it!"⁸⁹

Moses and the Israelites sang a song to the Lord following their deliverance from Egypt in Exodus 15; this song of Moses and the Lamb in Revelation 15 is not a direct quote from that but similar themes of the power of God, the righteousness of His judgments, and the ultimate recognition He will receive from those who denied Him in this life. "Significantly, this song, made up of a blended collection of OT texts, deals not with the overcoming of the saints, but

with the mighty works of God....Self is at last forgotten; selfishness is finally destroyed. In heaven, the song of Moses and the Lamb is exclusively an anthem of loving praise to the Almighty.”⁹⁰

Read Revelation 15:5-8. The temple was the most important and sacred location in the minds of the Jewish people. When Christ announced that “not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down,” the disciples responded in amazement, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:2-3). The thought that the temple would be destroyed was unfathomable to the Jewish mind.

“The picture here portrayed was that of the temple transferred from Jerusalem to heaven and transformed from temporal to spiritual. The vision is based on all that the temple on mount Zion meant to the nation of Israel....It was appropriate for the seven angels with the vials of plagues to be poured out on the harlot Jerusalem, ready for destruction, to come from the transformed temple in heaven.”⁹¹

The seven angels were “clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.” This is like the attire of Christ in Revelation 1:13, who was “clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.” The similarity of clothing indicates the angels were executing their task by the authority of Christ.

In the Old Testament record, Moses was prevented from entering the tabernacle when “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34-35). Here again, men are prevented from entering the temple “until the order of events resulting in the destruction of the old Jerusalem and the old temple had been accomplished, after which the new Jerusalem, and the new temple would be open to all true worshipers; when *the tabernacle of God with men* would be accessible to all nations of men.”⁹²

Read Revelation 16:1. The time had come to “pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” Keep in mind the symbolic language, and the what those symbols mean. One should not take “the earth” to mean the entire world, but the place of nations—in this case, the persecuting Palestinians.

“John has drawn an analogy between the Jews of Revelation and the Egyptians of Exodus. The downfall of Egypt is a type of the downfall of Jerusalem. The Jews had come full circle. The once oppressed righteous have now become the unrighteous oppressors. With careful examination, one can see parallels between the plagues in Revelation and the plagues upon Egypt (Ex. 9:8-12).”⁹³

Read Revelation 16:2-7. Wallace calls this section of Scripture “the seven plagues of penal woes.”⁹⁴ With the first bowl of wrath, “a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.” God was punishing those who rejected Him and His Son; He was not arbitrary in His judgments.

The sea turning to blood signified “the complete dissolution of the emperor-beast and his subject,”⁹⁵ while the rivers and springs turning to blood “was symbolic of retribution for the blood of the martyrs....The plague meant that they were figuratively made to drink the blood which they had made to flow from the mass murder of the saints.”⁹⁶

God is righteous and just, and those who were punished received their due. Let us remember, however, that it is not our place to exact vengeance, but God’s. “Repay no one evil

for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:17-21).

Read Revelation 16:8-9. These plagues show the danger of rebellion in the face of correction. The blasphemers, those who worshiped the beast and coerced others to do the same, “did not repent and give Him glory.” “Such was characteristic of the seditious Jews. They thought that by some means God would deliver them regardless of their wickedness. It never occurred to them that they were totally responsible for their own plight, and they refused to turn from their wicked ways.”⁹⁷ We can and must learn a lesson from their stubbornness—when we are confronted with truth, we must repent and comply!

Read Revelation 16:10-11. Impenitence is again seen here. “This kind of darkness would completely destroy thought and reason. The darkness symbolizes the paralyzing despair, hopelessness, and anguish felt by the oppressors.”⁹⁸

Read Revelation 16:12-16. It was previously seen that the Euphrates River served as a natural boundary and protection against invading forces. In the release of this plague, the River “dried up,” making an easy entrance for “the kings from the east.” “By removing the border guards, Titus, the Roman general, left the eastern border of the empire open for the Parthians and Jews who lived beyond the river to intervene in the war.”⁹⁹

“The verses that follow from *thirteen* to *sixteen* describe the gathering armies for the final battle in the overthrow of Jerusalem, with the spiritual overtones of the conflict between the forces of Judaism and heathenism on one side, and Christianity (the church) on the other.”¹⁰⁰

Frogs, seen by many ancients as a magical creature, represented deception. “From the dirtiness and slimey nature of the frogs, we may conclude that they are the devil’s propaganda agents, making a lot of noise like frogs, but being in themselves small, weak, dirty, and despicable.”¹⁰¹

Armageddon is one of those words thrown around by teachers of false doctrine, but the understanding of its role in Revelation is symbolic rather than literal. It is not the site of some great battle yet future, but represents something much simpler. “The name Armageddon comes from Mount Megiddo, a site of frequent battles between the people of God and the enemies of God. Here Deborah and Barak overcame the armies of Sisera, Jehoshaphat overcame the Moabites and Ammonites. Throughout history, wars have occurred here with Egyptians, Saracens, Druses, and Turks. Armageddon merely represents a conflict in which God clearly and purposefully aids one side against the other. In this case, God moved Rome against Jerusalem to punish them for killing His Son and persecuting His people (Zech. 12:11).”¹⁰²

Read Revelation 16:17-21. In the pronouncement, “It is done,” God ushers in the end of Jerusalem. “The time for the end of the judgments had come; the time for the fall of the Harlot City; and the time for the punishments to follow on both Jewish and imperial persecutors of the church; all of which was signified by the distant rumblings of *voices, thunders and lightnings*.”¹⁰³ Babylon, symbolizing Jerusalem, received “the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.”

The three divisions of the city are seen by Wallace to apply to the prophecy of Ezekiel 5:2, “to the three sources of Jerusalem’s afflictions: *pestilence*, *sword* and *exile*.”¹⁰⁴ Blake says, “The city was divided into three parts: the dead, those waiting to die, and those that would be left alive to live the rest of their days with the horrid memories of the butchery and carnage.”¹⁰⁵

What should our attitude be toward discipline? “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor detest His correction; For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12). God gave the Jews ample opportunities to repent; those who accepted His gospel were saved, but those who refused to obey perished. After all of His longsuffering, still “men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”

Review

1. What event in the Old Testament is similar to the events of Revelation 15-16?
2. What were the seven angels to pour out of the bowls?
3. What is the significance of the words, “It is done,” in Revelation 16:17?
4. What is a possible explanation of the three divisions of the city?

REVELATION 17:1 – 19:10 (THE FALL OF BABYLON)

“These remaining chapters of the apocalypse surrounded only two opposite figures—the old apostate Jerusalem in contrast with the New Jerusalem, the Victorious Church of Christ. The old Judaistic Jerusalem with all of her apostasies must have been removed in order for the New Jerusalem, the church—or kingdom of Christ—to have come into world-wide sway. Hence, symbolic Babylon the Harlot and figurative New Jerusalem, the Bride (the church), were the center of the remaining apocalypses.”¹⁰⁶

Read Revelation 17:1-6. The harlot or woman of this chapter is Jerusalem, and the beast upon which she rides is Rome. Jerusalem depended on the commercial success of Rome, but also used Rome to carry out more insidious schemes. “For some time, the Jews used the Romans to suit their own purposes, manipulating them into defending Jewish financial interests; even using them as a means of crucifying the Lord.”¹⁰⁷

John previously mentioned the seven heads and ten horns of the beast in Revelation 12 and 13. The seven heads served as “an evident symbol of the complete power of the ruling Roman emperor”¹⁰⁸ and the ten horns “denoted the ten kingdoms over which the emperor ruled.”¹⁰⁹

The woman was dressed “in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.” She appeared attractive, but she held “in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.” Someone may appear pure or good, but is in fact destructive to themselves and others because of underlying sin. Christ warned against such in Matthew 23 as He pronounced numerous woes against the scribes and Pharisees. In Matthew 23:28, He said, “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Read Revelation 17:7-10. This section has reference to the emperors of Rome. In verse 10, the phrase “five have fallen” refers to Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. “One is” points to Nero, while “the other has not yet come” is Domitian.

The angel’s statement in verse 8 is one of those Scriptures that is “hard to understand,” as Peter said in 2 Peter 3:16. “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.” Some believe this has reference to what is called the “‘the Neronic myth’ that Nero was dead, but was incarnated in Belial the idolatrous prince and head of the heathen world; and hence, the belief that he lived. The myth could have been the basis of the symbol, which undoubtedly means the persecutor had apparently granted surcease of the persecutions, but it was only a lull—the beast that *was*, *and is not*, should again appear without warnings, ascending as it were from the unfathomable depths of diabolical abode.”¹¹⁰

Read Revelation 17:11-14. The angel tells John that the one who “has not yet come”—Domitian—“must continue a short time” in verse 11, meaning that even though Jerusalem will be destroyed, the persecutions against the church will continue. Recall the Lord’s words to the church in Smyrna, that they “will have tribulation ten days” (Revelation 2:10). Wallace writes that “from Nero to Diocletian there were ten persecuting emperors. This era of persecution reached its crescendo in Diocletian’s *reign of terror*, in which he vowed to obliterate the name Christian from the Roman Empire.”¹¹¹ These facts can be cited in “assigning the date of Revelation to the early part of Nero’s reign, before the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.”¹¹²

Read Revelation 17:15-18. “This text makes it clear that Rome was merely a tool used to serve God’s purposes.”¹¹³ The beast hates the harlot, so much as to “make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.”

The final phrase of verse 18—“that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth”—contributed to the erroneous theory that Rome is the harlot rather than Jerusalem. However, when one recalls the symbolic nature of the book and the consistency of the symbols therein, this is easily explained. What does “the earth” symbolize? “The *earth*, as defined at the beginning of the visions and later repeated, referred to the land of Judea, inclusive of Palestine. The city of Jerusalem was the royal city where the kings of Judah reigned.”¹¹⁴

Read Revelation 18:1-3. An angel makes the grand announcement of judgment: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,” an echo of Isaiah 21:9. “The severance of all commercial affiliations by the siege of Jerusalem and the devastation of Judea, had reduced the city to haunt, symbolized by the demoniac habitation of evil spirits, devils and vultures.”¹¹⁵ Revelation 18 is a view from outside the city, taking the point of view of the neighboring Gentiles, identified as “the nations” in verse 3. “After the Roman attack, the city never did recover, and to this day remains a city inhabited by foreigners and is only of historical importance. In place of the Temple stands a mosque for Islamic worship.”¹¹⁶

Read Revelation 18:4-8. A second voice issues a warning to the faithful children of God to flee from Jerusalem to avoid the coming judgment. The Jews had persecuted the faithful for long enough, and had refused to repent of their sins against God. It was time for God’s vengeance to be poured out. “The old city declared that she was *no widow* and would see *no sorrow* (of widowhood), for she was the Jerusalem of the Israel which was wedded to the God of the Jews. But *verse eight* bluntly decreed that destruction would come upon her in *one day*, as suddenly as the Lord’s statement in Matt. 24:16-18.”¹¹⁷

Read Revelation 18:9-19. Three groups lament over the fall of Jerusalem: “kings of the earth” (verse 9), “merchants of the earth” (verse 11), and “shipmasters” (verse 17). “Their source of income is cut off and it won’t be long until they fall into oblivion as well. It would be futile to try to get rich dealing with Rome, for the Romans were greedy and would eat up all of the rich profits of the merchants in taxes.”¹¹⁸ In one hour, judgment came upon the city; in one hour, their great riches came to nothing; in one hour, the city was made desolate. The things of this life are not eternal. Paul told Timothy to warn wealthy Christians, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

Read Revelation 18:20. In contrast to the lamentations of the prior eleven verses, the voice encourages joy among the “holy apostles and prophets” as they have finally been avenged by the Almighty.

Read Revelation 18:21-24. Jesus told His disciples that they must be “converted and become as little children” if they desire entrance to the kingdom (Matthew 18:2). He then issues a warning, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). That is precisely the picture of verse 21, as “a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea.” Jerusalem had stumbled, and had caused others to stumble, and the city was destroyed for it.

Read Revelation 19:1-6. Chapter 19 shows worship and praise for God's righteous judgments upon the church's oppressors. "The word *alleluia*, in *verse one*, meant *praise ye the Lord*....The word *alleluia* itself is used only in the *nineteenth* chapter of Revelation, verses 1, 3, 4, 6, which lends special significance to the chorus of the heavenly multitude praises God for *Salvation* from enemies, and *righteous judgments* on Jerusalem; and for avenging the blood of the martyrs....It was not the general or usual form of worship and praise, but a special *hallelujah* for *true and righteous* retribution on the harlot woman—apostate Jerusalem—and her affiliates."¹¹⁹

Read Revelation 19:7-9. Paul used the analogy of marriage in describing the church's relationship to Jesus in Romans 7:2-4 and Ephesians 5:22-33. "The wedding feast of Revelation 19 is ongoing; every time one obeys the gospel, he or she becomes wedded to Christ. The wedding feast is not to be viewed chronologically; otherwise, those who became Christians before the fall of Jerusalem would be illegitimate."¹²⁰

Read Revelation 19:10. Caught up in the excitement, John attempted to worship the messenger, but was prevented. He told John, "Worship God!" Far too often, Christians put more faith and trust in preachers than they do in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Luke writes about the Bereans in Acts 17:11, calling them "more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They did not just take Paul and Silas' word for it; they sought to verify their words with the Word. We must be of that same noble spirit today, receiving the words preached and taught, but verifying the information for ourselves.

Review

1. In Revelation 17:10, who are the seven kings? To whom specifically does the phrase "one is" refer?
2. Who are the "ten kings" of Revelation 17:12?
3. What three groups of people lamented the fall of Jerusalem in Revelation 18?
4. Who is worthy of worship? In whom should we place our faith and trust?

REVELATION 19:11 – 20:10 (THE DEFEAT OF THE BEAST)

Once again, the reader must be reminded of the figurative nature of the language John employs in Revelation. “The visions of this conflict were presented in the language of high symbols, and there is danger of literalism in their application.”¹²¹

Read Revelation 19:11-14. Following the vision of joy and praise for God’s righteous judgment, John sees “Christ the warrior king on a white horse, followed by the armies in heaven on white horses.”¹²² The color white can symbolize either purity or victory, and either attribute can be rightly attributed to Christ. It should be noted that the events here follow the destruction of Jerusalem; Christ’s war is no longer against the Palestinian persecutors, but “against Caesar-worship and heathenism.”¹²³ His judgment is still—and ever will be—righteous.

The rider of the white horse is identified in four ways in this chapter: “Faithful and True” (verse 11), “a name written that no one knew except Himself” (verse 12), “The Word of God” (verse 13), and “King of kings and Lord of lords” (verse 16).

“Faithful and True” hearkens back to Revelation 3:14, the letter to the church in Laodicea, in which He is called “the Faithful and True Witness.” Later in Revelation, John is told the words revealed to him are “true and faithful” (21:5) and “faithful and true” (22:6). It follows that the revealed Word, inspired by One who cannot lie, would reveal His very character.

The description of His eyes in verse 12, “like a flame of fire,” takes the reader back to chapter 1:14 and 2:18 and speaks to his omniscience. The “name written that no one knew except Himself” may bring to mind what is written in Matthew 11:27, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” There are some things that have not yet been revealed to man (Deuteronomy 29:29), but we can be confident that everything we need to know has been revealed (2 Peter 1:3).

There are differing opinions on whose blood stained Christ’s garment in verse 13. Ogden sees it as “symbolizing His judgment upon Israel,”¹²⁴ while Coffman is “compelled to seek the meaning symbolized by the bloodstains in that eternal victory of the Cross, where the enabling victory of all that came afterwards was achieved.”¹²⁵ The name of verse 13, “The Word of God,” removes any doubt that one might have that this is Jesus. The very same man that penned Revelation by inspiration, was also inspired to write in his account of Christ’s life, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14).

Read Revelation 19:15-16. The “sharp sword” that comes “out of His mouth” represents Scripture (Hebrews 4:12). Paul, in his description of the whole armor of God, commands Christians, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). The striking of the nations and ruling with the rod of iron “were symbolic of the impact of the gospel on the heathen world. This inherent power and force or Christianity was prophesied in the second psalm, chapter 2:1-3.”¹²⁶ “The rod of iron symbolizes the strength of His word. By His powerful word, He either smites, or shepherds, the nations. His word either convinces, or it convicts. Those convinced walk with Christ their Shepherd in the New Jerusalem (cf. 7:17; 21:24; Jno. 10:27-29).”¹²⁷

Finally, Christ is known by the name, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” The angel with the seventh trumpet said, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15). How can such a statement be true, given the corruption that plagued leadership in the first century (and still today)? “The conquest of ‘the kingdoms of this world’ was spiritual, not literal; and it was to be accomplished by the spread of the gospel and expansion of Christianity over the heathen world, as stated in Matt. 24:31 and as prophesied in the second Psalm.”¹²⁸

Read Revelation 19:17-21. The judgment against Jerusalem was past, but persecutions continued via the Roman Empire, or the beast. “This beast was the original first sea-beast of chapter 13—personified in the emperor, the source of authority for all the persecutions.”¹²⁹ The message is clear however: Christ will reign victorious. Evil will not and cannot defeat the Lord. “Eventually the Lord does away with mighty Romans by giving them an ignominious death consumed by scavengers. When the Roman Empire fell, it was picked apart by barbarians and primitive tribes who stripped it like carrion birds.”¹³⁰ This was ultimately accomplished “by 313 A.D. when Constantine brought an end to Roman persecution.”¹³¹

Read Revelation 20:1-3. Here begins a shift from the things immediately relevant to the recipients of Revelation in the first century—things which “must shortly take place” (1:1)—to the ultimate end of the world we currently inhabit and the final judgment.

Now that the harlot and the beast have been defeated, John sees the binding of Satan himself (“the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”). “The angel is from heaven signifying that the binding of Satan is ordered by God. The angel has the key to the bottomless pit to portray the victory of Christ over Satan in the battle over sin (cf. 12:7-11; 1:18; Heb. 2:14-15).”¹³² “Just how is Satan bound? He is bound in that he cannot destroy the Bible; he cannot tempt a child of God more than he is able to bear; God makes a way of escape with every temptation, etc.”¹³³

The thousand years does not refer to a specific amount of time, as premillennialists and postmillennialists attest. Copeland opines, “It most likely depicts a long period of time in which Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations as he did during the time of the Roman empire (cf. Re 13:14; 20:3).”¹³⁴ Wallace, on the other hand, states, “A *thousand years*—as in all other places where the phrase was mentioned—denoted completeness. Here it had reference to the complete success of the cause over persecutions, and had no reference to a cycle of time.”¹³⁵ Coffman writes, “The ‘thousand years’ mentioned six times in verses 1-7 relate to the limitations which God imposed upon Satan throughout the Christian age and have no reference at all to the so-called ‘millennium’ of popular fancy.”¹³⁶ The main point to remember is this: the thousand years is not a literal period of time; it is symbolic.

“There are twenty figures of speech in the *nineteenth* and *twentieth* chapters alone. In a series of symbols such as these, it is not reasonable to make a literal application of the thousand years and a figurative application of all the rest of the symbols, without a contextual or historical reason for doing so. The thousand years, like the other parts of the vision, is a figure of speech—a symbol of something else.”¹³⁷

At the end of the thousand years—whether that is the Christian age, or a long period of time—Satan will “be released for a little while,” that is, “unleashed to exert influence, not in the form of persecution, but in the spiritual conflict between heathenism and Christianity—a

symbolic representation of the upsurge of heathenism.”¹³⁸ How much influence? Coffman writes, “The period of Satan’s binding is coextensive in every particular with the times when people are being saved by obeying gospel,”¹³⁹ concluding that “the ‘little time’ mentioned here means literally a brief period, beginning at the point after which God shall have finally achieved the full salvation of the total number of the redeemed, and lasting only a relatively short while. Satan will be ‘loosed’ without any restraint whatever during that brief period. Due to all that is revealed of Satan’s nature in the Bible, it cannot be supposed that the race of man, or the whole world, would continue very long after such an eventuality.”¹⁴⁰ If such is the case, it is a sobering and frightening thought.

Read Revelation 20:4-6. These are the same martyred souls as those who were “under the altar” in Revelation 6:9. They were now victorious, sitting on thrones. “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Premillennialists will inform anyone who will listen that this living and reigning is still future, and that it will occur on earth, and that it is inclusive of all Christians. Note, however, the past tense of the verbs “lived and reigned,” and that the phrase “on earth” is neither stated nor implied, and that the pronoun “they” refers specifically to those “who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands.”

The first resurrection mentioned in verses 5 and 6 does not refer to the literal resurrection. “The fact that they had to be told that it was a resurrection is proof that it was used in an unusual sense of the word; it was a figurative, metaphorical use, not a physical employment of the word.”¹⁴¹ Note that John says the second death has no power over those who have part in the first resurrection. Earlier, Jesus told the church at Smyrna, “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11). Thus, it follows, those who have part in the first resurrection are those who overcome.

Read Revelation 20:7-10. John returns to the idea of Satan’s release first mentioned in 20:3, stating that he “will go out to deceive the nations.” Keep in mind the possibility that the thousand years “relate to the limitations which God imposed upon Satan throughout the Christian age.”¹⁴² If this is the case, the loosing of Satan will occur when “the divine goal of redemption will be fully achieved, but that very near the end, faith shall practically vanish from the earth.... Just as the old Israel fell away from God and officially and finally rejected even the Messiah himself, their apostasy will be fulfilled in the great antitype of the church, the new Israel, which will apparently do exactly the same thing.”¹⁴³

This thought should instill in us the desire to evangelize even more, to give a greater number of people the opportunity to obey the truth of the gospel. Countless denominations preach a perverted gospel that will never save (Galatians 1:6-9). Only the pure, unadulterated gospel of Christ can save the penitent soul (Romans 1:16).

During the time of the release of Satan, he will “deceive the nations” and use “Gog and Magog” in his renewed assault against God’s elect. “Gog and Magog were pagan hordes that lived north of Palestine during Old Testament times. In Ezekiel 38, they attempt to go up against Jerusalem, just as corruption is going up against the new Jerusalem (the church) today, trying to pervert Christians. Gog and Magog represent any religion or faith that is not expressly from God.”¹⁴⁴ “John’s use of Gog and Magog evidently is to depict the emerging of an enemy force against the church which also has designs to completely destroy it.”¹⁴⁵

What is the result of this uprising? In one sense, it is the same as when the harlot and the beast were defeated centuries earlier: God is victorious. “John’s vision is not intended to be a bad dream. It is intended to be a forecast of what will happen in the world before the end of time....God will protect those that are truly His. John sees fire coming down from heaven and devouring the mighty forces gathered against God’s people. It is without question the end as described by Peter (2 Pet. 3:10-12). The nations of the earth will be destroyed as God rescues His saints and the devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone with his helpers to be tormented for ever and ever.”¹⁴⁶ As Coffman put it, “Not much of a ‘war’ was it? God spake, and it was done. God settled the full account with evil in a single fiery blast.”¹⁴⁷

The torment of eternal separation from God is unimaginable to our finite, mortal minds, but in figurative language John relates it to “the lake of fire and brimstone” (20:10). “Christ called it an ‘outer darkness’ (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 15:30), ‘eternal fire’ (Matthew 25:41), ‘hell, the unquenchable fire’ (Mark 9:44), ‘hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched’ (Mark 9:48)....Recognizing that this language does indeed seem to be metaphorical affords no relief. The reality is always greater than the symbol of it!”¹⁴⁸

Whatever hell is in a literal sense, we can be certain of one thing: it is eternal, and no one truly wants to go there. Those who flippantly say otherwise do not believe or understand the nature of the punishment that awaits. John reveals, “And they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). In the great judgment scene of Matthew 25, Jesus told one group, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” (Matthew 25:41), and told His followers that “these will go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46).

Review

1. In what four ways is the rider of the white horse identified in chapter 19?
2. What is the sharp sword of Revelation 19:15, and how was it used to strike the nations?
3. What is a possible explanation of the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 that does not contradict other Scriptures?
4. When will the end of the thousand years come?

REVELATION 20:11 – 22:21 (ALL THINGS MADE NEW)

Wallace writes, “Let it be impressed on the minds of the readers of Revelation, that these visions of resurrection; of second death and judgment; were all extraordinary and of special character. They were not intended for future and general application. They belonged to the apocalypse, and the apocalypse belonged to that period.”¹⁴⁹ This is where Wallace and this writer begin to disagree, yet much of the symbolism he identifies matches the interpretation of the glorified church in eternity.

Speaking of the first part of chapter 20, Copeland states, “The description is brief, for the book was written for the benefit of Christians in Asia Minor about things to shortly come to pass (cf. Re 1:1-4; 22:6,10). Those Christians would not experience this last attempt of Satan. But to assure them (and us!) that Satan would ultimately be defeated, we have the description found in these few verses (7-10).”¹⁵⁰

Read Revelation 20:11-15. John has just finished writing about the defeat of the devil, who “was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” He now turns his attention to the final judgment scene.

“The picture in these verses was but the continuation of the contrast between the causes of righteousness and wickedness, truth and error, Christianity and heathenism; and their standing respectively before the great throne of divine judgment.”¹⁵¹

This passage can bring great joy and hope to some, while others read it with terror. John reveals, “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” This is in harmony with what the preacher wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, what Jesus said while He dwelt in the flesh (John 12:48), and what the apostles taught through inspiration, such as Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

“The *book of life* was the registry of the approved of God. The names not found in it were not a part of God’s called and chosen people—they belonged to the society opposed to the church. The same reference in chapter 13:8 mentioned the names not written in the book of life ‘from the foundation of the earth,’ which affirms the great truth that in all nations and ages the only people who belong to God in the true sense of *the people of God* were and are the people who have lived and now live in obedience to His divine will.”¹⁵²

Those whose names are not written in the Book of Life face eternal punishment and separation from the Almighty. “It is essential that one’s name be written in the book of life at the time of judgment. Many whose names were once written therein have been blotted out (Ex. 32:32-33; Psa. 69:28; Rev. 3:5) and the consequence is eternal damnation (20:15).”¹⁵³

Read Revelation 21:1-8. What is the new heaven and new earth? In the symbolic language of Revelation, heaven referred to the existing government, while the earth referred to the persecuting powers of Palestine; these were “the first heaven and the first earth.” The new heaven and new earth, then, refers to the spiritual rule of Christ and His church. Where will the church reside when the things of this life end?

The New Jerusalem is the church. “The new Jerusalem is not solely heaven, the final abode of the righteous! The city rather represents the glorified state of the righteous both now

and forevermore....It includes the angels of heaven, the just dead who were cleansed by Christ's sacrifice, and the righteous who have died since that time. All of these inhabit this new city."¹⁵⁴

"The tabernacle is a symbol of fellowship, where God and man meet. Man is no longer separated from God but is in perfect fellowship with him (21:3)."¹⁵⁵ Not only will we be in perfect fellowship with God, but the things of this life that cause us pain and sorrow will no longer exist. No death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain.

The thrust of this passage is the relationship between God and "he who overcomes." God says, "I will be his God, and he shall be My son." There is no greater relationship than this; there is no force that can break this bond in eternity.

John then identifies some of the sins that will prevent the impenitent from the eternal promises of the Almighty. Paul and Peter both gave similar lists in their writings (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:3). It is a fact that all manner of sin will prevent one from an eternal reward if one does not repent. Isaiah wrote, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). Paul, however, offered hope to his readers after warning that "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God," when he said by inspiration, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9,11).

Read Revelation 21:9-21. This is a description of the glorified church. One must not fall into the trap of literalism still, recognizing that this is still symbolic language. The number twelve, symbolic of completeness, is used numerous times; the precious stones in the foundation "presented a vision so exquisite in the extreme as to exceed all human imagination or contemplation;"¹⁵⁶ they show "the eternal beauty and value of the church of the living God."¹⁵⁷

Read Revelation 21:22-27. "In it there was *no temple* (verse 22), for there was no *veil* between God and the Redeemed, as in the temple that had been taken away (Matt. 27:51); and because the church itself is the temple of God. (Eph. 2:21; Rev. 7:15) The old temple had been a type of the new, and there was no place in the vision for a symbol of that which had passed away."¹⁵⁸

As God will not tolerate sin, John again notes that sin will not be permitted to enter the New Jerusalem. "Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."¹⁵⁹

Read Revelation 22:1-5. We are first told of the tree of life in Genesis 2:8-9, "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Adam and Eve were permitted to eat of "every tree of the garden," including the tree of life, except for "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:16-17). When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God removed from them access to the tree of life: "Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:23-24).

In eternity, the redeemed will once again enjoy the benefits of the tree of life. “The tree of life was envisioned as bordering the banks of the river of life—on either side of it—affording to all inhabitants the source of perpetual spiritual blessings.”¹⁶⁰ “Could this be some literal tree with visible fruit? We believe it to be a beautiful symbol of a far greater *reality*.”¹⁶¹

John declares, “And there shall be no more curse.” “The curse of sin was removed by Jesus Christ. The apostle declared that ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.’ It was this death of ignominy on the cross, as declared in the following verse (14) that brought ‘the blessing of Abraham...on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.’ In the Holy City Jerusalem there should be *no more curse* of sin to the redeemed inhabitants.”¹⁶²

Read Revelation 22:6-11. John returns again to his present time for the remainder of Revelation. He comforted the first century church with the vision of the judgment upon the harlot (Jerusalem) and the end of the Palestinian persecution; he then showed that the beast (Rome) would be conquered; then briefly shows the final judgment scene and the glorified church in heaven. Here, the messenger tells John that the “words are faithful and true.” This phrase can be applied to every word spoke by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus speaks again in verse 7, “Behold, I am coming quickly!” This does not refer to the second coming, but rather His judgment upon Jerusalem. He says, “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” This principle can apply to the entire collection of the Scriptures, but the immediate view to John’s audience has reference to Revelation. The Christians had been given signs to look for prior to the destruction of Jerusalem; they would be blessed if they heeded those words.

It seems strange that John would again worship a created being rather than God so soon after being prohibited in chapter 19. Wallace believes that this is simply a reiteration of what had happened before. “The obviously correct view therefore is that John was here restating what had previously occurred for a necessary emphasis, just as he had quoted the words of Jesus in verse 7.”¹⁶³ Likewise, Ogden writes, “It is our opinion that John related the same occasion twice, and that the latter account is the true chronological setting of the event. It is unreasonable to imagine John making the same mistake twice.”¹⁶⁴ Coffman, however, believes “that John intended to ‘worship God’ before the feet of the angel. Otherwise, we would have to suppose that John deliberately disobeyed the prohibition mentioned on the first occasion....In this event, he was directing the worship to God, but doing so ‘before the feet of the angel.’...No matter how John intended it, his bowing down before the angel was sinful, and was in itself an action that was contrary to the heavenly edict, ‘Worship God.’”¹⁶⁵

John is instructed, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.” Compare that to Daniel, who was told, “Therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future” (Daniel 8:26). In one instance the fulfillment would come soon; in the other, the prophecies would not come to pass for “many days in the future.”

Let us not rip the words of verse 11 out of the context of Revelation. This does not mean that we should not evangelize and urge the sinner to repent and come to the Lord. Rather, the words were meant for the original audience. “These admonitions were coupled with the warning that the time was at hand; and the events being so near, so shortly to come to pass, no change in

the characters of the wicked devotees of the imperial beast or of conditions in the heathen world could be expected; but all others were exhorted to maintain their state of righteousness and holiness, as the storm approached.”¹⁶⁶

Read Revelation 22:12-17. In the KJV and NKJV, the phrase “do his commandments” appears in verse 14. In other versions, such as ASV, NASB, ESV, and NIV, this phrase is rendered “wash their robes.” The meaning is the same. To do his commands and to wash one’s robes is to obey the gospel. Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The washing of robes, or the washing away of sins, takes place when one is baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-6).

On the other hand, on the outside are those who do not “do his commandments” or “wash their robes.” They were called dogs, which was one of the highest insults possible to a Jew. “The Jews called the Gentiles dogs; but here the unbelieving Jews had so classified themselves and the term had boomeranged and fallen back upon them.”¹⁶⁷ Also excluded from the city are “sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

“The Lord has invited the lost into the church; now, the Spirit extends his invitation, the church invites, those who hear and believe even say ‘come with me.’ All who wish to be saved can enter the church and partake of eternal life. This is perhaps the most eloquent invitation in the Bible.”¹⁶⁸

Read Revelation 22:18-21. “As with all the other scriptures (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15-16), there are those who twist these scriptures to suit their own lusts (2 Tim. 4:2-4).”¹⁶⁹ Paul warned against changing the pure truth to a perverted gospel, saying of those who do such a thing, “Let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9). As this command specifically references “this book,” there is a specific application to Revelation. “A warning in no uncertain terms is given to anyone who would tamper with the prophecies in this book. It was imperative that the saints receive these timely instructions in unchanged form; else, how could they know what was in store and how to deal with it?”¹⁷⁰

“John had testified that Jesus had so promised—and he consistently, believingly and confidently responded, *Even so, come, Lord Jesus*. And it is the recorded fact that their Lord Jesus did come in the events of that generation to which John belonged, the words of Jesus himself being true (Mat. 23:36-24:34)—and He whose very name was THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE and THE WORD OF GOD (chapter 19:11-13) was the surety for their fulfillment at that time.”¹⁷¹

“John’s dedicated sanction came after he had gained understanding that the events shortly to come to pass would result in the destruction of old Jerusalem followed by the glorified existence of a new spiritual Jerusalem. Having this same understanding ourselves, we can imbibe the spirit of John. In fact, our understanding of these things in this age when we are looking for the Lord’s final return should cause our hearts to be filled with adoration and praise as we long for His coming. ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus.’”¹⁷²

Review

1. In the final judgment, according to what will we be judged?

2. What are some of things that will be no more, according to Revelation 21 and 22?

3. What are some of the sins that will lead men to the second death in chapter 21? What will prevent men from entering the gates of the city in chapter 22?

4. Why are the warnings against tampering with the revealed Word so severe?

PARALLELS WITH MATTHEW 24

In Matthew 24, Jesus dropped a bombshell on His disciples. Speaking of the temple, the Lord said, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). The disciples had trouble processing this statement; the temple was so important to the Jewish mind, it was unfathomable to imagine it utterly destroyed so that “not one stone shall be left here upon another.” History shows us that not only the temple was destroyed, but the entire city of Jerusalem was laid waste.

“In view of the size of the stones used in building the temple, it must have appeared highly improbable that every one of them would be thrown down, and yet that is exactly the way it happened. The fire which ravaged the cedar beams and furnishings within melted the gold with which much of the temple was overlaid. It ran down into the crevices of the mighty stones, and the soldiers literally left no stone unturned as they sought to recover the yellow metal that had adorned Herod’s temple as loot.”¹⁷³

There are many parallels between the Lord’s words in Matthew 24 and the Revelation given to John many years later. These parallels “join them together as being descriptions of the same events and as belonging to the same period of time.”¹⁷⁴ Let us observe some of Christ’s statements in Matthew 24, and the parallel statements in Revelation.

Read Matthew 24:34 and Revelation 1:1. There were some in Jesus’ audience on the Mount of Olives that would “by no means pass away till all these things take place.” There was a definite time restriction placed upon the words Jesus had spoken. Likewise, there is a time restriction on John’s inspired words: “things which must shortly take place.”

Read Matthew 24:21 and Revelation 1:9; 2:10; 7:14. Christians faced immense persecution at the hands of first century Jews. John identified himself as “your brother and companion in the tribulation.” The church at Smyrna was told they would “have tribulation ten days,” which referred to the persecutions at the hand of ten Roman emperors. Later John saw in his vision a multitude “arrayed in white robes,” identified as “the ones who come out of the great tribulation.”

Read Matthew 24:11 and Revelation 2:2. The “false prophets” are parallel to “those who say they are apostles and are not” that attempted to deceive the saints in Ephesus. John also warned of false prophets in 1 John 4:1: “Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Read Matthew 24:6-8 and Revelation 6:7-8. “The records of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, concerning Jerusalem, are counterparts of the seals of Revelation. The works of Josephus on the Palestinian wars give historical fulfillment in the account of the bloody war of the Jews and the siege of Jerusalem.”¹⁷⁵

Read Matthew 24:29-35 and Revelation 6:12-17. The similarities between these passages are especially striking. Revelation speaks of “a great earthquake,” while Jesus states “the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” John says that “the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,” and Jesus says that “the sun will be darkened.” John says that “the moon became like blood,” and Jesus says that “the moon will not give its light.” Revelation declares, “And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.” Jesus says that “the stars will fall from heaven,” and then in verses 32-35 relates “the parable

from the fig tree.” “The representations, symbols and language are so similar to the descriptions of Matthew 24:29-31 as to be identical in their significance. It describes the coming of the Son of man after the tribulation mentioned in the verse before it, as the sixth seal of Revelation 6 joins with the contents of the fifth seal before it. The divine visitations in the signs of terrestrial upheavals and celestial disturbances form an identical imagery. The comparison is impressive, if not conclusive evidence, of their fulfillment in the same series of events.”¹⁷⁶

Read Matthew 24:2; 23:37-38 and Revelation 11:8; 18:10,21. Not only would the temple be destroyed, but the people would also suffer. The reason was made clear by the Lord; Jerusalem had turned their backs on the Almighty, had persecuted His people and rejected His truth, despite repeated attempts by God to “gather your children together, as a hen gather her chicks under her wings.” Instead they became spiritually like “Sodom and Egypt” and “that great city Babylon.”

Read Matthew 24:15-21 and Revelation 12:6; 18:4-8. Jesus warns about the “abomination of desolation” prophesied by Daniel, pointing to that as the sign to flee the city. The woman of Revelation 12 is the church, and she was given opportunity by the Lord to flee from the city before it was destroyed.

Read Matthew 24:14,31 and Revelation 10:7; 11:15. “This last parallel refers to the end of the period of persecution and visualizes the success of the church, when gospel emissaries (designated as *angels*) would proclaim the gospel to the four winds—‘from one end of heaven to the other’—as described in the Matthew account. And in Revelation the scene envisions the universal sway of the kingdom of Christ by the spread of the gospel, as the kingdoms of the world became the kingdoms of God and of his Christ. Both passages describe the universal expansion of Christianity after the destruction of Jerusalem.”¹⁷⁷

Review

1. Why was Jesus’ prediction concerning the temple so shocking to the disciples?
2. How did the Ephesians react to the false apostles?
3. Identify some of the similarities between Matthew 24:29-35 and Revelation 6:12-17.
4. What prophecy of Daniel did Jesus cite as the sign to flee the city?

REFUTING FALSE DOCTRINES

Max R. King's "A.D. 70 Doctrine"

Max R. King published a book in 1971 titled *The Spirit of Prophecy*. In his book, he writes, "The coming of Christ was the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism, and the receiving in marriage of his bride (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7, 8; 21:1-10). The wedding was ready when the city was burned (Matt. 22:7, 8), and *no man* can put 2,000 years *between* these two events. They are synchronous time-wise and event-wise."¹⁷⁸

In a debate with the late brother Gus Nichols, brother Max R. King affirmed the following proposition: "The Holy Scriptures teach that the second coming of Christ, including the establishment of the eternal kingdom, the day of judgment, the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead, occurred with the fall of Judaism in 70 A.D."¹⁷⁹ The debate is over 150 pages long, and can be viewed online at the link in the endnotes.¹⁸⁰

Brother Garland M. Robinson states this false doctrine "is known by a number of terms and phrases: The A.D. 70 Doctrine, Realized Eschatology, Kingism or the Max King Doctrine."¹⁸¹ King asserts, "Separating the book of Revelation from the fall of Judaism is a travesty upon the unity and harmony of God's word and his scheme of redemption."¹⁸² There are some who incorrectly assume that all who believe the book of Revelation was written before and generally points to the destruction of Jerusalem believe in King's "A.D. 70 Doctrine." This is not the case. Foy E. Wallace Jr. did not hold to King's heretical view; nor does Arthur M. Ogden; nor does this writer.

While King's treatise is long, Robinson does a good job of summarizing some of the major fallacies. Robinson identifies five of King's shortcomings as follows:

- "1. The church was not established on Pentecost in 33 A.D., but in A.D. 70."¹⁸³
- "2. The final judgment occurred in A.D. 70."¹⁸⁴
- "3. The resurrection of all the dead occurred in A.D. 70."¹⁸⁵
- "4. The end of the world occurred in A.D. 70."¹⁸⁶
- "5. The second coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70."¹⁸⁷

Robinson's 19-page refutation against the false "A.D. 70 Doctrine" is highly recommended for those who want to study this topic further. In general, King seems to have difficulty with the figurative language of the Scriptures, and with separating the second coming or final judgment from the Lord's coming in judgment upon individual nations. He says in his debate with Nichols, "Now, let us read a few statements from brother Nichols. First of all, this past February I listened to him at the Freed-Hardeman Lectureship and he said in his book, 'I challenge anyone to show that Jesus Christ came visibly in A.D. 70. He did not come visibly.' Well, I'm going to show you tonight that He did. Jesus said, 'then shall they SEE the Son of man COMING' (Matthew 24:30). What did He say they would do? SEE. What does 'see' mean? Jesus said in Matthew 16:28, 'Some of you standing here shall not taste of death till ye SEE the Son of man coming.' That's visible. To 'see' is to make something visible, and so I affirm the VISIBLE coming of Jesus Christ in the destruction of Jerusalem. And I affirm the ACTUAL coming, and the REAL coming of Jesus Christ in the destruction of Jerusalem. He says, 'when He says He is coming, that means literally, actually, visibly He is coming' – that is, he says that's

what Jesus meant. Why, I believe that's what He meant, too. There's no difference between brother Nichols and me on that."¹⁸⁸

Obviously, Nichols has reference to the second coming at the end of time, as all sound brethren do, not the coming in judgment against Jerusalem in the first century. King sees the two events as one and the same.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and their Literal View of 144,000

The Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a literal interpretation of Revelation 7:4, "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed." They believe there is a contrast between this number and the "great multitude which no one could number, of all nations" in verse 9 that demands a literal reading of verse 4.

"Note, however, the contrast that John draws between verses 4 and 9 of Revelation chapter 7. He states that the first group, 'those who were sealed,' has a definite number. However, the second group, 'a great crowd,' is without a definite number. With that in mind, it is logical to take the number 144,000 to be literal. If the number 144,000 were symbolic and referred to a group that is actually numberless, the force of the contrast between those two verses would be lost. Thus, the context strongly indicates that the number 144,000 must be taken literally."¹⁸⁹

This false doctrine leads the Jehovah's Witnesses to conclude that heaven is not the eternal home of all faithful Christians. They state that "resurrection to heaven is closely related to an assignment given only to *some* humans. On their last evening together, Jesus told his apostles that they would 'sit on thrones to judge' in his heavenly Kingdom. Thus, ruling with Jesus in heaven was to be their assignment.—Luke 22:28-30. Besides the apostles, other humans would be given this marvelous commission. In a vision, the apostle John saw Jesus with a group of resurrected ones in heaven described as 'a kingdom and priests to rule over the earth.' (Revelation 3:21; 5:10)"¹⁹⁰

This heresy can easily be refuted with Scriptures such as 2 Timothy 4:8, "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." Also, consider the words of Christ in Matthew 25:31-46, in which the Son of Man separates "all the nations" into two groups: the faithful would "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), while the unfaithful would be sent "into the everlasting fire prepared for the evil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). There are only two eternal destinations, and Christ imposes no numerical limitation on either group.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism is a false doctrine that has deceived a great number in the Protestant world. It is based in part on a literal application and a very twisted interpretation of the "one thousand years" of Revelation 20. While the heresy of premillennialism has been debunked and there are virtually no members of the church who hold to it today, it is so prevalent among

religiously-minded people that Christians must make themselves aware of it and how to refute it when their friends refer to it. Nichols wisely said, “Even if there were not a premillennialist among us, we would still have to teach the truth against the theory, for the denominations are flooding the world with it, teaching it over the radio and bringing it into our homes, and through their writings and from almost every pulpit among the sects we hear the echo of premillennialism.”¹⁹¹

Premillennialists adhere to several variations of this false doctrine. Coffman notes the complexity of this doctrine in his commentary on Revelation, and attempts to identify some of its most common elements.

“1. At the start of the millennium, Christ will literally return to earth and personally take charge of all things for literally one thousand years.

“2. He will reign from Jerusalem on the literal throne of David.

“3. The righteous dead shall be raised with immortal bodies to help the Lord reign over people with normal bodies.

“4. The Lord will personally convert the whole world, who, though they reject the gospel, will receive him.

“5. After 1,000 years, the Lord will suddenly turn the devil loose, and the Great Tribulation will follow.

“6. The righteous will be caught up (the Rapture) to escape all this.

“7. There will be a series of judgments ranging from two to seven, depending on the form of the theory believed.

“8. During the Great Tribulation, Enoch and Elijah, who never died, will return to earth, preach Christ, suffer martyrdom, and then be raised from the dead and go on preaching!

“9. The Jews will all be converted and rally around Christ in Jerusalem. Rejecting the gospel, they will nevertheless accept Christ!

“10. The church becomes a step-child, or a concubine, in all millennially related speculations. It will be totally swallowed up in the glories of the millennium.

“11. Resurrections are as plentiful as judgments, depending on the shade of the heresy advocated.

“12. Some even assert that the wicked dead will rise and be given a second chance to accept Christ.”¹⁹²

This doctrine has so many non-Scriptural elements, it is enough to make one’s head spin. It is difficult to understand how such a doctrine has deceived so many. “The interpretation of the premillennialists is that the thousand years of Revelation 20 comes after the next resurrection, which they say will be a resurrection of saints only, and then, they say Christ will reign a thousand years on earth, and raise the wicked dead at the end of the thousand years. However, the chapter does not say this. Furthermore, hard-to-be understood scriptures should be interpreted so as to have to clash with plain passages whose meaning is not in doubt. Four times in one chapter Christ says he will raise the righteous dead ‘at the last day.’ (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54.) Millennialists deny this, and say the righteous will be raised a thousand years before the last day, and that the wicked will be raised at the last day, or after a thousand years.”¹⁹³

“The majority of those who speculate upon these verses hold to the doctrine of premillennialism. They teach that the first resurrection is the resurrection of the dead saints at the

advent of Christ. They believe the first resurrection preceeds [sic] a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem. Needless to say, no doctrine of man was ever more void of proof. This text says nothing about a bodily resurrection of anyone. It does not mention the second coming of Christ, the reign of saints on the earth or the reign of Christ upon earth. The fact is, the scriptures no where indicate that Christ will ever set foot upon this earth again. The doctrines of premillennialism are highly materialistic and bear a close resemblance to the doctrines of the Jews who rejected Christ as the Messiah, crucified Him, and then persecuted His followers.”¹⁹⁴

A refutation of this doctrine begins with the fact that the “one thousand years” in Revelation 20 was not meant to be literal. As with much of the book of Revelation, the language is symbolic and should be understood and interpreted as such unless there is Scriptural or historical evidence to suggest otherwise. Is Satan a literal dragon or a literal serpent, and is he literally bound with a literal chain in a literally bottomless literal pit? If these are all symbolic, why is the one thousand years taken literally? If all these elements of Revelation 20 are to be taken literally, what is the basis for such an interpretation? What evidence is there that John was speaking here literally, in a book that was “signified” (Revelation 1:1) to the apostle?

“John said, ‘they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.’ The passage says nothing about ‘the thousand years reign of Christ.’ There is a great difference in the two expressions. Revelation 20 says, ‘they lived and reigned with Christ.’ They who? Lived—lived where? Reigned—how, with whom and where? ‘Lived and reigned’—with whom, in what place? It is not the reign of Christ, but the reign of souls ‘with Christ,’ that is mentioned in Revelation 20. There is a vast difference between living and reigning ‘with Christ’ and a millennial reign ‘of Christ.’ So let us be true to the facts in the case. It does not mention the reign of Christ, but the reign of souls ‘with’ him. They not only ‘reigned’ with him, they ‘lived’ with him. They ‘lived and reigned’ with Christ a thousand years. The two verbs ‘lived’ and ‘reigned’ are both limited by the thousand years. If the expression denotes time, then when the reign is over, and they ceased to reign; the living would be over and they would cease to live.”¹⁹⁵

Wallace is the seminal defender of the truth against the heresy of premillennialism. There is perhaps no finer work on the refutation of this false doctrine than his book, *God’s Prophetic Word: A Series of Addresses Delivered in the Music Hall in Houston, Texas, January 21-18, 1945, Exposing Modern Millennial Theories*. This volume was first published in 1946 and is available for online reading at the link in the endnotes, and is highly recommended for further study on the subject.¹⁹⁶

Review

1. Does belief in the early writing of Revelation necessarily lead one to believe the Max R. King “A.D. 70 Doctrine”?

2. How would you show the fallacy of Max R. King's "A.D. 70 Doctrine"?

3. What Scriptures would you point to in refuting the Jehovah's Witnesses literal interpretation of the 144,000?

4. Expose as many errors of premillennialism as you can, using the Scriptures.

END NOTES

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³ Ogden, Arthur M. (1996). *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets: Commentary on Revelation*. Dyersburg, TN: Ogden Publications, page 102.

⁴ Wallace, page 79.

⁵ Ogden, page 113.

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⁸ Ogden, page 123.

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¹¹ Coffman, James Burton. (1984). *Revelation*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, page 59.

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¹⁴ Copeland, Mark A. (2013). *The Book of Revelation: A Study Guide with Introductory Comments, Summaries, and Review Questions*. Retrieved from http://executableoutlines.com/pdf/rev_sg.pdf, page 25.

¹⁵ Wallace, page 128.

¹⁶ Coffman, page 105.

¹⁷ Blake, page 24.

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¹⁹ Blake, page 25.

²⁰ Ogden, page 186.

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²² Wallace, page 142.

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²⁶ Blake, page 28.

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²⁹ Blake, page 29.

³⁰ Wallace, page 156.

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³⁵ Wallace, page 166.

³⁶ Wallace, page 171.

³⁷ Wallace, page 173.

³⁸ Wallace, page 174.

³⁹ Blake, page 32.

⁴⁰ Wallace, page 182.

⁴¹ Blake, page 32.

⁴² Wallace, page 184.

⁴³ Wallace, page 187.

⁴⁴ Blake, page 33.

⁴⁵ Wallace, page 190.

⁴⁶ Ogden, page 241.

⁴⁷ Wallace, page 204.

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- ⁴⁸ Wallace, page 204.
⁴⁹ Ogden, page 247.
⁵⁰ Blake, page 35.
⁵¹ Wallace, page 212.
⁵² Wallace, page 213.
⁵³ Blake, page 36.
⁵⁴ Wallace, page 220.
⁵⁵ Blake, page 37.
⁵⁶ Wallace, pages 225-226.
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⁵⁸ Wallace, page 231.
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⁶¹ Ogden, page 263.
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⁶³ Wallace, page 264.
⁶⁴ Wallace, page 264.
⁶⁵ Blake, page 42.
⁶⁶ Wallace, page 281.
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⁷⁷ Ogden, pages 13,15.
⁷⁸ Blake, page 45.
⁷⁹ Blake, page 45.
⁸⁰ Wallace, page 313.
⁸¹ Wallace, pages 314-315.
⁸² Ogden, page 300.
⁸³ Blake, pages 46-47.
⁸⁴ Wallace, page 321.
⁸⁵ Coffman, page 105.
⁸⁶ Wallace, page 321.
⁸⁷ Wallace, page 321.
⁸⁸ Coffman, page 342.
⁸⁹ Ogden, pages 303-304.
⁹⁰ Coffman, pages 343-344.
⁹¹ Wallace, page 324.
⁹² Wallace, page 325.
⁹³ Blake, page 47.
⁹⁴ Wallace, page 338.
⁹⁵ Wallace, page 339.
⁹⁶ Wallace, page 340.
⁹⁷ Ogden, pages 314-315.
⁹⁸ Blake, page 47.
⁹⁹ Ogden, page 316.
¹⁰⁰ Wallace, page 341.
¹⁰¹ Coffman, page 364.
¹⁰² Blake, page 48.

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¹⁰⁴ Wallace, pages 342-343.
¹⁰⁵ Blake, page 48.
¹⁰⁶ Wallace, page 363.
¹⁰⁷ Blake, page 50.
¹⁰⁸ Wallace, page 264.
¹⁰⁹ Wallace, page 264.
¹¹⁰ Wallace, page 369.
¹¹¹ Wallace, page 90.
¹¹² Wallace, page 372.
¹¹³ Blake, page 50.
¹¹⁴ Wallace, page 375.
¹¹⁵ Wallace, page 378.
¹¹⁶ Blake, page 51.
¹¹⁷ Wallace, page 380.
¹¹⁸ Blake, page 51.
¹¹⁹ Wallace, pages 386-387.
¹²⁰ Blake, page 53.
¹²¹ Wallace, page 390.
¹²² Copeland, page 83.
¹²³ Wallace, page 390.
¹²⁴ Ogden, page 349.
¹²⁵ Coffman, page 440.
¹²⁶ Wallace, page 392.
¹²⁷ Ogden, page 351.
¹²⁸ Wallace, page 393.
¹²⁹ Wallace, page 395.
¹³⁰ Blake, page 54.
¹³¹ Copeland, page 83.
¹³² Ogden, page 356.
¹³³ Coffman, pages 455-456.
¹³⁴ Copeland, page 87.
¹³⁵ Wallace, page 411.
¹³⁶ Coffman, pages 448-449.
¹³⁷ Wallace, page 403.
¹³⁸ Wallace, page 412.
¹³⁹ Coffman, page 456.
¹⁴⁰ Coffman, page 457.
¹⁴¹ Wallace, page 416.
¹⁴² Coffman, page 449.
¹⁴³ Coffman, page 465.
¹⁴⁴ Blake, page 57.
¹⁴⁵ Ogden, page 363.
¹⁴⁶ Ogden, page 363.
¹⁴⁷ Coffman, page 468.
¹⁴⁸ Coffman, page 448.
¹⁴⁹ Wallace, page 423.
¹⁵⁰ Copeland, page 87.
¹⁵¹ Wallace, page 419.
¹⁵² Wallace, pages 422-423.
¹⁵³ Ogden, page 365.
¹⁵⁴ Ogden, page 371.
¹⁵⁵ Sanders, Phil. (no date). *The Book of Revelation*. Retrieved from http://www.wrcoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Revelation_class_book.pdf, page 55.
¹⁵⁶ Wallace, page 441.
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- ¹⁶⁰ Wallace, page 449.
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- ¹⁶² Wallace, page 451.
- ¹⁶³ Wallace, page 465.
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- ¹⁶⁶ Wallace, page 467.
- ¹⁶⁷ Wallace, page 471.
- ¹⁶⁸ Blake, page 61.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ogden, page 404.
- ¹⁷⁰ Blake, pages 61-62.
- ¹⁷¹ Wallace, page 475.
- ¹⁷² Ogden, page 405.
- ¹⁷³ Coffman, James Burton. (1984) *Matthew*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, page 382. [This is the only reference to Coffman's commentary on Matthew. All other Coffman citations in these endnotes refer to his commentary on Revelation.]
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- ¹⁷⁶ Wallace, pages 152-153.
- ¹⁷⁷ Wallace, page 43.
- ¹⁷⁸ King, Max R. (1990). *The Spirit in Prophecy*. Warren, OH: Parkman Road Church of Christ, Publisher, page 128.
- ¹⁷⁹ Nichols, Gus and Max R. King. (1973). *The Nichols-King Debate*. Warren, OH: Parkman Road Church of Christ, Publisher, page 1.
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- ¹⁹³ Nichols, page 134.
- ¹⁹⁴ Ogden, pages 359-360.
- ¹⁹⁵ Wallace, pages 402-403.
- ¹⁹⁶ Wallace, Foy E. Jr. (1960). *God's Prophetic Word: A Series of Addresses Delivered in the Music Hall in Houston, Texas, January 21-18, 1945, Exposing Modern Millennial Theories*. Oklahoma City, OK: Foy E. Wallace, Jr, Publications. This study does not quote from this book; all citations for Wallace refer to his Commentary on Revelation. The full text of *God's Prophetic Word* can be read online at <http://www.retainthestandard.com/Foy%20E%20Wallace%20-%20God's%20Prophetic%20Word.pdf>.