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The Book of Revelation

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



Many people shy away from this book because they assume it is hard to understand. Granted, there are manifold mysteries here –and some will not be solved until they actually unfold, but the reality is that the primary purpose of the book of Revelation is to unveil and disclose the full identity of Jesus Christ. He is the subject and focal point of this book. The book of Revelation was given by Jesus through John to help His bride, the Church, prepare to meet Him through obedience, repentance, and revival. It is a preview of His glory and majesty. It was written to help us live and relate to Jesus Christ in light of who He is right now and forevermore –the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS!

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(Edited and occasional added content by Dan Jones)

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The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Revelation 1:1-2

"1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2) who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."

We are about to launch into an overview of the book of Revelation. Many people shy away from this book because they assume it is hard to understand. Granted, there are manifold mysteries in this book. Some will not be solved until they actually unfold. I do not claim to be an authority on end-time prophecy and if that is your goal in studying this book I sincerely believe you have missed the stated purpose of the book.

The opening verse gives us the key to understanding the book of Revelation. Let's look at the first phrase very carefully, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." Bingo! The primary purpose of this book is to reveal, disclose, or unveil a full understanding of Jesus Christ. Understanding Jesus Christ in all of His fullness and glory is the theme, focus, purpose, and subject of this book. It is first and foremost a book about Christology and not primarily about end-time prophecy or Chronology.

Those who study this book solely for prophetic insight miss the first and primary stated purpose of this book. I was in that boat for a long time myself and frankly had fears, anxiety, and phobias of the end-times. Honestly, the book of Revelation troubled me deeply. I avoided it.

That radically changed when I saw the stated purpose of the book in this opening verse. I started studying the book through new lenses. My new pursuit in the book was to learn and understand more about Jesus Christ. Wow! I cannot describe how this has impacted my life and my relationship with Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is now one of my favorite books in the Bible. I no longer fear the end-times. I now love and revere the Lord of the end-times.

When I first saw this stated purpose years ago, it literally revolutionized the way I see and study the book of Revelation. Sure, I still look for clues about prophecy, but my first priority is to discover the amazing portraits of Jesus Christ developed in this book. Jesus Christ is my highest pursuit in life. He is infinitely more important than anything, anyone, any activity, or any relationship. An accurate understanding of Him determines the potential and parameters of our relationship with Him. It is all about Him.

Let me give you a brief preview of this dynamic. Verse 2 talks about the apostle John. Do you remember him? In the Gospel of John he simply referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 19:26) He pictured himself leaning back on Jesus during the final Passover meal. (John 13:23) John deeply valued his relationship with Jesus, but nothing prepared him for the Revelation he received in his latter days. After seeing his first vision of Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:17 says, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man..."

Nothing prepared John for this revelation of Jesus Christ. He was no longer the humble carpenter's son who lived and walked among men. In this book Jesus is revealed in the fullness of His glory. He was far beyond anything John could have thought or imagined. He was ... "the Almighty!" (Revelation 1:8)

I cannot stress this strongly enough. The primary purpose of the book of Revelation is to unveil or disclose the full identity of Jesus Christ. He is the subject and focal point of this book. This is the key that unlocks the book of Revelation. This is the vantage point from which we will approach this book. I trust this will be a blessing for you.

The Things That Must Shortly Take Place: Revelation 1:1

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,"

Are you like me? I used to trip on the first verse in the book of Revelation. I would read that phrase "and the things which must shortly take place" and silently think to myself; "I wonder what's taking Him so long? It's been almost 2,000 years. When are these things going to start happening?"

My problem was that I viewed the book of Revelation strictly as an "end-times prophecy book" rather than a guide to history, the whole church age and the end-times. I now realize that the book of Revelation has been continuously unfolding over the past 2,000 years. It is a very active and dynamic book. Let me elaborate:

Many of the things Jesus spoke to John about were unfolding in his day and John personally witnessed them. For example, John watched Revelation 1:18 happen. He was an eyewitness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and personally saw the ascension take place.

John could relate well to some of the things Jesus spoke about in the letters to the seven churches. He knew the church at Ephesus was leaving its first love. (Revelation 2:4). Furthermore, John was one of the Apostles who had promoted Nicolas to be among the seven deacons. (Acts 6:5) I imagine he watched with alarm as the error and deeds of the Nicolaitans took root and started spreading in the early church. He wrote the book of 1 John to help combat this error.

I had a church history professor at Bible college make a strong and convincing case that the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 very accurately described the past 2,000 years of church history. He went through each letter and meticulously described how they were fulfilled in church history. According to him, we are now living in the days of the church of Laodicea. (Revelation 3:14-22) His arguments have merit, though the weakness of each church can be seen in the body of Christ today as well. God used his class to help me see the dynamic and active nature of the book of Revelation.

Let me ask another question: "When did the scene in heaven described in Revelation 4-5 happen?" Was it part of the Revelation of the glory, identity, and majesty of Jesus Christ that John received when he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day? (Revelation 1:10) In other words, did John witness live coverage of the news as it unfolded? Wow! Jesus meant it when He mentioned, "the things that must shortly take place." Things started happening very quickly for John.

I must also note that Revelation 12 has a very broad paint brush. It is a look at all of history, including Satan's present day war against Israel and the church. In other words, the book of Revelation has always been active and dynamic. Many events in the book of Revelation are still future, some are now in the history books, others are unfolding before our very eyes. We are the ones getting live coverage of the news as it unfolds.

Why do I belabor this point? Peter pointed out in 2 Peter 3:3-4 that mockers would come in the end-time and in essence claim that, "God isn't doing anything and He hasn't done anything over a long span of human history." This will give birth to the end-time philosophy of naturalism and humanism. Unfortunately, it is very contagious and many Christians seem to be infected with it. Have you ever heard a Christian say, "God doesn't do miracles today!" They have a chronic case of "uniformitarianism." Liberals just call it the, "God is dead movement."

I do not share that passive view. I believe the whole Bible, but especially the book of Revelation is alive, active and powerful. Its heart has been beating, its lungs active and its muscles have been moving continuously over the past 2,000 years. Jesus is alive, sovereign, and very active. His Spirit has been at work throughout all of church history and He is working mightily in our day.

I trust this gives you a new perspective of the book of Revelation. Welcome to the living history, current news and future prophecy book. Welcome to "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His bond-servants the things that must shortly take place..."

Angelic Meditation: Revelation 1:1c

"... and he sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond servant John."

On three occasions when God had an important message for His servants, He used the angel Gabriel as a mouthpiece. This was true twice for the prophet Daniel in both Daniel 8:16 and 9:21. It was also true for the young Virgin Mary as recorded in Luke 1:19 and 26. In the case of Apostle John in the book of Revelation, the angel is not named. Some believe this was Gabriel as well.

In Colossians 2:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul issued a warning about false and misleading angels who can lead people astray from Christ and the truth. He warned that Satan himself casts himself as angel of light to deceive people. Generally speaking, God does not

communicate with people through angels. I get nervous and run quickly when someone tells me they have been communicating with an angel. They are more likely channeling a demonic spirit.

Having sounded that caution, there is a lot of angelic activity seen in the Bible. Many are silent servants that protect and care for God's people as seen in Hebrews 1:14. This is where the concept of "guardian angels" most likely comes from in Scripture. Others carry out specific tasks for God. Another large group is dedicated solely to the praise and worship of God as pictured in Revelation 4-5. Angels are real. They are powerful. They are active in the world. And there are many of them.

The book of Revelation reveals more angelic activity than the rest of the Bible combined. The angelic army of God is very big. (Psalm 68:17, Revelation 12:7-8) The book of Revelation pulls the curtain back on the spiritual realm. It is an amazing book. Be prepared to have your worldview stretched. You cannot hold to the humanistic philosophy of naturalism and accept the worldview espoused by the book of Revelation at the same time. The invisible realm is real. The spiritual battle between the kingdoms of light and darkness is also real.

Divine Endorsement: Revelation 1:1c-2

"1) ... and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2) who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."

You might be thinking that these are not very exciting verses. I would encourage you to slow down and take a closer look. Jesus just wrapped his arms around all of the letters John had previously written and said "I approve!" How do I get that from these verses? Well, let's take a closer look.

That little phrase, "Who testified of the word of God" intrigues me. The Gospel of John opened with an exposition of Jesus being the Word of God. Comparing John 1:1 with John 1:14 we read; "1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The whole Gospel of John had been written to establish the testimony of Jesus.

Notice also the last phrase in Revelation 1:2 says, "even to all that he saw." It is hard for me to read this phrase and not think of 1 John 1:1-4 that says; "1) What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life- 2) and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us- 3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4) and these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete."

I see Revelation 1:1-2 as a major endorsement of the previous inspired writings of the Apostle John. He already had amazing insight into the person and identity of Jesus Christ. He was now being hand-picked to be the instrument to deliver the book of Revelation. Jesus knew that John would be faithful to record all that he saw in the vision that was entrusted to him.

Having studied the previous writings of John, I marvel at what happened to him in this opening chapter of the book of Revelation when He saw Jesus Christ in the fullness of His glory. Revelation 1:17 says, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man." Jesus was no longer the humble carpenter's son who lived and walked among men performing miracles and speaking of the Kingdom of God. He ascended into Heaven and took His royal place next to His Father. He stepped back into the fullness of His glory.

No matter who you are or how well you think you know Jesus, you will be gloriously shocked when you stand before Him face-to-face someday. The book of Revelation was given by Jesus through John to help prepare the bride to meet Him. It was written as a preview of His glory and majesty. It was written to help you and me transition now into living and relating to Jesus in light of who He is and not who He was when He walked among men.

I challenge you to upgrade your walk with Jesus by downloading the "Revelation" app into your spirit. Caution: This download takes time but it will change you!

The Amazing Promise: Revelation 1:3

"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."

The book of Revelation opens with a profound promise. It pronounces a blessing on those who read or hear this book and heed the things written in it. This is the only book in the Bible with this unique blessing.

I have mentioned this previously, but I have a dramatized audio Bible App on both my cell phone and iPad called "Bible Is". It is a free download. We often listen to the Bible in the background as we sleep throughout the night. I often wear earphones so as not to disturb people around me when I am traveling, a guest in someone's home, or at a conference center somewhere.

This is one of the ways I keep my "Word Tank" full. I especially enjoy the books of Psalms, Proverbs, the four Gospels, Acts, and the book of Revelation. I have listened to these hundreds of times.

During the past few months I have focused more on the book of Revelation. It has been an amazing blessing. I have grown to love this book. God has used the letters to the seven churches to search me and know me and convict me of sin in my life. You cannot read or listen to the book of Revelation without being exposed in some way. It will call you to personal repentance. The Holy Spirit will prompt you to "heed the things that are written in these letters."

The book of Revelation was written as a revival book. It was intended to call the church to repentance and obedience in preparation for wedding day. "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."

First Impressions: Revelation 1:4

"4) "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,"

First impressions are important. The first thing John introduces about Jesus is that He is eternal. He is, He was, and He is to come. He has neither beginning of days nor end of life. He always was and He always will be.

You and I cannot not make that statement about ourselves. We had a starting point. Human life begins at conception. It can be said that the human soul and spirit always will be moving forward into the future, but that is very different from Jesus Christ. He has eternal life both past and future.

He was both Creator and Savior. He is the Resurrected Christ. He is coming back as the King of King and the Lord of Lords. Notice at the end of verse 4, He has a throne. He is royalty. Who is this guy? Do you know Him?

The Seven Spirits: Revelation 1:4

"... and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,"

I was having a discussion with a Jehovah's Witness about the trinity. They do not recognize the Deity of Jesus Christ nor the personhood of the Holy Spirit. After I mentioned that the Holy Spirit has independent intelligence, emotion and will, and is therefore a person and not a force, the man threw me a curve ball.

He took me to Revelation 1:4 and asked, "There are seven Spirits before God, which one is the Holy Spirit?" I looked at the verse and drew a total blank. They are trained at proof texting and asking perplexing questions.

I prayed a short prayer for wisdom, took a deep breath and said, "Well..." I was stalling. Suddenly, I remembered something from theology class back at Bible College. The Greek word for spirit is "pneuma". It can be translated as "wind, breath, spirit, (an evil spirit), spirit of man, Spirit of God or angel." The context determines the usage. Hebrews 1:14 is a perfect example of the word "spirits" clearly referring to angels in the context.

I then pointed out the number 7 all through chapter one. There are seven churches, seven spirits, seven golden lampstands and seven stars. Verse 20 ties them all together by talking about the "angels of the seven churches." I then argued that it was clear from the context that John was talking about angels in verse 4 as well. It made for a good conversation.

Why are there only seven churches mentioned in the text? I don't know. Why weren't the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, the Galatian region, Corinth, Philippi, Colossi, Thessalonica, or Rome mentioned? I don't know. Does each church actually have an angel assigned to it? It appears so. Isn't that interesting?

We are not to get distracted by angels, but Jesus does have body guards for His bride. He takes care of His own. Make sure the church you are attending is "His Church" and not just a social gathering or a mere human institution.

How did my conversation with the Jehovah's Witness turn out? Only eternity will reveal the answer. He was not open to the Deity of Jesus Christ or the biblical person and work of the Holy Spirit. I always try to part on friendly terms and display the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, I think I was put on their "Do not visit list." It was the last time they stopped at our house. That was nearly 20 years ago.

The Kingdom of Jesus Christ: Revelation 1:5-6

"5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood, 6) and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father –to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Jesus had a purpose that went way beyond Himself. Death could not keep Him. He has a position much higher than any king or president. He rules over them. What He accomplished on the cross freed us from our sins. The chains of guilt and shame were broken. He liberated us and set us free.

He then transferred us into His own Kingdom. In Colossians 1:13-14 Paul describes this as being "delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son." We now live and conduct ourselves by new rules. Some refer to these as "Kingdom Principles." The change is as radical as moving from the darkest darkness into the brightest light. It is transforming.

In this kingdom we become priests to God. This hints at an amazing doctrine called "the priesthood of the believer." It is not for a select few who have restricted access to God. It is the call and position of every believer. Jesus is our high priest, and according to Hebrews 4:14-16 He sympathizes with us and He is approachable. The result is recorded in verse 16; "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We now have instant access to the throne of grace. We have no curtains, walls, barriers, or separation from God. We are in a new relationship with God and have been set free from our bondage to sin and to Satan. Welcome to the Revelation of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Coming Again: Revelation 1:7

“7) Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”

One of the primary doctrines of the Christian faith relates to the second coming of Jesus Christ. There are animated discussions as to when the rapture will take place, but there is little debate about the fact that Jesus is coming again. Some hold to a pre-tribulation rapture, some to a mid-tribulation rapture, others have a view called pre-wrath and others hold to a post-tribulation rapture, while still others avoid the subject altogether. They believe the church is to change the world so as to create a kingdom utopia on earth. I'm not banking on that plan.

The longer I'm a Christian and the more I study Scripture the clearer it becomes to me that the biblical focus is not on us or the rapture, it is on Jesus and His return. Let's look at some Scriptures that highlight this proposition.

The question of the disciples to Jesus in Matthew 24:3 illustrates this point. “3) As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Notice they didn't even ask about the rapture. Why? They were focusing on Jesus and not on themselves. I have come to believe that the whole conversation of the end-times will be divisive as long as it is “self-centered” instead of “Jesus-centered.”

Acts 1:6-11 is another prime example. After His resurrection, the disciples were questioning Him about when He was going to set up His earthy kingdom. After talking about the promise of the Holy Spirit and the call to world evangelism, an unexpected event took place. Let's look it.

“9) And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10) And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11) And they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”” (Acts 1:9-11 NASB)

Notice, the focus is not on the church or the rapture, it is on the promise that Jesus is coming again. This is a profound text of Scripture. The return of Jesus is the focus.

From my perspective, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 does the same thing. “15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not

precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words."

This is the text that the concept of the rapture is built upon. I fully believe Christians will be "caught up", I just don't know when. Again, the trigger point in the context is not the church being caught up, rather it is the second coming of Jesus Christ and the implication of that doctrine on Christians. Jesus is coming again!

If you want to study the book of Revelation to solve the mystery of the rapture, you will be greatly disappointed. The focus of this book is not on the rapture either, rather it is on Jesus and His return to set up His kingdom.

I have discovered that focusing on Jesus and the promise of His second coming unites and heals, but focusing on the us and details about the rapture divides and wounds. I have opinions about the rapture and when it might happen and they have changed over the years. One opinion is that rapture remains a mystery in Scripture to motivate us to focus on Jesus and not on ourselves. If you are expecting me to settle this mystery in this study, you will be greatly disappointed.

The biblical focus is being faithful to our call here and now and not on our sitting around waiting for our departure. The focus is on a welcoming committee and not an escape plan. The focus is on His coming and not on our leaving. The focus is on the fact that Jesus is coming again.

(My very first mission trip was to the Dominican Republic in 2015. Wherever we went in and around the capital city of Santo Domingo there were these blue-and-white handmade signs on telephone poles, buildings, signs, and everywhere that said, "Cristo Viene." The translation is "Christ is coming back" and the implication is "soon." -dj)

The Alpha and the Omega: Revelation 1:8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

If you have a red letter Bible, you know that the words spoken by Jesus in the gospels are in red. Look also at these opening chapters in Revelation. In my version, verse 8 is mostly in red. Verse 11 is also red. And then Verses 17b all the way through the end of chapter three are red. Why? Because Jesus Himself is speaking, but his voice is now very different than the one John knew so well.

John had to adjust to this new voice of Jesus. Notice after Jesus spoke just a little bit in verse 8, John commented on His voice in verse 10... it was a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet.

Then Jesus spoke a little bit more in verse 11 and in verse 15 and John commented again on His new voice; "And His voice was like the sound of many waters."

Let me say it again, John had to adjust to this new voice. Jesus no longer whispered or spoke like a mere mortal. He now spoke with the voice of absolute authority. By the way, this is the voice He used in dictating the letters to the seven churches. He wants us to listen to Him.

Ok, back to verse 8. Jesus starts by saying "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters in the Greek alphabet. It includes the idea of "the beginning and the end" or "the first and the last." It has the idea of "everything in between" or "the whole thing." It encompasses "all."

He then returns to the phrase used in verse 4; "Who is and who was and is to come, the Almighty." This is profound. Jesus claims eternal pre-existence as the Almighty.

The "was" is a reference to His past historical activity. It refers to His past work of creation. According to John 1:3, Jesus performed the work of creation. Hebrews 1:2 presents this same truth. It also refers to His past work and activity all through the Old Testament. (See 1 Corinthians 1:1-4). It is also a reference to His work in the four Gospels, including His death, burial, and resurrection. It encompasses His finished work of purchasing our salvation. It has been said that "history" is "His-story."

Technically, the "is" started the moment He stepped into His present glorified state. This started with His ascension and glorification. It ushered in the giving of the Holy Spirit that marked the beginning of the Church Age, His intercession role at the right hand of the Father and His position as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The "is" encompasses the full vision of Himself that He presents to us in the book of Revelation. He has been in this role for nearly 2,000 years. He wants us to know Him in the fullness of His "is" and not just the accomplishments of His "was." The reason the "is" always comes first in these verses is because He wants us to know Him in the present tense and not just His past tense roles.

The designation of "who is to come", marks His future role for all eternity. Paul hints at this in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. It is a future mystery. I do not have much to say about this coming mystery. I simply encourage you to read those verses.

Sufficient to say that something amazing is coming in the future and as believers and the Bride of Christ we will in some mysterious way be a part of what is to come. What will that be? I don't know. I cannot even begin to imagine. My finite mind locks up at this point. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul says; "but just as it is written, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

Tribulation and Persecution: Revelation 1:12

"I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

The Island of Patmos was a small rocky island of about 30 miles in circumference. It is located in the Aegean Sea about 45 miles west of Miletus. The name Patmos literally means "my killing." The Romans used it as a place of banishment for political prisoners who were often forced to work in a mine that was on the island.

The Apostle John was there because of "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." His life was devoted to spreading the gospel. The Romans had learned it was counterproductive to kill the Christian leaders. Their martyrdom only emboldened the Christians and caused the gospel to spread more rapidly.

John was clear to state that he was a "fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus." He may have been identifying himself with the other Apostles who had already suffered their fate at the hands of the Romans or he may have simply been acknowledging the harsh persecution that had come on the entire Christian church. Rome was seeking to wipe out the Christians altogether. Their resulting tribulation was real and harsh. John was calling the church to persevere.

History is sketchy about how it happened, but John was eventually released from the Island of Patmos. He was the only Apostle to die a natural death. His last days may have been spent in the catacombs below the streets of Rome itself. These were literally a network of tombs the early Christians dug into the sandstone-like sediment below the city. It is rumored that the remains of Peter and Paul were also buried there after their fate in the Roman Colosseum. Hundreds of early Christians met their fate in the colosseum and the catacombs became their burial ground. To the Romans it was just a graveyard for the Christian church.

However, little did the Romans realize, but the early Christians had more than tombs in the catacombs. Shortly they turned it into a maze of caves, tunnels, and corridors that also housed many Christians who were fleeing from the persecution happening in the city above. New life always emerges from death. It is part of the Christian message.

It was there that the early church hid their aged and beloved Apostle John. Toward the end of his life they would carry him on a cot into their underground church gatherings. Church history tells us he would gather his strength, raise himself up, and address the church and simply say; "Beloved, let us love one another". That was the message of his final days.

Against this backdrop the message of the book of Revelation was received by the church. To them it was very timely, literal, relevant, and real. It gave them the perseverance to eventually conquer the heart of Rome itself by a sacrificial love that defied explanation. Rome eventually

adopted Christianity as its state religion. Soon they were building cathedrals instead of catacombs. This caused another death to the simple gospel message. The slow death of prosperity may be worse than the suffering of persecution.

In the Spirit: John 1:10

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,"

John stresses the point that he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." This is only possible for a born-again and Spirit-filled Christian. God created us as body, soul, and spirit. Born-again Christians are also filled with the Holy Spirit. This means there are four potential levels of consciousness. Let me briefly touch on each:

First, is body or "flesh" consciousness. This is governed by the five human senses of taste, touch, smell, hearing, and seeing. It is also influenced by basic drives and hormones that control such things as thirst, hunger, and sexual drives. These are amazing gifts from God. At this level we experience consciousness of the world around us. Some people live their whole lives at this level.

Second, is soul consciousness. The soul is the seat of the intellect, emotion, and will. This is where we think, reason, feel, and decide. The soul is shaped by experience, education, study, philosophy, and interaction with others. This is where our worldview is formed and this becomes the seat of our personality. God wants us to work on personal growth and development. He wants us to sharpen our minds and develop talents and abilities. Many people go through life at this rational or platonic level and are agnostic or atheists when it comes to the next two levels.

Third, is spirit consciousness. Notice the small "s" in spirit. This is referring to the human spirit. It is the seat of the human conscience and intuition. This is where "god consciousness" takes place and where the phenomenon of religion or worship happens. It is where mankind connects with the spiritual realm. Keep in mind, there are many religions and many spirits in the world. It is entirely possible to be deceived and misled at this level even though a person is otherwise spiritual. Demonic influence and channeling can and does happen at this level. Being religious is not the same as biblical salvation.

Fourth, is Spirit consciousness. Notice the capital "S" on Spirit. This is the condition of a born-again Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit, walking in the Spirit and in tune with the voice of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul was talking about in Galatians 5:16-24 when he instructed Christians to "walk in the Spirit." This is the level where the spiritual gifts begin to function. Let me clarify, a Christian is called to live and function on all four levels. We still need good nutrition, exercise, education, personal growth, and people skills. These are essential. But we also need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind and put on the "new self." We need to learn how to live, walk, and worship "in the Spirit."

Let me issue a caution, being a Christian doesn't mean a person is automatically "in the Spirit." It is possible to be a Christian and not live or walk in the Spirit. Christians can grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. It is possible to be carnal, worldly, and self-centered. This results in being out of fellowship with God. It is entirely possible to be a Christian and not be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day."

John was experiencing 1 Corinthians 2:4-16 in overdrive. The Holy Spirit was in control and was speaking to Him. He was in undistracted and uninterrupted communion with God. He was not being distracted by the static of his flesh, his soul, or his human spirit. He was "in the Spirit." Unfortunately, this concept is foreign to many Christians, but God calls each of us into this deep, personal, and intimate communion with Himself.

Let me give a few cautions. When the Holy Spirit speaks, He is always within the boundaries of Scripture. When the Holy Spirit works, He is always within the boundaries of the character and nature of God. When the Holy Spirit moves, it is always in a God-ward direction. When the Holy Spirit teaches, it is always to increase the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit anoints, it is always filled with the fruit of the Spirit. He is not random. He is not foolish or filled with confusion. He is not shameful or immoral. He is not exploitive or deceitful.

On the one hand Scripture warns us to not be deceived and on the other hand it commands us to walk in the Spirit. Do not fear the Holy Spirit and do not be shy to seek Him. We are each called to build our own walk with God. We are invited to enjoy fellowship with God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are admonished to walk in the Spirit. Jesus gave us the promise of the Holy Spirit for a reason. He removed the walls of sin and of guilt so we can enjoy communion with God. Let me encourage you to set aside some time each day to be "in the Spirit."

Turning Toward Jesus: Revelation 1:10 & 12-13

"10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

12) Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lamp stands; 13) and in the middle of the lamp-stands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden girdle."

Are you turning toward Jesus? Three times in this text John mentioned that he was positioned wrong related to Jesus. The voice was behind him. He had to turn to see the voice that was speaking to him. It is when he turned that he saw Jesus in all of His glory.

Some people never see Jesus because they go through life with their backs toward Him. They allow some hurt, disappointment, or deception to keep them from seeking Jesus. In these cases Satan wins. His goal is to drive people from Jesus.

I don't want to take this too far, but the word "repent" means "to turn, to have a change of heart." Jesus is going to use the word "repent" several times in the next few chapters in calling His church back to Himself.

If you want to know Jesus, you need to turn toward Him. You need to seek Him. You need to come to Him on His terms. There are many people who go through life with their back toward Jesus. If that is you, then you need to turn toward Him. He will not force you to turn. He will speak and you need to respond.

In John 10:27 Jesus said; "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me". You cannot follow Jesus with your back toward Him. If Jesus is speaking to you, then you need to turn and follow Him. You need to respond to His voice. You need to "turn" toward Him. The first three chapters of Revelation are about Jesus speaking to His Church and calling her back to Himself. Revival happens when God's people turn back to Him.

Let me repeat the first part of verse 12 for emphasis; "Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw... " You will not see Jesus until you turn toward Him.

Love Letter to His Bride: Revelation 1:11

"11) saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

This verse leaves us with more questions than answers. Why these churches? Why only seven churches? There were many more churches in the days in which John lived and wrote than just these. Is it significant that there are seven churches in this verse? The number seven is used over and over again in this chapter. Unfortunately, I do not have answers to these questions.

However, I do think it is significant that Jesus told John to write to the churches. This is not a letter to the world. It is not an evangelistic tract like the Gospel of John. This is a letter to His people. This is a letter to His bride. It is a letter to warn and prepare His people for difficult times. It was intended to be an encouragement.

Ephesians 5:25-27 gives us a beautiful backdrop for this letter. Let's review these verses. "25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26) that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

According to these verses, Jesus speaks to His church for a reason. He wants to sanctify and cleanse her. He wants to prepare her for the wedding day. He wants her to be glorious and spotless. He wants her to be holy and blameless on the wedding day. The book of Revelation ends with a marriage. Look at Revelation chapter 19.

This might be a different spin on the book of Revelation, but this is a love letter from Jesus to His church. It is a letter that spans the whole church age. It is a letter that warns His bride of difficult times to come and assures her of His love and faithfulness.

One thing for sure— Jesus never gives up on His bride. There are five basic parts to the book of Revelation. The first part includes the love letters of Jesus to the Churches. The second part of the book is a warning of Satan's coming persecution of Israel and the church. The third part of the book is the story of how Jesus is going to turn the table on anti-Christ and pour out vengeance, wrath, and judgment on the evil system of the world. The fourth part of the book is a picture of the wedding day. The book ends with a brief picture of eternity and the new heavens and the new earth. This is a glimpse of the mansion Jesus is preparing for His bride. (John 14:1-6)

Let me say it again, Jesus never gives up on His bride. His eyes and heart are with His bride. Take courage, if you belong to Jesus He will never forsake you.

The Vision of Jesus Christ: Revelation 1:12-16

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

I have been working on memorizing this vision of Jesus. It is a picture of Him in His glory. This is the way we need to see Him. The book of Revelation needs to become our understanding of Jesus Christ. This is who He "now is." He has little resemblance to the humble carpenter's son who lived and walked among men. We need to fix this picture of Jesus in our mind and our spirit.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 adds a valuable insight of Jesus and His incomprehensible glory. Spend a moment pondering this verse. "8) Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;" Think of it, there will be no need for hand-to-hand combat between Jesus and Satan. The evil one will literally be blown away by the "appearance of His coming."

Revelation 19:11-16 does a great job of filling in this picture of Jesus returning in His glory. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Do you have the right view of Jesus Christ as He now is?

Jesus Speaks: Revelation 1:17-18

"17) When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18) and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Spending three years with Jesus did not prepare John for the vision he saw in verses 12-16. When he saw Jesus he fell at his feet as a dead man. Whatever your view of Jesus, He is infinitely more!

I like the way Jesus approached John. He touched him. From the text it appears to be a gentle touch. He placed His right hand on him and said "Do not be afraid!"

Let me assure you that Jesus wants to touch you as well. He wants you to lay aside your fears in His presence. We all have fears and phobias. Meeting Jesus is the fear-buster. They fall and melt away in His presence.

He wants us to know Him as the first and the last. He also wants us to know Him as everything in between. Do you fear for your health? He is the Great Physician! Do you fear for food or daily supply? He is the Provider! Do you fear for safety? He is the Protector! Do you fear for your life? He is the Resurrection and the Life! He died on the cross for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead. He is alive forever more! Do you fear your destiny in eternity? He has the keys of death and of Hades! Satan forfeited those keys to Jesus.

Jesus is saying to John that it all comes down to Him. Jesus is everything! You need to come to Jesus in simple saving faith. You need to invite Him into your life and make Him both Savior and King. You need to know Him from the four Gospels and you need to know Him from the book of Revelation. Life and eternity are not about us. They are about Jesus Christ and knowing Him.

Ok John, Start Writing: Revelation 1:19

"19) Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."

What a change Jesus had made in the life of John! He had grown from being a fisherman in a family-owned business to being an Apostle and a writer. (See Matthew 4:21-22) In fact, God used him to write five books of the New Testament!

I doubt he had any idea on that fateful day when he stepped out to follow Jesus that God would use him to impact the world for generations to come. Small steps of obedience can have huge ramifications. His job was simply to tell the story of what he saw.

He did it in the Gospel of John. In that book he just wrote the story of the three years he spent with Jesus when He walked among men. Jesus was the focal point of his story and not himself. That's important! John is never pictured in the New Testament as a powerful preacher in the spotlight. To the contrary, he just sat in the shadow of Peter writing and recording. He was now being asked to write the story of his vision.

At this point John was an old man, relatively alone and he was a prisoner on the island called Patmos, but God wasn't finished with him yet. Jesus commanded John to share the story of what he had seen. He was to put his vision into written form. God was calling Him to write what he had seen. He was about to give the world a picture of "the things that are, and the things which will take place after these things." He was about to pen the most amazing revelation of God, the truth about present reality and the things to come ever written.

This verse reminds me that as Christians it our job is to tell the story, but it is God's job to move the mountain. It is our job to be faithful to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is God's job to change lives and fulfill His Word.

I love the story of Moses. "The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." (Exodus 4:2) God can even use a man with a stick as long as the stick is dedicated to God.

I don't know what God is calling you to do. You might want to ask yourself; "What has God put in my hand?" "What is God doing in my life?" "Do I have a story to tell?" Maybe take another step, ask yourself; "What is the Holy Spirit whispering in my heart?" These are good starting points. I do know that God uses ordinary people in humble circumstances to do extraordinary things. Just start doing it the best you can where you're at and let God do the rest.

Let your light shine: Revelation 1:20

"20) As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

The one thing that stars and lamps have in common is that they both shine and give light. Jesus wants His churches to be radiant. He wants them to "shine" the light. He wants His churches to literally be lighthouses for the gospel to point the world to Him.

The basic meaning of the Greek word "aggeios" that is translated as "angels" in this verse is "to bring a message, announce, proclaim or report." The same word is sometimes translated as "bishop." The emphasis is on the messenger entrusted to bring a message from God to and through the church. Some scholars believe this is referring to the preaching pastor in the church.

The Greek word for "churches" is "ekklesis." This is referring to the congregation. It is referring to a gathering or community of those who have experienced salvation. Every individual believer is to shine, but the collective body of believers are to shine even brighter as churches.

Acts 1:8 says, "(8) but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." The compound witness of many Christians should become like a radiant star. Are you getting the picture? It is about the light shining through the church.

I cannot read this verse without thinking of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16 as He launched into the sermon on the mount. "(13) You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (14) You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; (15) nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The gospel has to be both seen and heard through the church. It includes both the deeds of God's people as the hands and feet of Jesus to the world and the verbal message proclaimed through the church and congregation as the mouthpiece of Jesus to the world. In the next two chapters as Jesus sends a letter to each of the seven churches, He is going to measure both their deeds and their message.

In Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus doesn't promise to build every church. He only promises to build His church. I am afraid there are many buildings filled with people that call themselves a church that have long ago stopped shining. It is nearly impossible to find biblical truth or gospel in them. The salt has become tasteless and the light has gone out! They are no longer lamps or shining stars. It is nearly impossible for people to hear the gospel or get saved in one of these churches. They definitely are not growing in Christ. If you are in one of those churches, pack up and leave.

If you want the presence of Jesus in your life and in your church, you better measure yourself by the Great Commission. That is exactly what Jesus is about to do in the letters to the seven churches. He encourages them to turn up the light. He admonishes them to shine.

Bible Study with Purpose: Revelation 2-3

As Jesus writes to the seven churches, He uses parallel literary style. It is almost like He is working off the same evaluation form. Before we look at each letter individually, let's briefly review the format Jesus uses:

First, He names each church. Jesus treats every church as a separate and unique entity. In the case of the first church, He simply says, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus. (Rev 2:1) He opens each letter the same way. He knows us as individuals as well. He knows our name.

Second, He relates something about Himself from the vision in Chapter One to each church. In the case of the first church it is, "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden land stands." There was something about Jesus they needed to embrace. Jesus is all-sufficient for our needs.

Third, He reviews their strengths. In the case of the church at Ephesus it is recorded in verses 2-3. He starts by saying "I know your deeds." That is very encouraging. He also acknowledges their trials. I believe Jesus does the same to us as individuals. What are you going through? Jesus knows it. He is a God of encouragement.

Fourth, He points out their weakness. In verse 4, He tells the church at Ephesus that they had left their first love. That was a serious problem. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit in our life is to convict us of sin. He is in a constant purifying process in our lives and in His church. We need to welcome this role.

Fifth, when needed, He calls the church to repentance. Repentance is not a one-time thing. We need to turn from sin whenever and wherever the Spirit of God convicts us. Five of the seven churches were called to repentance. There is both corporate repentance and individual repentance. Churches need to repent as a whole. This often ignites the fire of revival. (See 2 Chronicles 7:14) We as individuals also need to repent of our sins. This pulls down walls in our lives and removes discipline.

Sixth, He calls each church to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. God is constantly speaking to His bride through His Spirit. We need to be listening.

Finally, He concludes each letter with a promise. Jesus wants His people to embrace His promises.

If you look at the basic format in these two chapters an amazing Bible Study tool emerges. Approaching the Bible with questions in mind helps the text come alive. Here are some questions to ask when you are studying any text of Scripture in your Bible. It might be helpful to print out some pages with these seven questions for your personal Bible studies.

Seven Important Bible Study Questions:

1. Who is God speaking to in this text?
2. What can I learn about God from this text?
3. What good examples can I follow in this text?
4. What negative behavior should I avoid in this text?
5. What sins should I confess and repent from in this text?
6. What is the Holy Spirit trying to say to me from this text?
7. What promises can I claim from this text?

Warning: You will most likely lose track of time when you start studying your Bible with purpose.

Letter to the Drifting Church: Revelation 2:1-7

Occasionally when I'm preaching on this text, I ask people to open their Bibles to the book of 2nd Ephesians. That is usually met with blank expressions. Then I qualify, "open your Bibles to Revelation 2:1-7." Yes, this is the very same church Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to some years earlier.

According to verses 2-3 they had done well in many areas. Let's review the text: "(2) I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary." It sounds like they were working hard and were defending their theology well against false teaching. I take my hat off to them.

But Jesus points out a problem with this church in verse 4; "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Jesus wants more than head knowledge, He wants a heart relationship. This reminds me of Ephesians 5:22-33 where Jesus compares the Christian life to a marriage. It is intended to be a tender love relationship.

This text also reminds me of the question Jesus asked Peter three times after His resurrection in John 21:15-17, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter knew Jesus. Peter had followed Jesus. In Matthew 16:16 Peter had even passed his theology test. Peter was trying to serve Jesus even though he denied him three times. However, in these verses Jesus exposed a serious problem within Peter. He didn't love Jesus with all of his heart. When it came down to it, it appeared that his love for fishing was greater than his love for Jesus.

A relationship with Jesus is not based on religious rituals, repetitious ceremonies, reciting mental creeds or going through ordinances like baptism or taking communion. A relationship with Jesus is based on love. In fact, in the very next verse in Revelation 2:5 Jesus calls the church at Ephesus to repent before their lamp was removed. At the very least Jesus was warning that their light was growing dim, flickering, and about to go out.

It is easy to tell when a person passionately loves Jesus. You can see it in their face. You can also tell within a few minutes of a worship service if the church truly loves Jesus. There is sincerity, passion, and tender expression in the way they worship Jesus. You cannot fake love.

When I read Revelation 2:1-7, I take time to evaluate my love relationship with Jesus. This is a serious matter. Church history tells us that within one generation after receiving this sober warning, the church at Ephesus closed its doors permanently and went out of existence.

I do not minimize the importance of good theology, but I am more concerned about a person's heart relationship with Jesus Christ. When the heat is turned up and trials come your way, it is a genuine love relationship with Jesus that will impart the grace to carry you across the finish line. Do you sincerely love Jesus?

Letter to the Suffering Church: Revelation 2:8-11

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

This letter was very applicable to the early church and the persecution and martyrdom that it endured. Jesus has nothing negative to say about this church. He simply starts verse nine by saying "I Know." These are the words of Jesus to every Christian who is suffering. "I Know!" Our suffering by no means escapes His notice.

The mention of the "synagogue of Satan" at the end of verse nine highlights the fact that Satan hates Christians. He is out to destroy them. According to Revelation 12:17, he is in a perpetual state of war against Christians. Do not be surprised when persecution is aimed against you as a Christian.

Verse ten starts with the admonition "do not fear what you are about to suffer." Though I fully acknowledge the amazing blessings of knowing Jesus, I also recognize the doctrine of suffering. Christians are not immune to suffering. Some suffering comes our way because we are Christians. In some places around the world being a Christian is a death sentence. For the early church the suffering was real and severe. Jesus called them to be faithful until death.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs records the stories of many of these early Christians who loved Jesus more than life itself. Many met their fate in the Roman Colosseum. Others were hunted down and killed all across the Roman Empire. Every one of the early Apostles but John died a martyr's death. Thomas died in India. He gave his life to bring the gospel to the east.

The letter to the church of Smyrna blows holes in the prosperity gospel. Being a Christian is not a ticket to health, wealth, and prosperity. To the contrary, throughout history and in many countries today being a Christian is a pathway to suffering, tribulation, and death.

It is no wonder that Jesus ends this letter to the suffering church with the words, "He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death." According to Revelation 6:9-11, God has a special place and reward for the martyrs.

The end-times will see an increase in suffering and martyrdom. Shockingly, more Christians have died for their faith in the past 100 years than in all of church history put together. Unfortunately it is not considered news today when Christians suffer or are killed. It happens all the time in Islamic, Hindu, or communist countries like North Korea. Please pray for the persecuted church. Pray for the church of Smyrna.

Letter to the Church of the Double Standard: Revelation 2:12-17

Jesus addresses Himself to the church at Pergamum as "the one with the sharp two-edged sword." This is a strong admonition to build morals on the solid Word of God. It is a reminder of Hebrews 4:12 where the Word of God is pictured as a living, active and sharp two-edged sword that pierces into the innermost part of man. It cuts into both the soul and spirit and the joints and marrow. It is to govern both the soul and the body. Keep that application in mind as we dig into this study.

Notice the location of this church. Jesus said they "dwell where Satan's throne is." I believe this may be referring to a spiritual domain and not necessarily a physical location. Satan's stronghold is always in the realm of moral confusion, compromise, and drift.

Notice that Jesus identified the subversive teachings of Balaam and the corrupting teachings of the Nicolaitans. Let's look at each of these briefly.

The story of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-25. He was the man Balak called to curse Israel; but instead he blessed Israel three times. He was true to God on these three accounts, however he taught Balak how to subvert the children of Israel by enticing them into idolatry and sexual immorality. The end result was tragic and God severely judged His own people. Go back and read the whole story.

So who were the Nicolaitans? Many trace this error back to Nicolas who was put in the office of deacon in Acts 6:5. He may have started a tragic heresy in the early church that basically said the spirit and soul of Christians are sanctified, clean, holy, and justified by faith in Jesus no matter what deeds of the flesh a person commits or indulges in for pleasure. The logic was that only the soul and spirit are saved and the body is going to die and decay. This group taught the deeds of the flesh were connected to the body and not the soul or spirit. This basically gave license for sin and fed depravity of all kinds within segments of the early church. People could

claim they knew and loved Jesus and yet indulge in nearly any fleshly pleasure. It gave rise to a terrible double standard based on circular reasoning and not solid biblical study. He should have read Hebrews 4:12 to discover that God's Word is for both the soul and the body.

Notice what Jesus said to this church in verse 16; "Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." Notice the difference between the "you" and "them" in this verse. Not everyone bought into this immoral heresy. Many held true to biblical morality. No matter what others do, you are responsible for your moral decisions in life. You will give an account for yourself.

Let me say it this way, we will be judged by the Word of God and not our own personal morals, ethics, philosophy, or social opinion polls. Jesus saves and changes the whole person and not just the soul. In Matthew 8:24-27, Jesus closed His Sermon on the Mount by telling people to build their lives on the solid rock and not on sinking sand. He pointed out that only one foundation could endure the storms of life and the Judgment to come. Build your life on the solid rock of the Word of God.

Letter to the Church of Jezebel. Revelation 2:18-29

Jesus had the most to say to the church of Thyatira. Some were doing good and growing in their love and faith. However, Jesus was very harsh with most of them and pronounced judgement on them. Listen to these verses; "20) I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21) And I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality." (Revelation 2:20-21) Read the next several verses for the full indictment against this church.

In order to understand these verses, we need to go back to 1 Kings 16:31-33 and understand who Jezebel was and what she did. Let me quote those verses. "31) And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. 32) So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33) And Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him." This gives a graphic picture of Jezebel and what she did to corrupt God's people.

Notice that she was the daughter of the king of the Sidonians and that she was a Baal worshiper. This was a very immoral and corrupt religion that literally defiled Israel and corrupted them from within. God sent none other than the Prophet Elijah to try to reach King Ahab. Jezebel installed many prophets of Baal over Israel and had the prophets of God persecuted and killed. It was a tragic chapter in the History of Israel. Read the next several chapters in 1 Kings to get the whole story.

I believe Jesus was exposing a similar movement in the church at Thyatira. They were trying to keep some aspects of Christianity, but quickly blended it with other religions, philosophies, or moral values of the day. They were pointing to Jesus and some traditions of the Christian faith, but added whatever they wanted to it. The end result was not "Christian."

This movement has been alive and well in the Christian church for a long time. It usually ends up embracing and promoting the sexual distortions of the Sidonians. They often do this under the umbrella of "Christian love" and point out that the church should love, accept, and embrace everybody and every moral value.

The end result is "antiChrist" or the opposite of a biblical moral value system. This is especially tragic when church leadership embraces and adopts these values. Soon they begin to censure, ridicule, and persecute those who hold to the truth about Jesus and are living out a born-again testimony. They talk tolerance but are intolerant of those who know and love Jesus Christ.

Just because a church calls itself "Christian" doesn't mean it represents Christ or biblical truth. Beware and be warned. Jezebel is very active in segments of the Christian church today as she has been for a long time. This is the church of blended religions and secular values.

Christianity is complete. It is not improved by adding doctrines or practices from other religions or the world to it. This practice does not improve the gospel, it distorts it.

Letter to the Dying Church: Revelation 3:1-6

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

Many look at this as describing the Reformation period. It can be argued that this was a wake-up call for a sleeping and nearly dead church.

News flash: Churches can and do die! Most of them die in their sleep. They need to "wake up and strengthen what remains." They need to get back to their calling. They need reviving. They need the Holy Spirit to give them mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. They need Him to breathe on them again.

It is estimated that between 4,000 to 7,000 churches close their doors every year in the United States. What is happening? Well, I would say their deeds are not complete in the sight of God. They have walked away from the very things that impart life to the church. Prayer meetings and bold preaching of the Word have been abandoned. (See Acts 6:4) The gospel is seldom if ever heard in these churches or shared by the people as they interact in society.

You usually hear people in these churches say "religion is a private matter." They need to review Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:16-20. Consequently, the church is not having any new spiritual births. People are going through man-made religious ceremonies and traditions, but nobody is getting born again, transformed by the power of God, or filled with the Holy Spirit.

The worship services are dead, boring, and predictable rather than alive and vibrant. The most popular event in the church is Saturday night bingo rather than live praise and worship services. Jesus wants His church to resemble Acts 2:41-47 rather than the local funeral home. The early church was filled with new life and dynamic fellowship.

Yet there are some godly old saints in the churches of Sardis who have not soiled their garments with the world. I marvel at where I sometimes find choice servants of God hanging on until Jesus takes them home.

The older a church becomes the easier it is to drift away from its calling. Revival is the only biblical remedy for the churches of Sardis. God wants to impart new life to these dying churches. Jesus is saying to these churches; "Either get back to your biblical calling or start writing your obituary."

Letter to the Church of the Open Doors: Revelation 3:7-13

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

Many look at the church of Philadelphia as describing the characteristics of the modern missionary movement beginning with William Carry. I agree! He was used by God to spark something that literally changed the direction of the church coming out of the reformation. This time of recent church history has been marked by an explosion in modern world missions and the founding of literally hundreds of mission agencies and societies that was unknown in any previous age of the church.

This timeframe was marked by the works of such men and women as Hudson Taylor the founder of the China Inland Mission, George Muller, Dwight L. Moody, Amy Carmichael, Lottie Moon, Watchman Née, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon, and David Livingston. (I am leaving out thousands of others.) I would also put Billy Graham, Bill Bright the founder of Campus Crusade, Lawrence Cunningham the founder of YWAM, and George Verwer the founder of Operation Mobilization in this list. Wycliffe Bible Translators, New Tribes Missions, Africa Inland Missions, and many, many other people and agencies too numerous to mention.

The explosion of mission endeavors from other countries such as South Korea and India would also fit into this category. Many modern church denominations such as the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA) were birthed around the call of world missions. Nearly every evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic denomination or church started during this time frame also had aggressive mission programs. Though they came more recently, I would also put World Vision, Compassion International, Samaritan's Purse, and IHOP (International House of Prayer) in this list.

The unique thing about this explosion of modern missions is that it was unknown in any other age of the church except possibly the missions effort of the first century. However, that was dim compared to the world wide phenomenon of the past 200 years. There is no debate that the Spirit of God has and still is doing something very amazing in terms of world evangelization. This timeframe has literally impacted every people group in the world. I was born again and called into ministry right in the climax of this time frame in 1973. It is still my passion.

I believe we are still in the Philadelphia church age, but the church of Laodicea is emerging and is starting to suck the life and steam out of this focus on world missions. We will look at the church of Laodicea next.

Letter to the Lukewarm Church: Revelation 3:14-22

“15) I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16) So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17) Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18) I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19) Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”

Welcome to the end-time church. Notice that things are starting to cool off from the Philadelphia age of the church. There is an overlap between these two churches, but doors are beginning to close. This church is suffering from affluenza. The new focus is on wealth and self-sufficiency. It is materialistically motivated, aims at self-sufficiency and is literally gagging on hedonism. This church replaces the salvation gospel and the Great Commission with the prosperity gospel and the Great Omission.

Jesus wants this church to repent and become hot for His glory. He wants them to buy gold refined in a furnace and discover the true wealth of faith and investing in the Kingdom. (See 1 Peter 1:6-8) Because of its wealth, this church has much potential for spreading the gospel. If it stays lukewarm and worships and serves money more than God, He will spit it out of His mouth. Some segments of this church will repent and catch on fire for the glory of God. Some will grow cold in materialism and literally die of exposure to the world.

Notice verse 20; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." If you view the letters to the seven churches as a tour of church history, this is the final age of the church. He is standing at the door and knocking. His return is near. He is ready to swing the door open and walk through.

This church will see the end-times unfold. Every prophecy about the nations, tension in the Middle East and the rise of antiChrist will happen to this church. This church will experience the rest of the book of Revelation. The first six churches in the book of Revelation encompasses nearly 2,000 years of history. With this final letter, the church age is about to end.

Will there be a pre-tribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, pre-wrath rapture, post-tribulation rapture or will Jesus just send out His angels and gather the ungodly into the wine press of the wrath of God? I honestly don't know. There is Scripture that could support every position. I see much mystery surrounding the end-times.

The one consistent theme of each view is that Jesus wants His bride to be ready for His return. He wants His church to be hot and not lukewarm. His consistent message to each of the seven churches is "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22) You better be walking in the Spirit and listening to the Spirit of God. You better be hot and not lukewarm in the days to come.

A Door Standing Open in Heaven: Revelation 4:1

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

As John's vision continues, the scene switches from earth to heaven. This is the second time in four verses that a "door" was talked about. Remember what Jesus said in Revelation 3:20? Let's review; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."

As chapter four begins the door between heaven and earth is opened. Things change fast and we have the first in-depth picture of heavenly reality in the entire Bible. Paul mentions being caught up into Paradise in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, and that he heard "inexpressible words." In the book of Revelation, John is commanded to write what he sees and hears in heaven.

Chapters Four and Five focus on an incredible heavenly worship scene. It is breathtaking. The rest of the book of Revelation records "the things that must take place after these things."

The timing is significant. These things take place after the letter to the church of Laodicea. Many scholars agree that we are now well into the age of the Laodician church. We are experiencing

times of great wealth, prosperity, self-reliance and arrogant humanism on earth. The prideful and independent spirit of Laodicea is everywhere.

Another important observation can be made from this verse, John sees everything that happens in the rest of the book of Revelation from a heavenly vantage point. There is no question who is in control and who is calling the shots. The book of Revelation settles the question of sovereignty. Is Satan in control? Is man in control? Or is God in Control?

This reminds me of the words of Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar; "And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules." (Daniel 4:26 NASB) The book of Revelation screams "It is Heaven the Rules... God is sovereign and He does as He pleases... all are accountable to Him!"

The book of Revelation was not written to impart fear of Satan or panic among God's people. It was written to impart confidence that God is in control and every authority and power on earth will one day bow to Him. It was written to give a glimpse of the heavenly realm and eternity to come. It is an amazing open door into biblical reality.

The Throne Room of God: Revelation 4:3-4

"3) And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. 4) The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow." (NLT)

What does God look like? I don't know. Like many things in the book of Revelation, John was having difficulty describing what He was seeing. The first thing that stood out to him was the throne and Him who sat upon it. John was in the throne room of God. What he saw was breathtaking.

I need to confess total ignorance of various gems and precious stones, so I looked up a few definitions of the different gemstones used in these verses. Here is what I found:

"Jasper, an aggregate of microgranular quartz and/or chalcedony and other mineral phases, is an opaque, impure variety of silica, usually red, yellow, brown or green in color; and rarely blue. The common red color is due to iron inclusions." [Wikipedia](#)

"Carnelian: A glassy, translucent stone, Carnelian is an orange-colored variety of Chalcedony, a mineral of the Quartz family. Its color varies from pale pinkish-orange to a deep rusty brown."

I found the following online Bible Study Tool by Salem Communications very helpful for these two verses. For ease, I decided to simply cut and paste bits and pieces from this online tool into this post. As you read these cut-and-pasted quotes you will quickly discover that these gems had very special uses throughout the Bible. Let's start:

like a jasper

Jasper describes the light of, foundation, and walls of the holy Jerusalem (Rev. [Rev. 21:11+](#), [Rev. 21:18-20+](#)). It was the last of the twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel which were mounted in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. [Ex. 28:20](#); [Ex. 39:13](#)). When Satan was in the Garden of God, his covering included precious stones like jasper (Eze. [Eze. 28:13-14](#)).

like a sardius stone

"The sardius, better known in our day as the carnelian, is red. This stone is also mentioned as part of Satan's covering in the Garden of God (Eze. [Eze. 28:13](#)). It is the sixth foundation stone of the holy Jerusalem (Rev. [Rev. 21:19+](#)) and the first of the twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. [Ex. 28:17](#); [Ex. 39:10](#)). The inclusion of both the first stone, sardius, and last stone, jasper from the breastplate denote the idea of all Israel, first and last, beginning and end, or alpha and omega (Rev. [Rev. 1:8+](#), [Rev. 1:17+](#); [Rev. 2:8+](#)).

a rainbow around the throne

The brilliant light emanating from the throne resembled a rainbow of emerald hues. The rainbow was given as a sign following Noah's flood to remind God of His covenant never again to destroy all flesh with a flood (Gen. [Gen. 9:13-16](#); Isa. [Isa. 54:9-10](#)). Ezekiel saw this same rainbow as the brightness around the throne (Eze. [Eze. 1:28](#)).

like an emerald

The color of the third stone of the high priest's breastplate (Ex. [Ex. 28:17](#); [Ex. 39:10](#)) and also associated with Satan's covering in the Garden of God (Eze. [Eze. 28:13](#)). The stone of the fourth foundation of the holy Jerusalem (Rev. [Rev. 21:19+](#))"

Wow! What John saw was amazing! I must note that we as Christians are invited into this very throne room when we pray. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." What Jesus accomplished for us on the cross when He removed the barrier or the dividing wall between God and man cannot be understated. Christians now have instant access to God through Jesus Christ.

Surrounding the Throne: Revelation 4:4

"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads."

There is debate as to the number of thrones surrounding the throne of God. The total number is 24. Some look at the twelve tribes of Israel from the Old Testament combined with the Twelve Apostles from the New Testament church. These are mere guesses.

More significant is the realization that thrones represent some form of royalty or authority. Dressed in white garments and having crowns of gold on their heads is a symbol of absolute

purity. Keep in mind, they abide in the presence of God Himself. God wants to share His royalty with people. He wants people to rule and reign with Him.

Let me stress this again, though there are angels and other heavenly beings in God's presence as well, those sitting on the thrones are humans. Never in the Bible does God reserve thrones for angels. They were created to be servants. Satan wants a throne. (Isaiah 14:13) Revelation 2:13 even mentions "Satan's throne." But it is a temporary throne of rebellion filled with death and violence.

But closest to God and surrounding God are people seated on thrones. Why are people so near and dear to God? One fact stands out from a survey of Scripture, of everything God created, only people were created in the image of God. People have value to God. You have value to God. I believe this value and proximity of people to God literally drives Satan crazy with jealousy.

Let me state it clearly: God loves people. The whole story of the Bible relates to God's plan to reach and redeem people. John 3:16-17 says; "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

For some reason, God wants people to be in His presence. Only people are referred to as "children of God", "the family of God" and "sons of God."

One more thing must be observed from the context, Revelation 4:9-11 says; "And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Whoever the twenty-four elders are, they are not worshipping the "man in the mirror." They are worshipping the One who sits on the throne. They are worshipping the Creator. They give Him all credit, glory and majesty. They lay their crowns before the radiant and glowing One who alone receives all the attention and glory in this context.

The Throne of God: Revelation 4:5-6

"5) And from the throne proceeded flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6) and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind."

The Throne of God was different from the other twenty four thrones. It was the epicenter of perpetual lightning flashes with the corresponding sound of thunder. It was an awesome and fearful sight. Light was continually flashing from the throne of God.

Before the throne stood the seven spirits of God. From Revelation 8:2 we discover that these are seven mighty angels. No names are assigned to them in scripture. They are there to serve God and perform His command.

Then in front of the throne was a sea of glass that looked like a crystal. I am reminded here of the bronze sea that was placed before the temple in the Old Testament. 1 Kings 7:23 says, "Now he made the sea of cast metal ten cubits from brim to brim, circular in form, and its height was five cubits, and thirty cubits in circumference." The sea that sits in the presence of God was not made of cast metal, it is indeed a precious and invaluable crystal not made with human hands.

The sea in the Old Testament was used for cleansing for those about to enter the temple. Apart from the ceremonial cleansing they could not stand in the presence of God. It was a preview of the cleansing that Jesus accomplished on the cross where His blood was shed to wash away humanities sin.

This is mere speculation, but the sea that sits in the presence of God may serve as a reminder of the finished work of Christ on the cross that cleansed all people who believe in Him from sin and thereby made them part of the bride of Christ. I can imagine the sea in the presence of God like the large diamond of an engagement ring ever present as a memorial that the bride is pure and acceptable.

As the lightning proceeds from the throne of God some of it undoubtedly hits the crystal sea which immediately becomes like a giant prism. My mind can barely comprehend the spectacular display of the light spectrum reflecting from the crystal sea in every direction.

"... God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) We as Christians are reflectors of that light to the world. What an amazing picture of the gospel right in front of the very throne of grace.

Cherubim: Revelation 4:6-8

"6) and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. 7) The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8) And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.""

Most scholars look at this as a description of cherubim. They are mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. An individual cherubim is often called a "cherub."

The first mention of a cherubim in the Bible is in the book of Genesis right after the fall of man. According to Genesis 3:24, God stationed a cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life so fallen man does not find it, eat from it, and live forever in a fallen state. I seriously doubt Indiana Jones is going to get past this guard. This guy means business.

Later we see that two of them were made of cast gold and placed facing each other covering the mercy seat that Moses had built. (See Exodus 25:17-20) They were also included in the design of the temple in 1 Kings 6:23-35. They are always seen in the presence of God.

It is important to note from Revelation 4:6-8 that they are called "living creatures." They actually exist and are alive. The book of Ezekiel mentions them repeatedly. In Ezekiel 10:1-22 they are talked about numerous times as the glory of the Lord departed from the temple. They are seen transporting the glory of God. The description is amazing.

These are the highest and most glorious of all created beings. They are most likely the most powerful as well. From Ezekiel 28:11-19 we discover that Satan himself was a cherub before his fall. Verses 14 and 15 say; "14) You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15) You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you."

Some call them angels. I consider them as a separate class of created beings. Archangels like Micheal and Gabriel are the highest class of angels. Cherubim are in a class all of their own. They are individually created beings and each have a look of their own. Revelation 4:7 specifically describes four of them and they have very different appearances from one another. Ezekiel 10:14 does the same thing with one exception. There may be several of them all together. When added together they may be the seven spirits who stand in the presence of God.

Ezekiel 28:14 says that Satan had been the "anointed cherub who covers" and verse 17 says his "heart was lifted up because of his beauty." He may have been the highest of the cherubim and fallen from that high position. This is mere speculation.

As to their duty, they seem to shroud or protect the created realm from the glory of God and they engage in unceasing praise. They cry out continually and say, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

They might be the only creatures who ever actually see God in the fullness of His glory. Notice from verse 6, they are "full of eyes in front and behind." Verse 8 adds they even have eyes within. Because they see God, they cry out "Holy, Holy, Holy."

They are also always pictured with wings. They can fly. Ezekiel 10:5-19 is the most graphic description of them actually flying. I simply refer you to the text. If you want to do an in-depth study of these amazing creatures, you need a complete concordance of the Bible and then you must look up every time the word "cherub" or "cherubim" is used in the Bible.

The Highest Worship: Revelation 4:9-11

"9) And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11) "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.""

The Bible is clear that some people will receive crowns or rewards of recognition for the lives they lived for God. 2 Timothy 4:8 talks about the "crown of righteousness." James 1:12 talks about the "crown of life." 1 Peter 5:4 talks about the "unfading crown of glory."

The highest form of worship is to acknowledge that all that we are, all that we have and all that we accomplish is because of the grace and favor of God. We are insignificant but He is magnificent. I believe everyone in heaven will lay their crowns down before God in humble reverence and worship.

Paul emphasized something very similar in Romans 12:1 when he said, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." Yes, it goes beyond presenting a crown we may relieve, ultimately worship is presenting ourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

I like the acknowledgements made in Revelation 4:11: "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." Did you notice the three parts of this confession? 1) God is worthy! 2) God is my personal Lord and God! 3) God is the only Creator and source of all things!

The atheist, the agnostic, the evolutionist, the nominal religious person, and the non-believer cannot make these three proclamations. There is no room for self-glory or self-exaltation in the presence of God. Worship is all about Him and not about ourselves.

The Mystery Book: Revelation 5:1-4

"1) I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. 2) And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" 3) And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4) And I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;"

This is an amazing book. It contains the will of God. It could be called "God's Playbook." As the seals are eventually opened, events on earth begin to unfold and make up the balance of the book of Revelation.

The problem was finding someone worthy to open the book and to look into it. No one in heaven, on earth or under the earth was found worthy. What a disappointment. John began to weep.

It is an important question, "Who is worthy?" Who is acceptable to God? There is only one.

The Lamb Who Became the Lion King: Revelation 5:5-6

"5) and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." 6) And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth."

The last few verses ended with a problem. No one was found worthy to open the book and to look into it. John was weeping.

Suddenly, one of the elders approaches John with a solution. The Lion from the tribe of Judah, from the root of David had come forward. Upon closer examination, He resembles a slain Lamb. Even the casual reader must conclude that it is Jesus Christ.

This is one of the amazing pictures of Christ in the book of Revelation. He is the Lamb who became the Lion King. The lamb and lion come together in Christ. They become one.

The lamb speaks of both His humanity and His absolute innocence and love. He is the perfect sacrifice. He is the descendant of David who knew no sin, but became a sacrifice for the sins for all humanity. He is the second Adam. He is a servant.

The lion screams of His courage and justice. He is a bold warrior. It is a picture of His divine nature. He possesses all of the attributes of deity. He is royalty. He is King. He alone is worthy.

In Jesus Christ the human and divine meet in one person. Some theologians call it the hypostatic union. The lamb and the lion are one. The enmity is ended. The battle is settled. The war is over. He is the Prince of Peace.

So is he human or is He Divine? Is he a man or is He God? Was he blaspheming as charged in John 10:33 when he being a man made himself out to be God? Remember, John was the one who recorded that incident. He is also the one witnessing this scene unfold in heaven.

What happens in the rest of this chapter causes the universe to gasp. It answers every question and should silence every critic. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. For now, let's ponder the picture of the Lamb who became the Lion King. It is one of the amazing portraits of Christ in the book of Revelation.

Worship in Heaven: Revelation 5:7-10

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

We have a major problem developing in this text. The four living creatures who were created for worship are getting distracted from worshipping God. Instead of worshipping the One seated on the throne, they are dangerously close to giving too much attention to the Lamb. By the time this chapter is over, they do exactly that. They worship both the Father and the Son together in one setting in Heaven.

I love bringing those who deny the Deity of Christ to this chapter. I cannot find words to describe what is happening in these verses and what it says about the true identity of Jesus Christ.

Lest you doubt my statement that they are worshipping both the One on the throne and the Lamb, let me quote the rest of the chapter in conclusion. Let God's Word speak for itself.

"11) Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13) And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14) And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:11-14)

He is Worthy: Revelation 5:9-10

"9) And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10) "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

We need to back up for a moment and look at what the Lamb of God accomplished. This is the theme of the heavenly song. These verses are packed with reasons why the Lamb alone is worthy.

He is worthy because He qualified to be the only sinless sacrificial substitute for humanity. He was not only a lamb, He was a sacrificial lamb without blemish. He is worthy because of His work on the cross. He is worthy because He shed His own blood for human redemption. He is worthy because He valued all people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He is worthy because He turned ordinary people into priests for God. He is worthy because he placed people back into a position of reigning on earth.

In this text heaven is amazed because all indications were that earth was lost. Sin and Satan had wreaked havoc on earth. Human depravity had run its course. It looked like Satan had won and humanity was lost. But Jesus didn't give up on people. He is worthy. This is the theme song in heaven.

Multitudes of Angels: Revelation 5:11

"11) Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,"

There is no shortage of angels. They are individual created beings. There are thousands and thousands of them in heaven. If God needed more He could merely create more. They are servants of God.

However, when it comes to people, God directly created only two. One man and one woman. That was the beginning of a self-propagating race. He created them in His own image. Listen to the text from Genesis 1:26-28.

"26) Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" 27) God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28) God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

No wonder the Lamb was being celebrated in Revelation Chapter Five. Why? Because He redeemed a lost race. People are very precious to God. Only people can be saved. People have value to God. God loves people.

Let me get personal. You have value to God. God loves you. Jesus died to save you. You can come to God through faith in Christ. You can become part of the family of God by inviting Jesus Christ into your life. There is joy in heaven over every sinner that repents and turns to God.

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The First Seal: Global Conquest. Revelation 6:1-2

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

As the Lamb starts breaking the seven seals on the book, very specific things begin to happen on the earth. I used to read about these seals as if they were all condensed to the short period we often refer to as “the end-times.” I now believe these seals may span the past 2,000 years of history from the time John wrote the book of Revelation up to the present time.

It should be noted that many world conquerors have come and gone during that time frame. The mindset of world dominion has been pervasive throughout the past 2,000 years. The early Christians undoubtedly read these verses with Rome in mind.

At the same time, I must hasten to say that the antichrist of the end-times will have this ambition. The goal of globalization and a one-world government is very alive today. This will be a key characteristic of the end-times.

The stage is now set for a one-world government the likes of which has never been realized in human history. The book of Revelation predicts that Antichrist will rule for a short time over such a global empire. Modern technology has paved the road for an end-time global empire that is mind-boggling in terms of scope and effectiveness and truly fits the description of the book of Revelation.

The Second Seal: War Revelation 6:3-4

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

The second seal is commonly looked at as being "war." The goal of establishing peace apart from God has never been realized. There are two reasons. First, Satan is the god of this world and he comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10).

Second, human depravity is corrupt, self-centered, and exploitative. Someone always gets hurt, abused, or taken advantage of when fallen human nature is in control. The ambition of an earthly utopian apart from the Messiah will never be realized.

In the end-times things will get worse. A full surge of evil will be released on the earth. Knowing he has only a short time left, Satan will double his efforts. Scripture teaches that in the last days terrible times will come. (2 Timothy 3:1-9)

The Third Seal: Famine Revelation 6:5-6

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

The third seal is often called "Famine." This is referring to a wide-scale lack of food. When supply is down, prices go up. "A quart of wheat for a denarius" would translate to "a mere quart of oatmeal for a full day's wage." At those inflated prices it would be impossible to feed a family, let alone care for any other budget needs. The result would soon be homelessness, starvation, human exploitation, and pilferage.

Historically there have been many famines. Contributing factors include drought, floods, locust plagues, foreign invasion, war, overgrazing, poor land management that leads to soil depletion, and corrupt government policies contributing to gross mismanagement. Some causes of famine are related to natural disasters while others are man-made.

Where are we today? Famine is prevalent in large portions of Africa, North Korea, and other countries like Haiti. World relief efforts have helped, but have been hindered by corruption, localized wars, greed, and black markets. The rest of the world seems to be doing fairly well. Food production is at an all-time high in many developed countries.

However, when world food supply is measured against world population, we are only several months away from a universal famine. One season of widespread crop failure in North and South America could start a domino effect toward world famine.

Most developed nations have very tight inventory supply lines in grocery stores. Though the supply chain is functioning well right now, any disruption to the power grid or transportation system would be disastrous for urban populations. This is often seen in advance of massive storm warnings when there is a “run on grocery stores.” Inventories can be depleted in a few days or even hours.

Ironically, modernization and urbanization have made our world more vulnerable to a flash famine. Unfortunately, few people think ahead to have an emergency plan in place that includes several weeks of food and water supplies in the event of a disaster.

Most governments recommend an emergency disaster plan for every residence. There are numerous common sense websites that have great suggestions as to how to prepare for natural disasters. Sadly, there are also many wacko and exploitive websites that prey on fear and hysteria associated with this subject. Beware and be practical.

There is no question that disasters will come. For the Christian these are great opportunities to share the love of Christ and help the needy. We at GoServ Global have an entire branch of our ministry dedicated to emergency and disaster relief domestically. We also respond to international disasters. The Christian church has always been on the forefront of helping in times of crisis. I hope and pray this does not change as we approach the end-times. Christians are called to give water to the thirsty, feed the hungry, cloth to poor and share the gospel. I do not see this mandate revoked in the end-time prophecy.

Fourth Seal: Death Revelation 6:7-8

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

This seal is very sobering. It is talking about death on a scale that will approach 1.8 billion people according to population figures on earth today. Caution: This post will not be edifying to read.

The four causes of death mentioned are: 1) the sword, 2) famine, 3) pestilence and 4) wild beasts. It is difficult to read these verses and not be pessimistic. Let's look at each of these briefly.

"The sword" may be referring to war or human genocide. Images still burn in my mind of the Nazi extermination camps of WWII and the Cambodian killing fields.

"Famine" is self explanatory and was talked about in the previous seal. "The famine" may have a direct influence on "the sword" in this context. During times of famine spontaneous human violence often breaks out. Things can get so bad that many people die from hunger while others turn to violent raids and kill to get food. Human desperation has no morals.

"Pestilence" could be the spontaneous spread of sickness and disease associated with large scale death and misery and the lack of sanitation. But it might also relate to something more sinister like germ or biological warfare. Numerous armies today have arsenals of biological and chemical weapons that can literally wipe out large segments of the human population. Indications are that they have been tested on entire towns and cities as a means of ethnic cleansing in recent history in both Iraq and Syria.

However, we need not go to that extreme. There have been a few plagues in the past 2,000 years approaching and even surpassing this kind of devastation. The bubonic plagues of the Middle Ages reportedly killed 1/3 of the human population. It was called "Black Death." Its dark shadow devastated the human population between 1340 and 1400.

Smallpox has also emerged from time to time and killed masses of people. Native Americans were defenseless against smallpox during European migration. The disease nearly wiped out the native population. Literally millions died from the disease on both sides of the big pond.

One more sobering note, the medical community today is very concerned about the rapid mutation of viruses to become antibiotic resistant. It is ironic, but modern medicine may be setting up the human population for another major plague.

"Wild beasts" seems to indicate that animals will be affected by the famine as well. The survival instinct in animals will cause many of them to turn wild and attack people.

I have trouble comprehending the scope of this seal. I do believe that terrible times are lurking around the corner. Jesus warned His church for a reason. I believe He wants us to be prepared so we can be salt and light in difficult times. Love will still be our distinguishing characteristic. Ministry opportunities will abound in these times.

Fifth Seal: Martyrdom- Revelation 6:9-11

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

There is a doctrine of suffering and martyrdom that runs all the way through the New Testament. The early church experienced intense persecution and martyrdom. Foxe's Book of Martyrs records some of the stories in the first few centuries of Christianity.

The past 500 years have seen a steady increase in martyrdom. That trend has intensified in the last 100 years. It is estimated that more Christians have been martyred for their faith in the past 100 years than in all of church history combined. This includes those who have died under communism in various countries and under persecution from Islam and other world religions.

The intriguing thing about the seal judgments up to this point is that they have technically already had fulfillment in history during the past 2,000 years since the time of Christ. Most scholars apply them to the end-times and that might be the case. But remember the opening words of the book of Revelation; “1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place ...” (Revelation 1:1) Things have not been static during the past 2,000 years of church history. In the same way that the letters to the first six churches in chapters 2-3 could be looked at historically, the same is true for the first five seal judgments. Just like we may be transitioning from the Philadelphia church into the Laodicean church, one could argue that we may be moving through the fifth seal judgement and awaiting the sixth. Let me explain:

If we look at the bubonic plague or “Black Death” of 1340-1400 fulfilling the fourth seal, then shortly after that we moved into the fifth seal. Ironically, that corresponds exactly to the steady increase in martyrdom that has happened over the past 500 years. Notice in verse 10 that the martyrs were asking God how long He would delay in judging those who dwell on the earth. The indication is that many of them had been there a long time and not just mere weeks, months or a few years.

So, are the first five seal judgments to be looked at historically or will they all happen in the end-times? I don't know. Welcome to the mystery of the book of Revelation. Both could be the case. Either way, the book of Revelation is amazing and very contemporary in its fulfillment. However, we are about to move into sections of the book of Revelation that can only be applied to the end-times.

Heaven is Revealed: Revelation 6:12-17

“12) I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13) and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14) The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15) Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16) and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"”

We are now looking at an event with no parallel in history. This is future-tense. This undoubtedly relates to some aspect of the end-times and the return of Christ. Notice that there are astronomical wonders that correspond with events like violent earthquakes on earth. We are talking about mountains literally moving and islands being shaken. The mantle of the earth's crust is going to go through upheavals as phenomenal things happen in the stratosphere above the earth.

From verse 16 we discover that the people on earth will see the heavenly host gathering and they will understand that wrath is coming to the earth. The result will be fear and consternation.

The events from the above context are talked about in other portions of the Bible. Take time to compare Isaiah 24:23; 34:4; 50:3; 60:19-20; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; 3:15-16; Amos 8:9 and Matthew 24:29-31.

It is especially significant to study Matthew chapter 24 with this section of the book of Revelation. Focus especially on verses 29-31. Jesus foretold His disciples about these events. The bottom line is that we are looking at a change in the times and epochs. Heaven will be manifested and earth will be accountable to God.

Some scholars look at these verses as being figurative and full of symbolism. Granted, the stars of the sky may be referring to angelic beings as is the case in Revelation chapter 12. But for the most part this seems to be describing exactly what John saw in his vision. The created realm is about to be shaken as the unseen heavenly realm manifests itself.

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rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

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An Interlude: Revelation 7:1-17

"1) After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2) And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3) saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

This becomes a very interesting chapter related to the concept of the rapture. Some scholars see the raptured church in verse 9. Let's look at that in a moment, but first let's point out that at the beginning of this chapter the goal is not to take the servants of God out of the world. Rather the objective is to "seal" them or mark them on their foreheads so that they are exempt from some of the judgments to come.

There are two distinct groups of people in this chapter. First, in verses 4-8 we have one hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of the sons of Israel. Each tribe is specifically named and numbered at twelve thousand.

This text screams to me that God is not done with Israel yet. He will keep His promises and fulfill His word to His Old Testament Covenant people. I do not see the New Testament church replacing Israel in Scripture.

We also discover from this text that every tribe of Israel is present and accounted for before God. Though the kingdom was divided in the Old Testament, it seems to be unified with all tribes present before God in this context. I simply take this Scripture at face value. God has a plan for Israel.

Second, in verse 9 we have a great multitude standing before the throne of God. Let's look at the verse; "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;"

It must be concluded that they are in heaven and that they come from "every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues." I would include Messianic Jews in this group. Verse 14 includes the thought that they "come out of the great tribulation." The big question; "were they raptured up or are they victims of Martyrdom as mentioned in Revelation 6:9-11?" I honestly do not know the answer to that question. We do recognize that in both contexts they have white robes which means both texts may be talking about the same group.

The primary proof text for the concept of the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; "16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18) Therefore comfort one another with these words."

The challenge in this text is defining the timeline. The two big questions are 1) "When does Jesus descend from heaven?" And , 2) "When do we hear the trumpet of God?" In Matthew 24 it seems to be verse 27-31. In the book of Revelation it might be Revelation 6:12-17 which would account for the multitude in heaven, or it might be much later in the book. Again, I do not know.

I do not get hung up on the timing of the rapture. It will happen when God wants it to happen. Scripture is not clear about this event. Godly Christians disagree on the subject. Personal views on this subject should never be a test of fellowship nor should it divide Christians. It is a mystery mentioned briefly by the Apostle Paul and not focused on by Jesus or the other New Testament writers.

The one thing that is clear about the church is its mission in the world. Jesus wants His church to worship Him and focus on reaching the world with the gospel until He returns. (Mathew 28:18-20, Acts 1:6-11) This is my primary focus until Jesus takes me home.

Safely Home: Revelation 7:15-17

“15) For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16) They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17) for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Whoever this group is, whether they were raptured or martyred, they are now in the presence of God. They are before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple. They are accepted by God. They are priests in the presence of God. This is an amazing scene.

It reminds me of the opening of the book of Revelation as it highlights what Jesus has accomplished. Let's review a few verses. “5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood- 6) and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 1:5-6)

As we return to Revelation 7:16-17 we discover that they hunger and thirst no more. Every need is met. The Lamb becomes their shepherd and He brings them to the springs of the water of life. There is no more crying there. Every tear is wiped away. This is a blessed picture of Heaven.

I often have people ask, “What will heaven be like?” This is a good question and Scripture does not paint an extensive picture to answer that question. However, every glimpse shows that people are fully active and engage in some form of service or meaningful activity. We do not sit around doing nothing. We will reach our full potential and experience ongoing growth and development.

Silence in Heaven: Revelation 8:1-5

“1) When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2) And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3) Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4) And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5) Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”

The text is about to transition from the Seal Judgments into the Trumpet Judgements. But something is missing. It's almost like the momentum runs out of gas. Everything in heaven comes to a stand still for about half an hour. What is missing?

Suddenly an angel comes forward with a golden censer and adds much incense to the prayers of the saints. This may be a stretch, but it is almost like prayer is the fuel that powers heaven and the tank was running low. Prayer is like incense in the presence of God.

The lack of fervent prayer is the single greatest weakness in the church. It is the single greatest weakness in missions. It is the single greatest weakness in the life of most Christians. This is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray. (John 14:12-15) This is why the early church literally prayed in the day of Pentecost. (Acts 1:14-15) This is what caused the ground to shake when the apostles prayed. (Acts 4:29-31) This is why the Apostles made prayer and preaching their primary focus. (Acts 6:4) This is why Paul and Silas turned to prayer in the midst of their suffering. (Acts 16:25-31) This is why Paul urged Timothy to teach men to pray. (1 Timothy 2:1-8) This is why Paul prayed earnestly for all the churches. (Philippians 1:3-4)

I am an advocate for prayer. Every Christian man or woman who became a World Changer had a common thread, they were each launched into ministry and sustained by a solid foundation of prayer.

First Trumpet– Natural Disaster on Land: Revelation 8:6-7

“6) And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. 7) The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”

Buckle up, these seven trumpet judgments are going to be severe. The first trumpet judgment is a world-wide fire. A full one third of the natural resources on the entire planet are burned up. We have had wildfires in parts of the United States that are devastating in terms of trees and houses lost. We have had smoke and ashes literally carry for hundreds of miles. But at their worst point they amounted to a fraction of 1% of the earth.

This is talking about wildfires that consume literally one third of all vegetation on the planet. It describes the landmass on fire worldwide including both grasslands and forests. The smoke from this disaster might explain verse 12 and why one third of the sun and stars are obscured during the fourth trumpet judgement. Many people and animals will undoubtedly die from smoke inhalation.

Nothing like this has ever happened in world history. This is future tense from our vantage point.

Second Trumpet– Sea Impact Revelation: 8:8-9

“8) The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, 9) and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

The second trumpet judgment is caused by something striking the ocean. It could be a meteorite or something man-made. To John it looked like a mountain burning with fire.

The impact is severe. One third of all marine life dies. One third of all ships are destroyed. For that amount of devastation, the impact must be in the heart of the modern shipping lanes. I will let you theorize on possible points of impact.

The result is most likely a tsunami. We are talking about a gigantic disaster. Keep in mind, the land is already burning from the previous trumpet judgment. These trumpet judgements are devastating.

The Third Trumpet– Wormwood: Revelation 8:10-11

“10) The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. 11) The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.”

This trumpet judgement is especially descriptive. From John's perspective, a great star falls from heaven. It is burning like a torch. This could be a description of nearly any debris entering the earth's atmosphere. It could also be something more diabolical like an ICBM armed with a chemical warhead. The scenario makes perfect sense in these modern times.

What is especially curious is that “Wormwood” literally poisons the waters exposed to the surface of the land. A full one third of the streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes are affected. Many people die from not having safe drinking water. It must be assumed that animals also die.

The big question relates to the location of the impact. What part of the earth is affected? It is logical to speculate that John was seeing the impact on the part of the earth of which he is most familiar. This likely happens in the Middle East. However, the fallout is very large. Once released, poison is hard to contain.

The Fourth Trumpet– Atmospheric Obstruction: Revelation 8:12-13

“12) The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. 13) Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in

midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

The fourth trumpet might be the logical result of the first three trumpet judgments. With fires on the land and catastrophes in the oceans, it is not surprising that the atmosphere is severely affected. We are talking about events that will drastically affect weather patterns. The entire atmosphere and possibly stratosphere is filled with smoke and dust so thick it literally obscures the sky and blocks light from penetrating. It will be like dusk all day long.

As bad as the first four trumpet judgments are, the chapter closes in verse thirteen with a sober warning that things are about to get worse. Keep in mind that these are divine judgments. Things are happening on the magnitude of the flood of Noah's day or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These are major catastrophic events against which no army can defend. There will undoubtedly be widespread panic and chaos. Standard commerce and trade will be interrupted. It is no longer life as usual for people.

The Fifth Trumpet– The Bottomless Pit: Revelation 9:1-2

"1) Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. 2) And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit."

This trumpet judgment is actually twelve verses long. It is five months in duration and very devastating. I want to look at the first two verses to begin with because there are a few insights we need to capture.

First, from verse one, when it says a "star fell from heaven" notice that it is talking about an angel. This figure of speech is very important to understand as we move deeper into the book of Revelation. Keep in mind that "stars" is a reference to angels.

Second, notice the reference to the "bottomless pit." Scripture makes reference to "the pit" as a containment place for fallen angels, departed human spirits, and strange creatures. Isaiah 14:9-21 is a prime example. It is not a pleasant place. You do not want to go there.

Third, notice that when he opened the bottomless pit, smoke went up like the smoke of the furnace. It is always pictured as a burning place of fire and torment. Jesus warned that it is to be avoided at all costs. (See Matthew 5:29-30) The "pit" seems to be a reference to hell itself. The Bible talks about it as a real place.

The Fifth Trumpet Expanded– Flying Scorpion Locusts: Revelation 9:3-6

"3) Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4) They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any

green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5) And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. 6) And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.”

These are strange creatures. The size is not described, but these are like flying scorpion locusts. For five months they sting and torment people. The sting is extremely painful but not deadly. People will seek death during this time, but it will flee from them.

There is an interesting note in verse 4, they were not permitted to hurt any plants, “but only men who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” There is no doubt that God will have His sealed people on earth during this time. This is a clear reference to Revelation 7:3.

Granted, there is a question as to who this group represents. Are they Christians? Are they the 144,000 Jewish evangelists from Revelation 7:4-8? Do they include some of the great company from every nation in Revelation 7:9 & 14 that had not died in the great tribulation? Has the church been raptured by this point? There are many opinions.

What is significant is that God makes a distinction between His people and those who follow the god of this world. I can say with great confidence that all non-Christians will go through these terrible times. Next, we will look at the balance of the Fifth Trumpet Judgement. If you are a non-Christian, I would encourage you to trust in Jesus before these days start. When they start it might be too late.

Description of the Scorpion Locusts: Revelation 9:7-12

“7) The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8) They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. 9) They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. 10) They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. 11) They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12) The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.”

The first thing that caught John’s attention was the head. They looked like a horse prepared for battle. They had crowns of a golden color and yet they had faces like men with the teeth of a lion. They also seemed to have long hair. It was a fearful sight.

The body of the scorpion locusts looked to John like they had plated armor. Have you ever studied a grasshopper or beetle carefully? They have what is called an exoskeleton. Any insect with an exoskeleton makes a strange noise when it flies. John describes the sound of these swarms of scorpion locusts as “many chariots and horses rushing to battle.” The noise was intimidating. You can hear them coming.

Their tails must have resembled a scorpion tail and their sting was as bad. John indicated it was very painful but not deadly. Their mission is to hurt people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (Vs 4) for five months (Vs 10) John gave no indication of their size.

I want to emphasize that this is not figurative language. If you study large insects, nearly everything John describes exists within various insects. The exoskeletons, wings, noisy flight and scorpion tails filled with painful poison have been around for centuries, but they have never come together in one woeful creature. I have no doubt John is describing something very real.

According to verse 11, they have “as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.” The literal translation is “exterminator” or “destroyer.” He is also referred to as the “angel of death.” In the Latin Vulgate he is called “Exterminas.” Death, misery and destruction go before him.

Notice from verse 12 that this was called “the first woe.” This will be a very bad plague, but two more are yet to come.

The Sixth Trumpet– An Immense Army: Revelation 9:13-16

“13) Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14) one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” 15) And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16) The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”

The sixth trumpet judgement is longer than these four verses, but there are a few thoughts here that we need to capture. First, notice there are four angels released who had been bound by the great river Euphrates. They were prepared for this hour, day, month, and year. What is about to happen will not be early or late. It will happen when God wants it to happen... but it will happen!

Second, their mission is to kill one third of mankind. With the present world population being 7.2 billion, that means over 2.4 billion people will be killed in this woe. Let that number sink in for a moment. The human casualties are staggering.

Finally, notice the number of the armies of the horsemen are two hundred million. Historically this made no sense because no individual country was armed or could field an army of this size. However, today, there is a country with an army of this size and if you are carefully watching the news, it is actively preparing for war. Most modern scholars agree this is talking about China and WWII.

For the first time in world history the stage is set for this portion of the book of Revelation to be fulfilled. I believe when the Trumpet Judgements start in Revelation 8, the events unfold quickly.

These judgements cannot be explained away or applied to any other time of world history. However, these events will be accompanied by the illusion of world peace and prosperity to such an extent that most people won't even notice the storm clouds gathering. Jesus warned that these days will be just like the days of Noah. (Matthew 24:36-39)

Paul also warned about this time frame in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6. Let me close by quoting these verses; "1) Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3) While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6) so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."

Implements of Modern Warfare: Revelation 9:17-19

"17) And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18) A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19) For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm."

John was seeing something indescribable to him. He was seeing something a man could ride on that fire, smoke, and brimstone proceeded out from. That's exactly what happens when a tank fires a round. Keep in mind, John had never seen a gun, cannon, armored jeep, personnel carrier or tank. Modern weapons would be very hard for him to comprehend let alone explain. These verses make sense when applied to a modern battlefield and the various pieces of equipment used on the front lines.

Sinful and Unrepentant People: Revelation 9:20-21

"20) The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21) and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."

This is a picture of the human heart in the end-times. It is a tragic picture. Humanity becomes universally sinful and unrepentant. God's patience comes to an end. The Judge takes action. God is acting within His character and nature of justice.

The Angel of the Mystery of God: Revelation 10:1-7

“1) I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; 2) and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; 3) and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. 4) When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them." 5) Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6) and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, 7) but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.”

I confess, these are some of the most frustrating verses in the book of Revelation. This angel is described in great detail. It is a magnificent angel with a very special message. He is carrying a little book which is open. As he speaks with the voice of a lion, seven peals of thunder sound. As John prepares to record the seven peals of thunder, he is stopped. In fact, he is commanded not to write them.

The only clue is found in verse seven. There will be delay no longer because “the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.” Suddenly we are pointed back to the Old Testament prophets. Their message becomes very significant again.

Keep in mind, “the church age” or “the age of grace” was a mystery not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. Paul wrote about this mystery in Ephesians 3:8-13. Is the church age now over? I don’t know, but I believe we are now back on script from an Old Testament perspective. Israel is being grafted back into God's plan. Every promise made by God through the Old Testament prophets about the restoration of Israel is about to be fulfilled.

For starters you can read Joel 3:1-4:21 or Amos 9:11-15. You could also read Daniel 11-12 or Isaiah 65-66. This angel might be announcing that things are back on script for Israel after the mystery of the church age. Things now unfold “as He preached to His servants the prophets.” The focus is again on Israel and the Middle East.

The Little Book: Revelation 10:8-11

“8) Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9) So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10) I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I

had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11) And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

It is impossible to read these words without being reminded of what happened to the prophet Ezekiel. Let's look briefly at the beginning of his call into ministry.

"1) Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." 2) So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3) He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth." (Ezekiel 3:1-3) This was the beginning of the call of the prophet. He was sent with a message from God to a very stubborn people, but he was warned they would not listen.

I believe this text in the book of Revelation is a reminder of the double application of the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Many of them had applications for the day in which they were written, but they would ultimately be fulfilled in the end-times. God is telling us to revisit these Old Testament books to discover what He will be doing in the end-times. Every promise He made to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled. God always keeps His Word.

The Mystery of the Temple: Revelation 11:1-2

"1) Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. 2) Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."

These verses baffle many modern scholars. John was told to go and measure the temple and the altar. But there is a problem today, there is no temple in Jerusalem! In fact, the Muslim Dome of the Rock sits on the temple site.

Something significant has to happen for these verses to be fulfilled. The temple must be rebuilt. I never doubt God's Word. Keep your eyes on Jerusalem. Keep your ears peeled to any news coming from the temple sight. Activity to rebuild the temple will undoubtedly focus the attention of the world on Jerusalem.

Any move to rebuild the temple will undoubtedly bring about the fulfillment of verse 2, the nations will march on the sight. This is mere speculation on my behalf, but it might be in the form of United Nations Peacekeeping forces. In some form, the nations will occupy the court outside of the Temple for 42 months.

(Indeed, the Dome of the Rock currently does sit on the site where the Jewish Temple used to be located and many think it is a Muslim mosque, but it is not. It is a shrine. Directly beneath that golden dome, there is no floor and the bare rock of that place is exposed with nothing to cover it because Muslims and Jews and Christians alike believe this is the exact location of

Mount Moriah where Abraham took his only son, Isaac, to sacrifice him but was prevented from doing so by an angel of the LORD. -dj)

The Two Witnesses: Revelation 11:3-6

“3) And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4) These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5) And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6) These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.”

Most scholars look at these two witnesses as being Moses and Elijah. They were last seen on assignment together in Matthew 17:1-8 on the mount of Transfiguration. They have authority to prophecy for 1,260 days. That is basically 3 1/2 years.

They have amazing self-defensive powers. Fire literally comes out of their mouth to devour their enemies. It sounds like the secular antichrist state will be against them for harm. They will be like real Avengers and not fictitious Hollywood characters.

They have the powers displayed by Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament. According to verse 6, they have the power to shut up the sky so that it might not rain during the days of their ministry and the power to perform plagues like those seen in Egypt during the time of Moses.

I can imagine in modern times they will be featured live on the evening news worldwide. God will use them to get the attention of the world, but just like the Egyptians many will be hardened and reject their message.

The Death and Resurrection of the Two Witnesses: Revelation 11:7-14

“7) When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. 8) And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9) Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10) And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. 11) But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. 12) And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13) And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and

gave glory to the God of heaven. 14) The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

Notice from verse 7 that when they had finished their testimony, the beast overcame them and killed them. Until they had completed their mission, they were invincible. God is always in control. The greatest part of their testimony was still to come.

The parallel between the death, resurrection, and ascension of the two witnesses and the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ cannot be missed. Satan always deceives himself into thinking he wins. He delights in death, but Jesus delights in resurrection and life.

Satan’s victory is short-lived in this text. People begin to celebrate and even send gifts to one another thinking their problems are gone. But their problems are just beginning. They have aligned themselves with the wrong side.

Don’t be on the wrong side of the gospel. Don’t be on the wrong side of what God is doing. Everything the world offers is short-lived. It is a phantom pleasure. We will be held accountable for our actions and eternity is a very long time.

Kingdom Ownership Reclaimed: Revelation 11:15-17

“15) Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." 16) And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17) saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.”

These verses are significant because they state that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ.” At this point Satan loses his world dominion. The King is ready to reclaim what belongs to Him. Heaven recognizes it, but those on earth are not about to give up without a fight. They are enraged and they resist. The rest of the book of Revelation is the story of the transfer of the Kingdom.

The New American Standard Version at this point has what appears to be terrible grammar in translation. Instead of saying “the Almighty, who is and who was”; it reads “the Almighty, who are and who were.” This does not follow in other English translations, but it is worth mentioning. The translators either had poor grammar or good theology.

Why is this significant? Because the NASV translation is in the plural. It is a subtle indication that the Almighty is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This reminds me of Genesis 1:26 and 3:22 where the plural “us” is used for God. Let me quote the two verses for emphasis.

“26) Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."” (Genesis 1:26 NASB)

“22) Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"-" (Genesis 3:22 NASB)

There is no missing the plural in these two verses. It forces us to consider the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Time Came: Revelation 11:18-19

“18) And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." 19) And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”

With these two verses some significant changes take place. It is time for judgments and rewards. Notice the sharp contrast between those who were dedicated to judgment and those destined for rewards. God knows those who are His.

Also notice the temple of God which is in heaven was opened. Many wonder where the ark of the covenant is today. According to verse 19, it is in heaven. God has it. It is His covenant. It is not lost.

These verses usher in chapter 12 which is a panoramic view of all of history. It is like we are stepping away from the realm of time into the realm of eternity. Past, present, and future blend together in the presence of God.

If you are looking for a neat chronological unfolding of the end-times, things get very difficult to follow beginning with Revelation 11:18 through Revelation chapter 12. These verses blend the past, present, and future almost randomly. They dance back and forth on God's timetable.

The Original Star Wars: Revelation 12

Welcome to one of the most intriguing chapters in the whole Bible. I call it “The Original Star Wars” because it presents the fall of Satan from heaven and gives a glimpse of how many angels joined in his conspiracy. According to verse 4, the dragon's tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

Later in verse 9 we discover the identity of the dragon and that the stars swept away by him were actually angels; “9) And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

As I mentioned yesterday, this chapter is confusing because it quickly moves forward and backward in time. Satan's original fall from heaven happened shortly after the creation of the physical realm. In Luke 10:18 Jesus made an interesting comment, “18) And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” In some mysterious way, the pre-incarnate Christ was there for the battle described in Revelation 12:7-9. Let me quote the first two verses; “7) And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, 8) and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.”

This chapter reminds me that earth is not the center of the universe. We are merely part of a reality much larger. In fact, God may have created earth to serve as a prison for Satan and his rebellious angels. It is a mystery how mankind fits into the equation, but we do play a significant role.

This chapter also focuses on the origin and call of Israel, the incarnation of Christ and the church filled with those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. In this chapter, Satan is committed to the destruction of Israel and as a result of God's sovereign protection he directs his rage against the church.

This chapter reminds me that we are part of something much larger. The Bible presents a reality that goes far beyond the physical realm and the true story is much larger than the daily headline news. Stay tuned as the plot to “The Original Star Wars” unfolds rapidly in the balance of the book of Revelation.

In the meantime, read and study this chapter several times until it begins to shape your understanding of reality. You will not have a true biblical worldview without a basic understanding of this chapter.

The Accuser of the Brethren: Revelation 12:10-11

“10) Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. 11) And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

These verses expose Satan as the accuser of the brethren. Christians beware! If you are plagued with guilt and condemnation it is most likely not the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin to bring confessions, repentance, and restoration to fellowship

with God. He never brings up past sins already confessed and turned from. He cleanses, forgives and floods us with acceptance, assurance, and the fruit of the Spirit. (See Romans 8:1-4)

The accuser of the brethren often impersonates the Holy Spirit, but instead of gentle conviction he heaps on guilt and condemnation. He is like a relentless interrogator. He will use lies and deception as he tries to separate you from the love and mercy of God. You might have thoughts plaguing you like "God cannot forgive me for what I have done!" Or, "I have lost my salvation and deserve to suffer and die!" I have seen some people struggle with severe anxiety disorder or suicidal thoughts related to past sin or failure they cannot move beyond.

If that is you my friend, you are being worked over by the accuser of the brethren. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10 NASB) Jesus came to break the power of sin and guilt. He came to set captives free. He came to forgive and restore. You need to stand up and resist the accuser of the brethren in the name of Jesus and embrace the forgiveness Jesus died on the cross to give you.

The accuser of the brethren works night and day. He is relentless. He can only be overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of genuine salvation. Putting faith in Jesus Christ and speaking His name as you resist the evil one works. Then seek Jesus in earnest prayer, praise and worship. The chains of guilt, shame, and condemnation will soon fall away and you will be free!

Beast from the Sea and Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:1-18

In these verses Satan stands on the seashore and calls up a beast from the sea. This ushers in the beginning of the work of the anti-Christ. This beast is worshiped as a false god and is determined to blaspheme the true God. Satan himself is behind this beast. In the second part of the chapter he turns and calls a second beast from the land.

It might be that this first beast will strategize to take over or block every sea port world wide. He who controls the ports controls the continent. Shipping lanes are immensely important. This is step one of a two step world take-over plan. This is an "outside-in" approach. Every nation will have mass immigration from this religious group.

The balance of this chapter (Vs 11-18) has another beast coming from the land. This is an "inside out" approach. The second beast will grow from within every nation. It will seek to become a majority within each country through rapid population growth. This chapter as a whole exposes a plot that moves from infiltration, through a time of accommodation, to the point of saturation, then shifts to domination, and finally its true face is exposed as it forces adherence or extermination on entire countries. This strategic move is already in place.

According to verse 7, “It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.” I look at this leader as the head of a world religion that hates Christianity and is bent on destroying it.

According to verse 8-10, a sober warning is given; “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.”

It appears that this beast (world religion) is intolerant of any form of religious freedom and especially targets Christianity. It has no problem with leading some people into captivity and slavery while it uses the sword to kill others. We are definitely seeing the forceful imposing of a one-world religious system that seeks to control every aspect of life.

We will look more at the second beast in the next post. I believe this process is already happening. The stage is being set for a forceful world-wide takeover by one intolerant religion that is bent on world domination. I will let you speculate which world religion this might be. Keep in mind, Christianity becomes its number one target of violence and intolerance.

The Beast of Electronic Globalism: Revelation 13:11-13

This beast performs false signs and wonders so that he even makes fire come down from heaven. Vs 13 The goal of this false religious system is to deceive those who dwell on the earth and to force them to make an image of the beast whose fatal wound from the sword was healed. I take it this radical religious system was opposed militarily, but not only survived, it also thrived.

It seems from verse 15 that the image actually comes to life. Those who refuse to worship the beast are put to death. This seems to be a renewal of the ancient Babylonian system. You can almost imagine the image that Nebuchadnezzar built and the forced worship he imposed on the people. It is impossible to miss the connection later in the book of Daniel and the warnings he gave of the coming anti-Christ in chapters 8-9. It is also hard to miss other New Testament warnings of the anti-Christ such as Matthew 24:15 or 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. I would encourage you to study these texts on your own.

But is this end-time beast a literal image like the one Nebuchadnezzar built, or could it be an electronic matrix that comes alive and is used to control the world? Let's move on in the text.

Undoubtedly the most commonly highlighted section of Revelation 13 is verses 16-18: “ 16) And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17) and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18) Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the

number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.”

Many have written about these verses and the mark of the beast. The text seems to be pointing to a one-world government system that ties international commerce to an electronic monetary system. Cash, coins, silver, and gold are about to be replaced with scanners and chips. The selling points of this system are obvious. Identifying theft will be solved by giving every person a chip or electronic mark that can be scanned at the checkout counter. Modern technology has made this possible.

I will not speculate further about this system. Much has been written about it. I find it intriguing that John wrote about this nearly 2,000 years ago and for the first time in human history it all makes sense. Welcome to the middle of the book of Revelation. Welcome to electronic international commerce. Welcome to the beast of modern globalism.

144,000 with the Lamb: Revelation 14:1-5

“1) Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2) And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. 3) And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4) These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5) And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.”

These are the 144,000 from Revelation 7:4-8. They are with Jesus on Mount Zion and they seem to be doing fine. The seal on their forehead has worked and they have been spared.

If you look carefully, you will discover two marks. From Revelation 13:16-18 there are those who receive the mark of the beast. They embrace everything Satan has to offer and sell out to his worldly values.

From Revelation 14:1-5 we have the 144,000 who are sealed for the Lamb and set aside for Him. Notice from verse 1, they have His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. They are not ashamed of Jesus. They are set aside for Him. They embrace the values of the Lamb and live holy and set aside lives. The way we live does make a difference.

While the world is suffering, they are worshiping the Lamb and singing a new song. Though I don't want to minimize the scene in this text, I have found this general principle to be true. Those who follow the Lamb and live God's way are spared from the sorrows and consequences of sin and the world. A clear conscience has great value.

The Eternal Gospel: Revelation 14:6-7

“6) And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7) and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.””

There are several things I do not know about the tribulation period. First, I do not know when the rapture takes place. I do not know if it is pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib. But I do know that God has people who go through the tribulation period and repopulate the earth during the 1,000 year earthly reign of Christ talked about in Revelation 20:1-6.

Second, I do not know how far we are into the tribulation period by Revelation chapter 14. Generally speaking, scholars talk about seven years of tribulation. I agree with those numbers. Revelation chapter 14 might be slightly more than half way through the tribulation period. I glean that from Revelation 11:3 and the time frame of the ministry of the two witnesses. They minister for 1,260 days or approximately 3 1/2 years.

Third, I do not know the role of the United States in end-time prophecy. I have heard many theories but have a wait-and-see posture. It is very difficult to prove conclusively in Scripture.

But I do know one thing for certain from the above two verses, the gospel is still being preached in the tribulation period and people are still being saved. These verses tell us that the Great Commission is alive and well in the middle of the book of Revelation. It is an eternal gospel. It is to every nation, tribe, and tongue and people.

I see no place in Scripture where the mandate for world missions is withdrawn prior to the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21. Rather than storing up guns and ammunition, I believe God's people should be preparing food, clean water, clothing, shelter, and Bibles for days of great need and harvest. Dark days and difficult times always open huge doors for the eternal gospel.

So what if you prepare these things and the church is raptured? No problem, God will find a way to use them for those who come to Jesus as a result of the witness of the rapture. Notice in these verses the emphasis is still on the eternal gospel. God still loves the world and wants people to be saved. (John 3:16-17)

The Second Angel: Revelation 14:8

“8) And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.”

We now have a second angel flying in midheaven with a message. This is a message that "Babylon the great has fallen." It is hard to define Babylon. At the very least it is talking about the sinful and worldly system aligned against God that promotes sin and wickedness among people. Chapters 17 and 18 will deal with the actual fall of Babylon, but at this time the decree is given. God often pronounces judgement before it is applied.

Notice the charge against her, "she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." Drunkenness and immorality always go together. With inhibitions lost through too much wine, reason, and self-restraint are silenced.

I could go a step further: Addictions are not only the downfall of people, Satan uses them to weaken entire nations. It doesn't matter what the alcohol or chemical is, addictions are devastating. They tear families, communities, and nations apart. Alcoholism and drug addictions ruin millions of lives.

Nobody ever sets out to become an addict. They drink or use for the fun and the high. Soon they become slaves and slide down the slope into shameful immorality. Babylon has a two-pronged approach at destroying lives and taking captives. Satan has used it from the beginning of time in his attack on people. Why? Because it is so effective and has claimed so many victims.

If you are caught in the clutches of either a chemical addiction or a sexual addiction, you are a slave to Babylon's system of destruction. Only Jesus Christ can break the power of sin and set you free.

The Third Angel... The Wrath of God: Revelation 14:9-12

Many people see God only as a God of love, but the Bible equally presents His wrath and judgment. The verses we are looking at today speak for themselves. I need not add any more commentary. Trust me, you don't want to face the wrath of God.

"9) Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10) he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11) And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." 12) Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."

Perseverance of the Saints: Revelation 14:12-13

"12) Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13) And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in

the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

We are more than half-way through the book of Revelation and the text talks about "the perseverance of the saints." These are those "who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." It is clearly talking about Christians. Has the church already been raptured? I don't know. There is no clear indication of a rapture up to this point in the book of Revelation. Did some come to Christ as a result of the witness of the rapture? I don't know. That is the theory some use to explain this text.

One thing is clear, there are Christians present in this text and they are persevering for Jesus and some are dying for Him. God has a purpose for them. Their deeds are not forgotten and they are not in vain. There have always been martyrs for the Christian faith. It is a reminder of Revelation 6:9-11. One day the number of the martyrs will be complete. The calculator is still running in Revelation 14:13.

God calls us to persevere for Him. That means to be faithful even if it means our death. We are to live for Him and we are to die for Him if need be. Just like the story of Stephen in Acts 7:54-60, His grace is always there for the martyrs. Never has a Christian faced death alone, no matter what the cause.

The Reapers: Revelation 14:14-20

"14) Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15) And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16) Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. 17) And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18) Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." 19) So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20) And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles."

This is a tragic text. The reaping is not for rewards, it is for judgment and punishment. According to verse 19, "the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God." This is a reaping for the wrath of God.

It looks like the event happens just outside of what is called "Babylon the great." (See vs 20) The blood that came out from the judgement was up to the horse's bridle for 200 miles. This is a scene of death and destruction. Chapters 17-18 are going to talk in depth about this judgement.

The wrath and judgment of God are real. When the time comes and God's patience is gone, mankind will be judged. I have the utmost respect for the wrath and judgment of God.

Heaven Prepares for the Final Seven Plagues of God's Wrath: Revelation 15:1-8

"Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."

Nothing needs to be added to this chapter. God is in control. He is preparing his final seven plagues on the ungodly world. In them the wrath of God is finished.

First Bowl Judgement: Revelation 16:1-2

"1) Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; 2) and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image."

Chapter Sixteen contains what are called the Seven Bowls of Wrath. The first one becomes loathsome and malignant sore on the people who have the mark of the beast and who worship the image of the beast.

There is no explanation beyond this short verse of the first bowl judgement. I am reminded of the story of Job. He was smitten with boils and suffered greatly. The addition of the word "malignant" adds to the severity. I am tempted to think this is the result of some form of chemical warfare with the exception that it only affects those who have the mark of the beast.

This is a reminder of the plagues in Egypt under Moses that only affected the non-Jewish people. God can be very specific in His judgement. Hebrews 10:31 warns "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The context deals with the wrath of God. It is a chapter worthy of your review.

The Second Bowl Judgement: Revelation 16:3

"3) The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died."

If you remember back to Revelation 13:1-10, the first beast that blasphemed God came up from the sea. During this second bowl judgement the angel of God pours out his bowl on the sea and it becomes like blood. The result is that everything in the sea dies.

I am not sure if there is significance to the word "sea" being singular instead of "seas" that would be plural and indicate every sea, ocean, and lake around the world. The singular use is the same rendering as in Revelation 13:1 that says, "...And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea..."

I believe this is a direct assault on the origin and habitation of the first beast. All waters surrounding him are turned into blood because everything in that sea dies. Dead fish float to the surface and begin to decay. The water begins to stink as waves wash the dead carcasses up on the shore. It is definitely not a good time to own seashore property. The first beast is being humiliated.

The Third Bowl Judgement- Vengeance: Revelation 16:4-7

"4) Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. 5) And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; 6) for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." 7) And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

With this judgement the water on the land becomes blood. It affects the rivers and the springs of water. We often hear talk about "water quality." The drinking water is now polluted with blood to the point that it cannot be easily consumed, so they will be forced to drink the blood water. The question remains, "Is this a universal judgement on the whole earth or is it localized?"

It is significant that a reason is given for this judgment. Verse 6 says, "for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets." This might be a connection to Matthew 23:34- 39. In this text Jesus laments over Jerusalem and the way it had spilled the blood of the prophets and wise men sent to them. Listen to these amazing verses; ""34) Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so 35) that upon you may

fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36) Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 37) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38) Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39) For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Matthew 23:34-39) If you continue in the book of Matthew, Jesus immediately launches into His amazing end-time prophecy with the very next verses and chapters.

My guess is that the location of this judgment will be the Middle East and Jerusalem will be the epicenter of everything that happens in Revelation chapters 16-18. I am not saying that only Jewish people will be the recipient of these judgments. Some who reject the Messiah will be targeted by this judgement, but remember, many of them turn to Jesus in Revelation 7:4-8. So the big question is: "Who or what movement has historically been fighting for Jerusalem and eagerly spilling the blood of God's people?" Who is contesting for Jerusalem today and spilling blood indiscriminately? Keep your eyes on the Middle East. It is the focal point of this portion of the book of Revelation.

The Fourth Bowl- Scorching Heat: Revelation 16:8-9

"8) The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 9) Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory."

This judgment is not hard to imagine. Something happens in the earth's atmosphere to remove the ozone layer that filters out the cosmic rays of the sun. With the protective canopy gone, the ultraviolet rays begin to burn people quickly.

I am not a proponent of the Global Warming movement as it currently exists, but I do believe it can happen on a catastrophic level and mankind has the weapons to make it happen. John is not describing a slow event escalating over hundreds of years, he is describing something that happens quickly and grows into a world-wide phenomenon.

I will let you wrestle with this text. It sounds to me like chapter 16 is describing events that escalate into a world war focused on Israel. The next two bowl judgments become even more telling and even includes a great army from the east invading. Keep your ears peeled to news coming from China.

The Fifth Bowl Judgement- Pains and Sores: Revelation 16:10-11

"10)Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; 11) and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed

the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.”

This might be the cumulative effect of all of the previous judgments put together or it might be a new plague that results in fresh pain and open sores. The pain is so bad people literally gnaw their tongues. They are so miserable with pain they curse and blaspheme the God of heaven.

When I read these verses I think of chemical warfare. I think of an agent so bad it makes the skin rot but leaves people alive to wither in pain while their bodies are covered with open sores.

The Sixth Bowl Judgement- The Battle of Armageddon: Revelation 16:12-16

“12) The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. 13) And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. 15) (“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”) 16) And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.”

These verses specifically set the geography of the bowl judgements. The focal point is the plains of Har-Magedon in northern Israel. In these verses, Satan sends out three demon spirits to gather the nations for war.

More and more every year Israel is the focal point of opposition in the United Nations. Look for that trend to continue and even escalate. It is not clear where the United States is positioned in prophecy. Some see the United States as the “Great Wilderness” mentioned in Revelation 12:13-16 where many Jewish people flee on “the wings of the great eagle” for protection.

One could glean from the context of Revelation 12 that the protection lasts for only 3 1/2 years. When Revelation 16:12-16 are added to the discussion there is no question that many armies of the world will gather in northern Israel. An end-time war is coming to the Middle East.

(A worthwhile spot to visit on a trip to Israel is Deir Al-Mukhraqa Carmelite Monastery, southwest of the Sea of Galilee atop Mount Carmel. The site commemorates the prophet Elijah’s taunting of the prophets of Baal and his subsequent slaughter of them. The view of the Jezreel Valley -also known as the Valley of Armageddon- is spectacular. -dj)

The Seventh Bowl Judgement: Revelation 16:17-21

“17) Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." 18) And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. 19) The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20) And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21) And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

This judgment is universal but the epicenter still seems to be the Middle East. Notice the earthquake unlike no equal. The great city was split into three parts. When verse 20 says, “And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found”, we are looking at a cataclysmic event that disfigures the face of the earth. This is serious. God’s wrath is fierce.

The thing I remember from my very first reading of the book of Revelation was the huge hail stones of 100 pounds each. One gallon of water weighs 8.34 pounds. These hailstones are nearly 12 gallons each. That’s enough to flatten a car, rip through the roof of a house and result in unimaginable devastation. The response is that men who survive this judgement curse God.

Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots is Exposed: Revelation 17:1-13

“1) Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2) with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.””

We are now introduced to the god of this world and his evil empire that has spanned the ages of human history. This chapter pulls back the curtains on Satan's age-old conspiracy to rule the kings and world leaders by giving them his domain in exchange for pleasure, sex, intoxication, power, and wealth. Verse seven says, “7) and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

When Jesus was being tempted by the devil, He was offered a place in this evil empire. Let’s review the exchange as recorded in Luke Chapter four. “5) And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6) And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7) Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8) Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God and serve Him only.””

Jesus refused to bow his knee, but many kings and world leaders have taken Satan's offer and were granted access to the great harlot. In exchange they became intoxicated with the wine of the passion of her immorality and her abominations. She then ruled over them like wicked Jezebel. (See Revelation 2:20-21)

Make no mistake, this is talking about a world-wide and age-old conspiracy orchestrated by Satan himself with the goal of absolute world conquest and evil dominion. Look carefully at Revelation 17:6; "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly." God's people have always been Satan's target. Why? Because they do not yield to his wicked morals and values. They do not buy his lies or submit to his corruption. As a result, he wages war against them. The gates of hell have always rallied against Jesus and His Church.

"Babylon the Great" is an evil mystery filled with demonic activity and subversion. It is vile, corrupt, enslaving, abusive, and forceful. It aims to subvert, conquer, and rule mankind. It is world wide and honors no national boundaries. It is evil. It has been in existence from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve when world dominion was handed over to Satan.

It ruled and ruined the ancient world prior to the flood of Noah's day. It was the unseen conspiracy and demonic influence behind the Tower of Babel. It emerged again after the flood and has been active through the ages in every world empire and age of human history.

The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. Satan feeds on human suffering, misery, and death. The great harlot exploits and feeds on human depravity, lust, greed, and weakness. Many have sold out their souls to her. Kings, politicians, business leaders, gang members, sports heroes, and movie stars are all invited to her banquet table. Just bow your knee and she promises a life full of wealth and pleasure. But it's all a lie. It is a trap. It has eternal consequences. Make no mistake, the great harlot is alive and well in our world today.

Fallen is Babylon the Great: Revelation 18:1-3

"1) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2) And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 3) For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.'"

We need to take a moment and reflect on the words of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 4:30 says, "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' The consequence was severe for the king. He lost both his sovereignty and his mind. He went crazy until his reason

was restored to him when he recognized that “heaven rules.” His full confession is recorded in Daniel 4:34-37.

Why is this important to our study of the book of Revelation? Because the spirit of Babylon is nothing short of a demonic deception that concludes: “there is no Creator God and as a result no morals and no boundaries on human depravity.” “I can live and do as I please with no consequence.” “I control my own destiny.” Over the centuries it has been fueled by many different human philosophies, religions, and world views. This might be the meaning of the seven heads and ten horns of the beast. The modern fuel is evolution and humanism. It is the deception that allows modern humanity to rebel against the notion of God and His values.

This deception today is strong and is woven into every secular education system around the world. The intellectuals of modern humanism are standing up like Nebuchadnezzar and boasting “Is this not Babylon the Great which I have built!” They are trying to create a world and secular value system void of the notion of God. They do not know that they are drunk and blind and deceived by the enemy of the human soul. The whole system is about to collapse and be exposed.

This humanistic value system is driving trade and commerce today which is full of all kinds of debased merchandise. It includes everything from volumes of drugs and alcohol, to the multi-billion dollar pornography industry. Ironically, Revelation 18:13 even includes the modern human trafficking industry. It is fed by Hollywood fantasy and produces unchecked lusts, a craving for materialism, and a fantasy-like search for meaning and significance. The modern appetite for self-consumption and pleasure cannot be satisfied. It puts self and pleasure at the center of the universe.

If I were to summarize “Babylon the Great”, it is the rejection of the God of Creation and the understanding that Heaven Rules. It is a demonically driven, immoral, indulgent and drug-fueled rebellion against God. It is Satan’s attempt to remove the notion of “God” from human morals and daily experience. It is Satan's age-old conspiracy to hijack and steal humanity from the Creator.

The Great City is Destroyed: Revelation 18:4-8

“4) And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; 5) for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6) Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7) To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’ 8) For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”

The destruction of the city of Babylon is described in this text. Many have ventured to identify which city this might represent. I am not so confident as to assign one city above another. There are several that have clearly controlled world commerce through the ages and became cities of prominence that could have filled this description.

In early human history it was Babel. (Genesis 11) Later the country of Egypt and its capital became the world leader. (Book of Exodus) In the days that John lived and wrote it was undoubtedly Rome. During later periods of history Rome became less significant. During the colonial days London was a clear world leader and candidate for this chapter. Some have argued that today it could be New York City with the stock exchange.

I do not know which city the book of Revelation is specifically identifying, but its destruction will shake the whole world and radically affect world commerce and trade. I would not rule out in this modern era something as far reaching as the destruction of the World Wide Web and the interruption of electronic commerce. Every theory is mere speculation, but the downfall John is describing shakes the whole world.

The balance of Revelation 18 paints the picture of how devastating the destruction of this city will be to the rest of the world. Everything is thrown into chaos. Globalization and the one world government that Satan rules over comes to a stand still. His evil empire is judged.

Extensive Commerce Including Sex Trafficking: Revelation 18:9-13

“(9) And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, 10) standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'”

The number one charge against Babylon, the mother of Harlots, is that she influenced everyone with her immorality. In Revelation 17:5 she was called “Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots.” Now we discovered that she caused the kings of the earth to commit acts of immorality with her.

Sexual immorality is like a drug. People can become intoxicated by it. Sadly, it can and does become addictive for both men and women, young, and old. Satan uses it to destroy lives. It seldom comes alone. It is often accompanied by alcohol and other drugs. This is the primary characteristic of what John calls “the City of Babylon.” It is immoral. It is like Sodom and Gomorrah. It is fixated on sex and immorality.

In verses 11-13, the text turns to the merchants who become wealthy trading with this wicked city. The last phase in verse 13 is very specific. This movement emerges from ruins of ancient Babylon and will trade in all kinds of things, including “slaves and human lives.”

What a telling description. Let me repeat, the text is talking about a movement that arises on the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon that has no trouble buying and selling slaves and even uses them for sex trafficking.

It might surprise you, but slavery has not ended in the modern world. In fact, there are more people forced into slavery today than any time in human history. People being bought and sold like a commodity is considered normal within this sick and demonically driven movement. Entire villages, usually Christian, are routinely being massacred while women and children are rounded up and sold on public auction blocks to the highest bidder as sex slaves. According to Revelation 18:4-8, payday is coming.

Babylon the Great City is Destroyed: Revelation 18:15-19

“15) The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, 16) saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17) for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, 18) and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' 19) And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'”

Many people stand back and marvel and mourn over the destruction of the city called “Babylon.” The problem is that we do know exactly what “Babylon” stands for in the book of Revelation. Is it a literal city? Is it a system of commerce? Is it a false religious system that controls world commerce? Is it a general description for the coming anti-Christ and his seat of power? Welcome to one of the challenges of understanding the book of Revelation.

But once again we have the phenomenon that many people stand by and observe the destruction take place. This judgment is aimed specifically at what is called the “city of Babylon” and many people watch it unfold. This highlights one of the other challenges with understanding the book of Revelation. Which judgments are universal and which ones are localized? Both happen in this book.

I am hesitant to assign or try to pinpoint the city of Babylon on today's world map. We could speculate about several locations. We do know from the text that this judgment is aimed against Satan and not just people, but we do not know where his throne is at the time these events unfold.

We do know this concentration of power is evil, immoral, deceptive, materialistic, and influential to the point of being a one-world government system. From this location Satan seeks to rule the world and he has many kings of the earth consolidated under his influence and control.

The use of the word “merchants” is significant. It appears that Antichrist will control world commerce in the end-times. The book of Revelation clearly paints that picture.

As far as timing, I believe the stage is being set. The movement toward globalism is in motion. We are becoming an interdependent world.

Final Destruction of Babylon: Revelation 18:21-24

“21) Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. 22) And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 23) and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24) And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.””

Again we have a very localized judgement. This is aimed at the evil city of Babylon. The strong angel picked up a great millstone and threw it into the sea to illustrate the violent end of the great city of babylon. It is over for her. No more music, dancing, trade, or human activity of any kind. No more marriage or merchants. The end has come for this influential city.

The last phrase of verse 23 is significant; “because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.” Like Babylon of old, this city practiced demonic sorcery. Harry Potter was alive and well in Babylon. Sorcery was the underlying spiritual activity within this city no matter what religious name it had above its door.

Finally, verse 24 is evidence of her guilt; “And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.” She was responsible for the persecution and martyrdom of many Christians and innocent people. Satan feeds on death and destruction. He loves human misery and suffering. The violent judgment on this wicked city is more than justified.

The Fourfold Hallelujah: Revelation 19:1-6

“1) After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; 2) because His judgements are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.” 3) And a second time they said, “Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.” 4) And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5) And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.” 6) Then I heard something like the

voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."

This is commonly called the fourfold hallelujah. Heaven is rejoicing because the great harlot is judged and the blood of the saints is avenged.

Most look back at the great multitude in heaven from Revelation 7 making up this heavenly chorus. The number of martyrs has undoubtedly increased during the tribulation period. Some also include the raptured church in this great multitude. I would not argue that point except to say it is not clear in the book of Revelation when the rapture takes place.

Notice also that the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures from Revelation 4-5 get involved in this worship service. Then the very throne of God issues a decree to worship as a result of the judgement. Heaven rejoices in justice.

Notice that the common theme is that God's judgment is both just and deserved. The cup of God's wrath is full and His patience has expired. The day of the Lord is coming and the blood of the saints will be avenged. God is the true Avenger.

Wedding Day of the Lamb: Revelation 19:7-10

"7) Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8) And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9) And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10) And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The focus of the book of Revelation shifts from the filthy and immoral harlot of Babylon to the holy and pure Bride of Christ. What a contrast. One is the recipient of God's wrath and judgment for all of eternity. I cannot begin to imagine! To the other the recipient of God's love and goodness for all of eternity. I can only imagine!

Notice the emphasis in verse 7; "and His bride has made herself ready." We are forgiven through the work of Christ on the cross. We make ourselves ready by seeking, serving, and walking with Him throughout our lives. This is the work of Jesus in the life of every true believer.

Paul captures this thought in Ephesians 5:25-27. This is the way Jesus prepares His bride for wedding day. Let's look at these amazing verses.

"25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26) that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

Notice the tenses in those three verses. It looks to me like verse 25 is past tense. Jesus died on the cross for His bride. That’s a fact of history. It looks to me like verse 26 is present tense. Jesus is actively working in His bride to wash, sanctify, and cleanse her. This should be the daily reality in the life of every true believer through the active inner work of the Holy Spirit. It looks to me like verse 27 is future tense. Jesus is coming back for his bride. Wedding day is coming.

When does it happen? The actual marriage of the Lamb to His bride takes place at the end of the book of Revelation which is after the Great Tribulation period. Where is the church during the tribulation? Is she raptured to heaven and set aside to prepare for the wedding? (1 Thessalonians 4:16-7) Is she merely set aside and sheltered from the demonic mayhem on earth as she prepares for wedding day? (Revelation 12:14-16) Or does God use the persecution, trials and tribulations she endures to sanctify and purify her in preparation for wedding day? (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Answer: I do not know, but I do know the Holy Spirit will be actively working within the Bride of Christ preparing her for wedding day! From my observation the church today has a long way to go to fit the description of Ephesians 5:27. It will take a major revival for Jesus to present His bride to Himself “in all of her glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.” I fully expect the tribulation that destroys the harlot of Babylon to be accompanied by a revival that prepares the Bride of Christ for the wedding day.

The KING OF KINGS is Coming: Revelation 19:11-16

“11) And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12) His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13) He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15) From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."”

Jesus is coming back to reclaim what is His. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He means business. His army follows after Him, but He doesn’t need their help. What an awesome sight.

Some glorify Satan. The god of this world has been preparing for a long time for this battle. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says, “Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;” That fast and the battle is over.

What can I say? Jesus is the incomparable Christ. He has no equal. No challenger can stand before Him. Our God is an Awesome God. He reigns!

(The NASB uses capitalization to let readers know that a New Testament writer is quoting from the Old Testament. But in this case, that's not what's happening. The Greek language John used to write Revelation did not use punctuation marks. The phrase "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" appears here in all capitals because that's how John wrote it. –dj)

The War to End all Wars: Revelation 19:17-19

"17) Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18) in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." 19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army."

This is not a war of men against men or nations against nations. This is the final cosmic battle. This is the Kingdom of Satan and darkness against the Kingdom of Christ and light. Yes, Satan has enticed earthy kings and armies to fight with him, but it is to no avail. This war is finishing the age-old battle recorded in Revelation 12:7-9 when the Serpent of old and his angels were cast out of heaven and down to the earth. It is time for the god of this world to give an account for his evil actions through the ages.

This time, instead of Micheal and his angels leading the charge, it is the glorified Christ at the head of the heavenly hosts. Review again Revelation 19:11-13. Following the King of Kings; "14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses." Notice the use of the plural "armies." This is no small force.

I emphasize again, this is a battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The human casualties on earth are great in this text. The vultures and birds of prey are called in to feast on the carnage. The battle itself is short lived. Yet as we will see in the next chapter, this is not an end to the human population on planet earth. To the contrary, Jesus sets up his millennial kingdom and rules for 1,000 years on earth. There is coming an age of earthly restoration without the curse of the fall upon the earth and its inhabitants.

Both the bride and the coming King are mentioned in this chapter. According to Revelation 19:7, the bride has made herself ready. This is reminiscent of Matthew 24:29-31 and Matthew 25:1-13. I do not know how things will play out, but the king is coming, the elect are gathered, the wedding takes place and planet earth is redeemed from the evil one as Jesus prepares to set up His millennial kingdom on earth.

This is not a sad book. It is an unfolding love story of the King coming for His bride and redeeming her from an evil, deceptive, and false ruler. Planet earth becomes a paradise again when Jesus takes His place on His earthly throne.

Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet: Revelation 19:19-21

“19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20) And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21) And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

Make no doubt about it, the stage is already being set for this war. The beast and the false prophet are already working to deceive the nations and make war against the knowledge of the true God. They work through Hollywood spreading all kinds of deception and misleading views of reality. They work through world commerce spreading vile and immoral things like pornography and even engage in human trafficking. They work through human governments to suppress and persecute the church or make Christianity illegal. They work through a world-wide education system that spreads the lies of humanism, communism, and evolution. They work through world religions that refuse to acknowledge Jesus or the gospel. The end result is a proud, boisterous, and in-your-face world-wide value system aligned against the truth about God. Humanity is being deceived and seduced into an antiChrist rebellion based on lies and deception. The armies of the beast and of the false prophet are being assembled all around us today.

According to verses 20-21, when Jesus comes back, the beast and the false prophet will be dealt with quickly and thrown alive into the lake of fire. The people who receive the mark and follow the beast and the false prophet will be killed with the sword. “The Sword” is a biblical description of capital punishment. The wicked will be removed from power, leadership, influence and control. Jesus will make a clean sweep of all corruption. His coming kingdom will start with a clean slate.

The Satan Factor is Bound for 1,000 Years: Revelation 20:1-3

“1) Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2) And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3) and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”

Can you imagine life on earth without Satan or his influence? Well, there is a coming time when he will be bound for a thousand years. It is God's way to test what will happen if the "Satan factor" is removed from society. He will not be free to deceive nations any longer.

I believe this is just a test. Unfortunately, not much will change as long as human nature remains the same. The unredeemed human heart will still be desperately wicked and subject to lust, greed, jealousy, and pride.

To aid the situation, the next few verses say that there will also be a change in human government. Corruption will be gone and Jesus Himself will reign with only good people in office. Do you think that will force a change in people?

Don't get me wrong, I think it's going to help and many things will undoubtedly be better. But just to complete the test, after that time frame according to verse 3, Satan will be released again for a short time. It will be the ultimate test of fallen human nature and free will.

As a lawmaker in the Iowa Legislature, I marveled at how people think the ills of society can be fixed. Groups demonstrate, curse, swear, and demand that we pass new laws, elect different leaders, take away guns, make penalties stiffer, and maybe even change government altogether. The millennial test will go way beyond these things. All excuses will be gone, but if the human heart is not changed sin will still have its way.

You see, Jesus ruling on the outside will be of little value if He is not ruling on the inside. People need to stop making excuses and blaming everything on externals, Satan or other people. Satan is merely the tempter and the tester. The millennial test will prove beyond all doubt that the problem is within the human heart.

The Millennial Reign of Christ: Revelation 20:4-6

"4) Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

This is talking about what is called the Millennial Kingdom. It is a 1,000 year reign of Christ upon earth. Those who are martyred for Christ during the tribulation period will be resurrected and will rule and reign with Him. The earth will be repopulated and the nations will be resettled. Earth will be like a paradise. There will be a one-world government that Jesus Himself will rule over as a benevolent and just King.

This is the next dispensation on God's calendar following the church age and the tribulation period. Keep in mind, the wedding of the Lamb has already taken place by this point so the body of Christ will be present.

Prophetically, this time was talked about in Scriptures like Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 11:6-10 and Micah 4:3. The world will again be a paradise and will enjoy peace. Many believe this is what Paul was talking about in Romans 8:18-25. The earthly environment will be totally restored in this time frame.

I take Revelation 20 to be literal and not allegorical as some theological models imply. I believe Jesus will rule and reign on earth for 1,000 years. This might be the Sabbath day rest for the people of God talked about in Hebrews 4:1-11. Let me briefly explain.

The Bible teaches that one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years as one day on God's calendar. This is found both in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8-9. When you do the simple math, something beautiful unfolds.

The Bible teaches we have had 6,000 years of human history since the beginning of the book of Genesis up to present. That means that history up to this point would represent the first six days of creation. If you remember, God rested on the seventh day from His work of Creation and established the Sabbath.

The Orthodox Jews have always believed their Messiah was returning to set up His kingdom at the end of the 6th day or 6th millennium. Guess where we are right now in world history on the biblical calendar? We are at the dawn of the 7th millennium and prophecy is unfolding quickly. I take the 1,000 year reign of Christ talked about in Revelation 20 to be both literal and right on time.

The Final Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-10

"7) When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8) and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9) And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10) And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Following the Millennial Kingdom, Satan will be released for a short time for one final attempt to deceive the nations. It is hard to believe, but many people will follow him in rebellion against Christ. Leadership always has critics.

The rebellion will be short-lived. He and his followers will be devoured and then they will be thrown into the lake of fire which burns day and night forever and ever. There is no such thing

as annihilation taught in the Bible. A spirit is eternal and will spend eternity in one of two places. Heaven and hell are very different.

Great White Throne Judgement: Revelation 20:11-15

“11) Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12) And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14) Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is called “The Great White Throne Judgement.” It is different from The Judgement Seat of Christ mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that takes place at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. The Judgement Seat of Christ is for believers.

The One seated on the Great White Throne is so awesome that earth and heaven flee from Him. Before this Throne the lost and ungodly must stand and face judgment. The Great White Throne Judgment is for “the dead.” These are the people who never received new life in Jesus Christ. They were never “born again.”

According to the text, two sets of books are opened. The first book relates to the deeds of the ungodly. Notice there is no prosecuting attorney or defense attorney. Judgement is made based on the things written in the books. Every fact is indisputable.

The second book is called the Book of Life. This is a cross reference to make sure their name does not appear in the book of Life. No mistake in judgment will be made. This group was not part of the first resurrection nor were they present ruling and reigning with Jesus during the thousand year Millennial Kingdom as mentioned in Revelation 20:6. They spent 1,000 years in Hades.

After this judgment is complete, Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. Verse 14 and 15 are very sobering. This marks the final destination of the ungodly. They are thrown into the lake of fire. This will be their final eternal destination.

The New Heaven and New Earth: Revelation 21:1

“1) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.”

After talking about the lake of fire, John turns his attention to the new heaven and the new earth. What an amazing contrast. Peter also talked about the new heaven and new earth in 2 Peter 3:1-13. Take a few moments and read the entire chapter.

Here is something to think about: According to Genesis 1-2, it took God only six days to create the present heaven and earth. According to John 14:1-6, Jesus promised to go and prepare a place for His disciples. He has been working on that task for nearly 2,000 years. If it only took six days to create the present universe (and I think it's marvelous), can you imagine what the new heaven and new earth is going to be like?

Let me quote the apostle Paul in giving and answer, "but just as it is written, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."" (1 Corinthians 2:9)

No More Crying!: Revelation 21:1-4

"1) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4) and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

This is a general description of the New Jerusalem. In a traditional Jewish engagement, the groom prepares a dwelling place or mansion for his bride. (John 14:1-6) It will be their home after the wedding is complete. I understand that the actual wedding ceremony lasted seven days and then the newly married couple moved into the dwelling place prepared by the groom. Revelation Chapter 21 is describing the place Jesus has been preparing for His bride. It is mind-boggling.

Many times the new dwelling place was connected to the father's house. Such seems to be the case in Revelation 21. That is the emphasis of verse three; "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." For the first time in the Bible, the Father Himself will dwell among men.

The end result will be no more crying. He will wipe away every tear. Let me emphasize again, there will be no more pain, sickness, sorrow, death, or suffering of any kind. This place not only looks amazing, it also feels awesome. The surroundings and the atmosphere blend together into something absolutely glorious.

All Things New: Revelation 21:5-8

"5) And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6) Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7) He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8) But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Something new is coming. Keep in mind, this is after the Millennial Kingdom. We are looking at an eternity in the future. This is the New Heaven and the New Earth talked about in Revelation 21:1. This is a mystery not talked about at length in the Bible. It is alluded to in 2 Peter 3, but no expanded details are given. Apart from the last two chapters of the book of Revelation, it remains a mystery.

The Fate of the Unbelieving: Revelation 21:8

"8) But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

This verse is very specific. There are sinners who get saved and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, but there are no Christians who remain sinners by character and nature after genuine salvation. There is no such thing as a Christian liar, a Christian thief, a Christian adulterer or Christian idolaters. Jesus and the gospel changes people. If Jesus isn't at work changing you then He hasn't saved you from anything. The Bible isn't talking about perfection, it is talking about a transforming journey.

Paul made this point abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Let me quote these verses so you can see the consistency in Scripture. "9) Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11) 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 Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

Welcome to salvation by faith and the dynamic doctrine of sanctification. At the moment of salvation we are filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately He begins the process of washing, sanctifying, and changing us from the inside out. He starts preparing us to stand in God's presence. I cannot argue with Revelation 21:8. If a person isn't being changed, they haven't been saved.

Calendar Check: Revelation 21:9

“19) Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.””

This is an intriguing verse. One of the seven angels who helped carry out the bowl judgments now has a new role. By this point, the seven judgements are long past and new things have come. This angel is now serving as a tour guide for John to introduce him to “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

Did you catch that? The wedding is long past and the church has become “the wife of the Lamb.” It might be wise to read Ephesians 5:25-27 to get a background. Let me quote them for convenience. “25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, 26) having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” In these verses, Paul was looking ahead to the promise of the wedding.

In Revelation 21:9 the wedding is over and John is being introduced to the wife of the Lamb. In other words, this verse is talking about a new dispensation or a new age. The church age, the tribulation period and the millennial kingdom are all over at this point. John is getting his first glimpse of the New Jerusalem.

John is seeing events way into the future. The New Jerusalem was at least 3,000 years into the future from when John lived and it is still over 1,000 years into the future from our present time. Read carefully, Revelation 20 and 21 launches over 1,000 years into the future past the completion of the bowl judgments. The pages of the calendar are turning very quickly in these closing chapters of the book of Revelation.

Let me emphasize again that the book of Revelation spans from eternity past to eternity future. It is a panoramic view of all of time and eternity. The book covers many centuries and many millenniums of time. Don’t force it into a small box and don’t expect things to unfold in weeks, months, or years. You need to step aside and see the big picture in this book.

Let’s take a moment and review the calendar we have studied so far in this book. Revelation 2-3 covers the church age of the past 2,000 years. I believe we are currently living as a speck of dust on the timeline in this book most likely somewhere in Revelation 3:14-22 which talks about the age of the church of Laodicea.

Revelation 4-5 briefly steps out of time and into reality in God’s presence. Then Revelation 6-18 looks ahead at the Tribulation Period with the exception of Revelation 12 that does a flashback overview of history from the beginning of time. Revelation 19 talks about the wedding of the Lamb and the second return of Christ. Then Revelation 20 briefly talks about the coming

millennial kingdom. Finally, Revelation 21 to the end of the book briefly looks at the New Heavens and the New earth and the New Jerusalem with a glimpse into an eternity future.

How Big is the New Jerusalem? Revelation 21:10-11 (16)

“10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11) having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.”

John’s angelic tour guide is about to give him a glimpse of the New Jerusalem. He carries him away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain. As John looks up, he sees what looks like a gigantic square cube coming down from heaven. It is absolutely brilliant and glorious. It looks like a very costly crystal-clear stone of jasper.

Verse 16 adds this crucial detail; “The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.”

Science fiction today would call this a UFO, but the contrast cannot be missed. From the original Star Wars movie to the Avengers, every alien craft is black, ugly, and full of death and destruction. The New Jerusalem is bright, glorious, and full of light and life. It is not a Death Star.

Notice the size. It is 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide and 1,500 miles high. In other words it has 2,250,000 square miles. That would be the approximate land mass of the whole United States west of the Mississippi River.

But wait, there is one more measurement. Let’s add the height and figure the cubic miles. When that is done we discover the New Jerusalem has 3,375,000,000 cubic miles. So how can we wrap our minds around that figure? Let’s try our best.

Ok, are you ready to have your mind stretched? I wonder if it has decks within it and how many? I know I am making a big assumption that it has decks, but God often builds that way. He designed Noah’s ark and it had three decks. So, if the New Jerusalem has one deck every mile high, that would be 1,500 decks. It could have many many many more than 1,500 decks. A mile high deck is a waste of a lot of valuable space.

A very rough calculation would conclude that it would take around 25 decks to equal the whole land mass of planet earth including the polar regions. Are you getting my point? The New Jerusalem is massive beyond comprehension in terms of potential living, recreation, and production space. It will not be over-crowded and the carrying capacity will be self-sustaining into eternity.

The Old and the New Together: Revelation 21:12-14

“12) It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13) There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14) And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

Numbers are significant in the Bible. One number that stands out is the number twelve. In the Old Testament there were the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. In the New Testament there were the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Both come together in the vision John sees of the New Jerusalem. There are twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel and there are twelve foundation stones named after the apostles of the Lamb.

This reminds me of the harmony of the Old and the New Testaments. They do not contradict one another. It has been said that the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. I love studying both.

The high wall and the gates are significant. The New Jerusalem is carefully guarded. It is a very secure place. Jesus said, “13) Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14) For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” The Old and the New Testaments both point to faith in Jesus as the only way to salvation. The Bible is in perfect harmony with itself.
(Matthew 7:13-14)

Building Materials for the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:18-21

“18) The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19) The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; 20) the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. 21) And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

I must confess, I am overwhelmed by this description. The architect spared no expense. It is beautiful beyond comprehension. When God is in charge of the building project anything is possible. The building materials are awesome. They are all costly jewels.

So how are you doing at building for the glory of God? What kind of materials are you using to build your spiritual life? Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. “10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11) For no man can lay a

foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

Why is this important? Take a moment and review those beautiful stones in the wall of this amazing structure John is describing. Where do you suppose God gets those stones? May I suggest they may be living stones. Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:4-5; "4)And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

This is a great mystery, but you and I as Christians are jewels for Jesus. We are not dirty old bricks made from heated clay and straw. God wants our lives to be made from refined gold, silver and precious stones. He is personally preparing and fitting us into His future building plan. It is one of the great mysteries in the Bible. Life here is a giant quarry where God is preparing His future building materials for eternity.

The Unfathomable Glory of God: Revelation 21:22-24

"22) And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23) And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24) And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it."

The New Jerusalem will not have a temple. It will be spiritual but not religious. God Himself will be there in all of His fullness. There is no need for symbols, rituals, or ceremonies. Technically, a temple is a wall of separation between God and Man. The separation will be gone. There will be absolute and total connection with God in His presence.

The city also does not have a sun, moon, or other luminaries shining upon it. I am sure they will be out there in the new heavens, but they will be dimmed by the light of God's presence. Remember the observation that John made earlier about God in 1 John 1:5; "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is the source of light. He radiates with non-stop glory.

This explains how in Genesis Chapter One God could create plants and vegetation on the third day of creation (Genesis 1:9-13), but He did not create the solar system with sun or moon until the fourth day of creation. (Genesis 1:14-19) It is not a misprint. The light spectrum emanating from God's presence was the source of life for the newly created organic world. (See John 1:4-5) God Himself is the power plant in the New Jerusalem. I stand amazed at the unfathomable glory of God!

The Day That Never Ends: Revelation 21:24-27

“24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25) In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26) and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27) and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

This is an amazing description of the New Jerusalem. The first thing that catches the eye of the reader is that there is perpetual light and perpetual daytime. There will be no darkness and no night in the New Jerusalem.

Ephesians 5:8-13 gives us a hint that God is even now preparing His people for this dwelling in light; “8) for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9) (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10) trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11) Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12) for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13) But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”

Moving back to the text, notice that there are still nations and kings. This might be the most surprising statement in these verses. There is a distinction between people groups in the New Jerusalem. God wants every nation, tribe, and tongue represented in heaven. The present mission of the church is to go into all of the world with the gospel.

I am reminded of the little song from Vacation Bible School years ago that says, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.” Secular humanism envisions a utopia on earth, but fallen human nature cannot produce it. Only Jesus Christ and the gospel can conquer prejudice and discrimination to bring together all the people groups of the world in absolute equality. God loves all people.

Notice that the kings will bring their glory and honor into the new Jerusalem. There are still leaders over people groups, but all corruption will be gone. For the first time in human history, there will be a sincere and godly United Nations. They are untied around the Lamb. Access to this city will be made up of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Fallen human nature will be gone and people will walk in godly character.

Notice that the gates are never closed. There is no crime, corruption, or violence to protect the city from. There is open and unhindered access to God. I can only imagine!

River of Life and Tree of Life: Revelation 22:1-2

“1) Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2) in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the center of the New Jerusalem is the River of Life. The water coming from the throne is pure and clear as a crystal. It is running water as from a spring or river as opposed to a stagnant pool of water. It is reminiscent of the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman in John 4:13-14; “13) Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

The scene reminds us that God is the source of all life. He is pro-life. He is the only One who can quench the thirst and yearning of the human soul. John may have also had Ezekiel 47:1-12 in mind when he saw this scene. I will let you read this text on your own.

On both sides of the river is the tree of life. Not one tree, but a literal forest of the tree of life. The trees are everywhere along the river. The trees bear twelve fruits. Some scholars suggest the emphasis in the Greek is not on “twelve kinds of fruit”, but rather “twelve fruit bearing seasons or crops.” In other words, the trees yield new fruit every month.

The tree of life is abundantly available to everyone in the New Jerusalem. What a contrast to the last mention of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden after the fall of man in Genesis 3:22-24. The final verse says it all; “24) So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.”

Notice also that the leaves on the tree of life have medicinal value. They are for the healing of the nations. Every nation is sick, broken, and hurting today. God wants to heal entire nations. He not only loves people, He also loves nations. I am intrigued by the fact that there will be national distinctions in the New Jerusalem, but am encouraged that there will be total peace and harmony between the nations. God is the only source of peace.

The Curse will be Gone: Revelation 22:3-4

“3) There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; 4) they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.”

Can you imagine a world where the curse of sin is gone? There will be no sickness, disease, suffering, tears, or death. There will be no pollution, decay, rust, or mold. The sin nature will be

gone so there will be no temptation, lusts, crime, or corruption. Everyone will have a godly character absent from pride, self service, greed, or jealousy. Mutual trust and good will will govern all relationships and interactions between people.

The focal point will be God and not man. He will occupy His throne in the center of the city and we will see Him face-to-face. He will no longer be a mystery. He will no longer be hidden from His creation. Living in His light and serving in His presence will be our delight.

His name will be on our foreheads. We will be identified with Him and our walk and our talk will be consistent. Keep in mind, we will be in our new and glorified bodies described in 1 Corinthians 15:42-58. Take a moment and review that amazing description of our new bodies. I can only imagine!

Brilliance of the Son that Outshines the Sun: Revelation 22:5

“5) And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.”

I always pay special attention when the Bible repeats itself. Verse number five is a near repeat of Revelation 21:23-25. (Review the post from that context) The emphasis is that there will be no darkness. There will be no night. The One who is light shines perpetually in the new Jerusalem. There is no need for a lamp nor the light of the sun.

I personally believe both will be there, but they will be overshadowed by the brilliance of the Son. There will be New Heavens and a New Earth, but any light produced by any star or artificial light will be dim by comparison to the light shining from the Lord God.

Keep in mind, 1 John 1:5 says that “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” This begs the question; “What is the source of the energy behind or within Deity?” Every source of energy within the standard realm of physics gradually runs out. Gas tanks run out of fuel. Batteries go dead. People and animals without oxygen, food, or water soon die. Even nuclear energy dissipates over time. We also know that stars eventually burn out, cool off, and die. But Deity energy is eternal. It never runs out nor is it depleted. God is self-existent and self-sustaining. God is the measure of how long eternity will last. According to this verse, He will power the New Jerusalem forever and ever. Wow!

Now, let's stretch our imaginations in another direction for a moment. Do you remember the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation chapter twenty-one? It is described as a transparent cube of crystal clear jasper. It measures 1,500 miles deep, wide, and high. I wonder what happens to the light from God's presence when it passes through the transparent crystal walls of the cube? It would not surprise me if it resembles a beam of light passing through a prism. In other words, the New Jerusalem will be beautiful beyond description when viewed from

a distance. The whole light spectrum will be seen. It will be visible for all of eternity. I can only imagine!

One thing I know for sure, I would rather be on the inside rather than on the outside of the walls of the New Jerusalem. Those on the outside will be reminded for all eternity what they are missing.

Divine Sovereignty Within the Spirit of Prophecy: Revelation 22:6-7

"6) And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. "7) And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Pick your reading material carefully. Some books aren't worth the paper they are printed on. When you pick up the Bible in general and the book of Revelation in particular you have a script that is "faithful and true." Things will unfold exactly as the Bible says.

The word "prophecy" means to foretell something that is going to happen in the future. The Bible is full of prophetic messages. This is one of the unique characteristics about the Bible that distinguishes it from all other books, both secular and sacred.

Because the Bible was written over thousands of years, many of the prophetic events have already been fulfilled. For example, the prophecies about Israel being enslaved for 430 years in Egypt and then being given the promised land is now ancient history. The world ruling Kingdoms revealed to Daniel have come and gone. The 300 Old Testament prophecies about the birth, death and resurrection of the Christ have all been fulfilled. The prophetic track record of the Bible is impeccable.

The book of Revelation is right on target as well. I have mentioned previously that the letters to the seven churches have unfolded precisely over the past 2,000 years. We are now in the age of the church of Laodicea as described in Revelation 3:14-22. The stage for the tribulation period is being set and reported constantly in the daily news. We are rushing toward a climax in biblical prophecy.

At the same time, the spirit of prophecy reveals that God is patient and not compelled to push things quickly. (Read 2 Peter 3:1-18) He wants the gospel to spread and thousands of people to be saved. I believe in the sovereignty and providence of God and that He navigates prophecy like a moving vehicle. His patience, mercy, and grace can take a scenic side-trip any time He pleases in response to human repentance, revival, and awakening. I believe God is actively in control of world events and the prophetic target.

Let me illustrate by showing how this unfolded in the small book of Jonah. I believe the book sheds significant light on the active sovereignty of God within the spirit of prophecy. (Read

Jonah chapter three.) In verse 4 Jonah warned Nineveh about 40 days to coming destruction. Yet in verse 10 it says, "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it." The destruction of Nineveh eventually happened, but God sovereignly adjusted His calendar to align with the human response to His warning through Jonah.

Future biblical prophecy is like a defined target many miles down range. God's sovereignty is like the guidance system on a modern missile. It makes active calculations and corrections en route adjusting for changing winds and terrain. It ultimately hits its target, but there can be many variables en route. The mission can even be aborted and delayed for a future launch without violating the stated mission.

The words of prophecy are faithful and true. They will soon take place, but God's sovereignty, mercy, and grace are actively guiding the process to the ultimate target. Jesus is the active Lord over prophecy. He is in tune with prayer and the condition of the human heart. Populating heaven is His main objective. Don't take this lightly. Take heed, these things will shortly take place.

Worship God Not Angels: Revelation 22:8-9

"8) I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9) And he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.""

John was overwhelmed by the vision and the Revelation he had heard and seen. It came in technicolor. Without thinking what he was doing, he fell to the ground and began to worship at the feet of the angel who revealed the vision to him.

The angel abruptly stopped him and put things in perspective. He said to John, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."

Paul warned against this practice in Colossians 2:18-19. "18) Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." We are not to worship angels. Why?

Angels are not divine beings. They are not God nor are they gods. They do have some amazing powers and abilities; but they are mere servants of God and of His people. That was the message this angel made to John.

This corresponds exactly with what the writer of the book of Hebrews said in Hebrews 1:14 when he was speaking of angels; “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?” Angels are servants for God on behalf of those who will inherit salvation. They carry out God's will in the world.

Do Not Be Silent: Revelation 22:10-11

“10) And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11) Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”

God gives a message for a reason. He wants it to be shared. He gave John this vision to be shared with the world. John was not to keep it to himself. It was to serve as a warning to all people that God is and that we are accountable to Him for our actions. John's job was not to change people. His job was to tell the story and let the people respond accordingly.

This reminds me of the warning God gave the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 3:17-21. This text is so profound it needs to be quoted here:

“17) Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. 18) When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19) Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. 20) Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21) However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.”

The church needs to be reminded of this parallel message given to both John and Ezekiel. Paul had a similar charge upon himself in 1 Corinthians 9:16; “16) For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” He gave a similar sobering charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. It is worthy of reading in the context of this discussion.

God wants us to be salt and light in the world. (Matthew 5:13-16) It is our job to shine and share the good news. It is God's job to save people. Though I do not intend to guilt trip anyone into sharing the gospel, these texts remind me that I have a responsibility to warn people of things to come and to share the gospel with them.

The Alpha and the Omega: Revelation 22:12-13

“12) Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

I love red letter editions of the Bible. In these Bibles, the words of Jesus are in red. Three times in Revelation chapter 22 we have verses in red. Two of those times the message “Behold I come quickly” is repeated. Compare verse 7 and verse 12.

But you say, “It has been nearly 2,000 years and Jesus hasn’t come yet!” Compared to the timetable of eternity, 2,000 years is a blink of the eye.

Notice that His reward is with Him. He will render to every man according to what he has done. I maintain that all people are accountable for their actions. Human free will will give an account. The wicked and lost await eternal judgment. The saints and the godly have glorious rewards waiting for them.

This is where two doctrines come into focus with each other. The doctrine of “Justification by faith” is the basis of salvation. The doctrine of “Sanctification by works” is the basis of eternal rewards. Texts of Scripture like this motivate me to not drift through life. Everything to come is based on what we do with this life. Please don’t waste your life.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Ephesians 2:8-10 both paint this contrast. Jesus redeemed us so we can make the most of our lives. (Ephesians 5:15-16) Serving God in any capacity is a great privilege. It’s not so much what we do that matters, rather it’s who we become. I am convinced that a godly saint serving others in the lowest position in this life will be rewarded better than a self-centered sloth in the highest position possible in this life.

In verse 13, Jesus reminds us that He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” May I add, He is also everything in between. Life is not about us. It is all about Him. This is the way He introduced Himself at the beginning of the book of Revelation as well. (Read Revelation 1:8) The book starts with Him and it ends with Him.

Christian life and service is not about us, it is all about Him. Eternity is not about us, it is all about Him. The more we focus on Him the less we become absorbed in ourselves. As I mentioned at the beginning of this series on Revelation, the primary purpose of this book is to serve as a “Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The secondary purpose is to show His bond servants the things that must shortly take place.

Time and eternity are both wrapped up in Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” That covers it all!

Enter by the Narrow Gate: Revelation 22:14-15

“14) Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15) Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

This is a sober warning to repent and live a clean life. This reminds me of the sober warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:13-23. In these verses He talked about entering by the narrow gates and bearing good fruit in our lives.

He finished this passage with this epic warning; “21) Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22) Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23) And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

The bottom line is that faith in Jesus changes people. Those who are “In Christ” become new people. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Final Invitation: Revelation 22:16-17

“16) I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” 17) The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

Jesus gives one final invitation. It is simply “Come.” He is the Messiah of the root of David. He is the bright morning star. Salvation is not earned and it is not purchased. It is by public invitation and without charge. He gives the invite, we must respond.

I like the way Jesus said it in the Gospel of John; “3) To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” ... “27) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28) and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one.”” (John 10:3, 27-30)

It's that simple. Are you hearing His voice? Is He calling your name? Then follow Him. You must respond. He does not force people against their will.

Don't Twist or Distort God's Word: Revelation 22:18-19

"18) I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19) and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

Don't mess with God's Word. Don't add to it and don't take away from it. Don't spin it or try to twist it. That is especially true of the book of Revelation.

The best way to approach Scripture is to take it at face value and understand it literally whenever possible. The exception is when the context itself is allegorical or poetic. Camp out on the sections that are clear and easy to understand.

Many people say, "The Bible is hard to understand." That is certainly true of some portions, but much of it is very plain and simple. Develop the practice of letting God speak for Himself and spend time reading the Bible.

Make it a goal to read through the New Testament and then the whole Bible. Start by praying and asking God to guide you and give you understanding. Don't place on the text things that aren't there and don't take away from the text what it is clearly saying because you disagree with it.

Remember, we do not judge the Bible but it will be the standard by which God judges us. Study it and apply it to your life. There will be a test!

Final Word... Amen! Revelation 22:20-21

"20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

This has been an amazing book. It covered the full spectrum of time from eternity past to eternity future. Jesus is the beginning and the end. When viewed in that fashion, the book moves very quickly. These are the closing verses to the book of Revelation and of the New Testament. This is the end. The Bible ends with a promise. Jesus promises that He is coming quickly.

Notice the word "Amen" is used twice in these two verses. The word "Amen" means "let it be done." I agree with John. "Amen!" Let it be done! Let it happen!